

Portraits of a Congregation:

5 Pastors' Perspectives on Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Gainesville, Florida

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Foreword

When the author first decided to focus on collecting a history of his home congregation, the task seemed fairly straight-forward: spend some time reading the congregational records, talk to some of the original members and pastors, and rely on his own experiences there to help make sense of the data. What the author did not anticipate was that almost all of the original records which track events in Gainesville after 1977 are conspicuous only in their absence. After spending some time searching the store rooms and closets of the church, the author's worst fears were confirmed: the records simply aren't there. Council minutes, at one time organized by the church's secretary into neat yearly volumes, have disappeared: only one year, 1989, remains. Voter's minutes appeared to be non-existent. Only the congregation's statistical ledger and some scattered collections of almost randomly ordered bulletins remain. Suddenly, the author's task became considerably more challenging.

This significant setback forced some changes to be made in the direction of the paper. Of course, it meant that some secondary sources of information—compilations of the church's history at its building dedication and 25th anniversary—took on an almost primary significance. Since the author had already planned (and, in some cases, conducted) interviews with each original pastor, as well as with founding and long-standing members, the content of these interviews became even more precious. After surveying the resources at his disposal, the author decided to organize the paper chronologically, focusing on the thoughts and experiences of each pastor through the years. The bulk of the information presented is therefore based on the recollections of the pastor who conducted the initial exploratory work, as well as the four full-time shepherds

who succeeded him. More explanation of this structure will follow in the body of the paper.

The question remains: What has become of the original records? There are rumors of different persons who cleaned out the closets, but ultimately there is no point in assigning blame—if the records are no longer recoverable, then the only practical issue is what, if anything, can be reconstructed. Perhaps some of the men who served the congregation as secretaries kept copies of their work; if so, some items may be reclaimed. Perhaps some of the pastors themselves still have old files boxed up in their attic or garage. The author strongly encourages the council of Zion to pursue all possible avenues in order to regain as much of their historical identity as possible. The task will only become more difficult as time progresses. The sense of congregational identity which can be gained by such an historical study is well worth the effort, however.

The Task at Hand

This paper intends to focus on the history of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church as viewed through the pastors of the congregation. As was previously mentioned, it is largely based on interviews conducted by the author with each pastor, either by phone or by e-mail. This paper will follow essentially chronological order, beginning with the initial exploratory efforts of 1972, and carrying through until the year 1998. Within this chronological arrangement, 5 men's thoughts will be presented in special detail: Rev. John F. Vogt, Rev. John C. Lawrenz, Rev. Theodore B. Olsen, Rev. Richard L. Wiechmann, and Rev. Lynn E. Wiedmann. Each of these pastors will form the basis of a separate section of the paper. Within each section, some supplemental data from the statistical ledger of the congregation and from previously compiled histories will be

included. Each section will also address several specific areas: initial impressions, challenges, joys, and milestones. By the end of the paper, the reader should have formed a firm impression of the congregation and its community as seen through the eyes of its shepherds.

Beginning: Rev. John F. Vogt¹

Pastor John F. Vogt entered the public ministry of the WELS in 1971. He was assigned to Jacksonville, FL as pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church. It did not take long, however, for him to begin looking southwest to the smaller university community of Gainesville. Several things helped encourage him in this direction. First of all, current policy of the synod's Board for Home Missions strongly advocated planting churches in every major metropolitan area of the country.² Secondly, several families at Our Savior in Jacksonville were actually located closer to Gainesville, and eagerly agreed to begin mission planting there.³ Finally, Pastor Vogt himself saw several obvious reasons: "The university offered students who needed to be served. And geographically it was a logical link between Jacksonville and the congregations in the south." All indications seemed to point toward beginning work in Gainesville.

The rate at which the congregation formed is almost astonishing. Although Pastor Vogt only arrived in Jacksonville in 1971, he already was conducting canvass work in Gainesville in the summer of 1972. Enlisting the aid of a canvassing team of Lutheran Collegians, Pastor Vogt and the local Our Savior families (Mr. and Mrs. Reinhold

¹ All quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the following: Rev. John F. Vogt, interview by author, 20 April 2000, Milwaukee, WI, e-mail transcript.

² Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, Dedication Sunday Service Folder, 24 April 1977, pg. 1, author unknown (hereafter referred to as "Brief History of Zion Congregation")

³ Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 25th Anniversary Service Folder, 12 October 1997, pg. 1, author unknown (hereafter referred to as "Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church")

McGhghy, Mr. and Mrs. William Harrison) knocked on doors during the heat of July.⁴ Soon, enough of a nucleus had formed so that the group began holding services on October 1st of the same year. This small group met in a Seventh Day Adventist chapel, and included people not only from Gainesville, but also the surrounding communities of Lake City, Newberry, Ocala, Hawthorne, and Keystone Heights.⁵

It became apparent that the work in Zion had gained enough momentum that full-time care was necessary. A full-time pastor was approved in May of 1973, and, after several calls to the field, a Seminary graduate was requested.⁶ Barely a year after Pastor Vogt began exploratory efforts, Zion's first resident pastor, Rev. John C. Lawrenz, was installed on July 29th, 1973. With opportunities in Daytona Beach and his hands full in Jacksonville, Pastor Vogt turned his attention to other responsibilities.

Despite the short amount of time Pastor Vogt spent in Gainesville, many lasting impressions were formed. "Florida in those days was very exciting. New congregations were starting all the time. Moreover, it was a fun place to do mission work because, being in the Bible Belt, people were willing to talk about the Bible and they were very open to door-to-door outreach efforts." Gainesville itself seemed to him to be a "sleepy college town." Pastor Vogt also "found contact with professors and students stimulating—and an invigorating change from work with 100% military in Jacksonville." There is no doubt from these and similar comments that Pastor Vogt enjoyed his work in Gainesville, brief though it was.

During this critical initial time, one might suppose that the congregation was always one step away from being snuffed out. From Pastor Vogt's perspective, this simply was

⁴ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 1

⁵ *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 1

not the case. When asked to describe the challenges he faced, his reply was immediate and succinct, “I faced no real challenges—things went quickly and smoothly that first year.” He preferred to focus on the joys, some of which have already been detailed. Perhaps this statement of his best summarizes his attitude toward his work in Gainesville, “...I carry a warm feeling of those days being pleasant and exciting times.” The blessing of a gracious God can be easily observed during this formative year in Zion’s history.

Due to the brief tenure of Pastor Vogt, the milestones are not numerous, but they are significant. The initial canvass in July of 1972 got the ball rolling. The first service in October showed how far they had come already. And the assignment of the first pastor was a determined step in continuing the congregation into the future. Because of the Lord’s blessing on Pastor Vogt’s initial efforts, Zion’s beginnings were bright indeed.

Building: Rev. John C. Lawrenz⁷

Although the beginning was well-made, the congregation now faced a critical phase in its growth. The number of communicant members at the end of 1973 was 20 people.⁸ In order to continue to support a pastor, the congregation would have to work hard at establishing itself in its community and dedicating itself to the mission work which would also bring more people into its fold. Pastor Lawrenz faced a number of significant challenges, to which he applied himself diligently.

Perhaps a little background might help the reader understand Pastor Lawrenz’s situation. He had actually completed his seminary training several years earlier, but had elected to conduct some post-graduate study at Brandeis University, which he had

⁶ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 1

⁷ All quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the following: Rev. John C. Lawrenz, interview by author, 15 April 2000, Milwaukee, WI, author’s interview notes.

⁸ *WELS Statistical Report*, 1973

recently completed. Pastor Lawrenz and his wife, Phoebe, had also just experienced the birth of their first child, Sarah. Personally, he and his family were experiencing a number of rapid changes.

The district situation in Florida was also undergoing change. The synod in convention had elected to spin a new district off of the Michigan^D district, which would be known as the South Atlantic. During Pastor Lawrenz's first summer in Gainesville, the South Atlantic District was organized. Shortly thereafter, Pastor Lawrenz was elected to the district's Board for Parish Education, and served as chairman. Thus Pastor Lawrenz arrived at a time when a number of things were also changing at the district level.

It was obvious from the beginning to Pastor Lawrenz that Florida was "not the Midwest." Several incidents reinforced this impression for him. When he arrived at the congregation, he was concerned that some of the people might be disturbed by his beard, which at the time was more in keeping with the post-graduate community of Boston. When he approached the leadership of the congregation about the issue, he received an unusual reply—his beard was fine, but his name was not. He and his family had been using the German pronunciation, rendering the "w" as a "v" sound in English. The congregation insisted that his name should sound like the way it was spelled. From then on, the accent shifted to the last syllable, and the "w" remained.

Another incident occurred during a visit to a prospective seller of land to be used for church property. The conversation was polite enough, until Pastor Lawrenz noticed a picture of a distinguished-looking gentlemen over the fireplace. Thinking it was a relative, he inquired about the painting. The prospective seller was noticeably offended

that he had failed to recognize General Stonewall Jackson, and negotiations for the property broke off soon afterward.

Despite some of these early difficulties, Pastor Lawrenz soon put his organizational skills to good use. The first identified need was to finish organizing as a congregation. A charter had been signed in August of 1973, and by June of 1974 a constitution was put in place.⁹ Elections were held just a few months later in September. This internal organization helped the congregation develop a sense of purpose and served to further develop leaders in the church.

The next order of business was to find a permanent place to call home for the congregation. The congregation had moved between several different worship facilities, some of which were difficult to find, especially for visitors. The District Mission Board had already approved this next phase in November of 1973, so Pastor Lawrenz began surveying the community for likely church sites. During this time, the congregation also found and purchased permanent housing for Pastor Lawrenz. By September of 1975, the congregation had purchased 5 acres of land to be used as the site for the congregation's new worship facility.¹⁰

The original plan had been to construct a temporary chapel facility. However, local zoning regulations prevented this, and so the congregation moved forward with plans for a chapel/fellowship hall.¹¹ After the architect was selected, the plans were approved, and the construction company was contracted, the congregation itself mobilized. Volunteers worked hard at landscaping the new property. The craftsmen of the congregation designed, built, and finished the altar, sanctuary cross, pulpit, and lectern. The

⁹ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 2

¹⁰ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 2

craftswomen of the congregation designed and sewed paraments, banners and cutains for use in the new building. Tables and chairs were painted, bulletin and chalk boards were hung, tile was laid, and sound equipment was installed even as the contractors finished their work. The first service held in the new facility occurred in December of 1976, and the building was officially dedicated to God's service on April 24th, 1977.¹²

As the congregation completed this project, they were unaware that soon they would face their first vacancy. In November of 1977, Pastor Lawrenz accepted a call to become president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary. During his time at Zion, the congregation had doubled to 46 communicants¹³, and many projects had been accomplished. The congregation was now firmly established in the community.

Pastor Lawrenz's first impressions have already been recorded at the beginning of this section. When asked about the challenges that he faced while at Zion, he mentioned two areas. The first was a lack of synodical tools for work in the mission field. Evangelism training, a modern hymnal and Bible translation, and forms of parish assistance have all since been developed, but were not available during those early years. The second area was purely personal—adjusting to all of the changes which occurred during that first year. Being recently married, a new father, a new pastor, in a new district, at a new congregation—all of these aspects of his life required constant balance.

The joys of his ministry at Zion were especially noticeable during the interview. He very much appreciated the “young, diverse, flexible” nature of the congregation. The congregation was not dominated by Lutherans fleeing the Missouri synod or Lutherans trying to recreate a piece of the Midwest, but kept a concentrated focus on missions and

¹¹ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 2

¹² *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 2

reaching out to the unchurched. Ultimately, Pastor Lawrenz also appreciated the grace of his Lord, who “gave him one of everything, but rarely two.” God put the right pieces in the right places to make growth and establishment happen at the same time.

The major milestones have already been detailed. Installing the first pastor, purchasing a parsonage, building a worship and fellowship facility, and doubling the size of the congregation all seem to be significant events from a human perspective. By the time Pastor Lawrenz left, Zion’s roots had grown much deeper.

Education: Rev. Theodore B. Olsen¹⁴

After Pastor Lawrenz left, the congregation faced its first vacancy. The Lord graciously provided a new shepherd, Pastor Theodore B. Olsen. Pastor Olsen and family arrived during the summer of 1978 and was installed early in August of that year. For a congregation which had come so far so fast, what would the next step be?

The answer is found in the title of this section: Education. This is not to say that the congregation was woefully lacking in this area—Pastor Lawrenz was a dedicated teacher in his own right. Pastor Olsen found a congregation which had a burning thirst for constant spiritual nourishment, and which wasn’t afraid to ask hard questions in Bible classes.

One of the characteristics of the congregation Pastor Olsen noticed was a decidedly “university” element. Gainesville has and always will be a college town, with roughly half of its population connected with the University of Florida either as students or employees. The congregation also was “steeped in college culture”. Part of the problem

¹³ *WELS Statistical Report*, 1977

¹⁴ All quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the following: Rev. Theodore B. Olsen, interview by author, 25 April 2000, Gainesville, FL, author’s interview notes.

of a college town is that the population tends to be rather transient—students move on to find other places to begin their professional careers. Young professionals associated with the university often take more prestigious positions elsewhere as they climb the academic ladder. Because Gainesville has no large industry or business to speak of, those students who did marry and settle in Gainesville often transferred out when promoted to a higher position. Because of this high turnover, Pastor Olsen saw a need to shift in the direction of family-based ministry. Young families would need the stability which the Gospel provides, and older established families could become the steadfast core of leaders and examples which the young congregation needed.

As a result, Pastor Olsen worked hard at Bible class and other educational opportunities. At one point, rotating Bible classes were offered at 3 separate times during the week, and 100% of the congregation was involved in one of the three classes. The congregation history states that the members “recall fondly [Pastor Olsen’s] ability to teach.”¹⁵ In Pastor Olsen’s estimation, roughly 90% of the congregation had no WELS experience before becoming members. As such, new practices such as Lenten services had to be carefully introduced, explained, and implemented over a number of years—it took about 4 years before Zion had a full complement of Lenten and Holy Week worship services. By working hard at education, the congregation was strengthened, and fewer problems resulted.

This emphasis on education led to a new idea: Why not form a Christian Day School? The demographics of the congregation had continued to improve, especially in the area of young children—by the end of 1980, there were over 80 communicants and 25 children

¹⁵ *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 3

in the congregation.¹⁶ This project was near and dear to Pastor Olsen's heart, and was also widely accepted by the congregation.

There were, however, significant challenges to overcome before a school could begin. The first major problem that existed was the congregational debt. The congregation was still subsidized to a large degree by synod, and had spent a about \$120,000 on the church facility¹⁷, \$30,000 on the church property, and about \$40,000 on the parsonage¹⁸. Current mission policy dictated that the synod would not subsidize school facilities, and so the congregation worked in earnest at reducing its debts.

Another situation was both a challenge and a blessing. Much as Zion had utilized a core group from Jacksonville to begin in Gainesville, so also Gainesville would provide a core group for a new church nearby—Keystone Heights. By 1980, this group was ready to become its own congregation, and called its own fulltime pastor. Zion transferred about 40 souls to this new congregation, while still managing to maintain the numbers listed in the above statistical report. This loss of communicants and children also slowed Zion's progress toward debt reduction and a school facility.

Finally, the Lord threw an unexpected challenge Zion's way—after a little more than three and a half years, in May of 1982, Pastor Olsen was called as the president of Martin Luther Preparatory School. He accepted the call, and Zion was faced with its second vacancy. While work on debt reduction continued, active planning toward a school facility was put on the back burner. The congregation had developed a more-defined sense of purpose and had nearly doubled again in size under Pastor Olsen's efforts and the care of a gracious heavenly Father.

¹⁶ *WELS Statistical Report*, 1980

¹⁷ *Brief History of Zion Congregation*, pg. 3

The author noted with some degree of humor that Pastor Olsen's first impressions were similar to Pastor Lawrenz—"It's not the Midwest!" He felt like he needed an interpreter for some of the strong Southern accents he encountered. He was pleased to be in a "friendly, progressive district", and noted that "people seemed to appreciate church more." The transient nature of Gainesville, as previously expressed, soon became apparent to him as well.

The challenges of his ministry have already been fairly expounded. The struggle with the debt, the desire to build a school (and the inability to do so immediately), and the high turnover rate of the congregation were sometimes sources of frustration. However, the joys went hand in hand with these things. The congregation had a solid facility to show for its debt. The cooperation of the congregation in working toward planning a school was also a special joy, even if the planning was frustrated. The high turnover rate had an upside as well—the vast majority of those who left transferred to other WELS churches, and (in some cases) even planned their career choices around the availability of a WELS church. Finally, Pastor Olsen recalled with some fondness the people, who as a whole were "not afraid to get into the deep questions."

The milestones during Pastor Olsen's short time are a bit more intangible, but significant nonetheless. By the time he left, the switch had successfully been made to a family based ministry. The congregation was setting goals and working towards them. The beginning of a sister congregation, and the blessing of maintaining membership numbers despite the fact were both significant events. If the reader will permit the author an aside, it is personally significant to him that the author's parents were one of the

¹⁸ *Zion Statistical Ledger*

young families who entered the congregation through Pastor Olsen's educational efforts. Zion had continued to make progress.

Transition: Rev. Richard L. Wiechmann¹⁹

During the next few years, Zion was going to undergo several changes in leadership, as well as experience significant turnover (again!) in internal membership. In fact, from mid-1982 to early 1986, Zion would experience five different pastors (including vacancy pastors). Likewise, another congregational nucleus would form and relocate during this time. Hence this section is entitled transition, because the church constantly had to adjust.

The vacancy after Pastor Olsen's departure was relatively short—in November of 1982, Pastor Richard Wiechmann was installed as Zion's new shepherd. Pastor Wiechmann had previous experience in Orlando, and his uncle Raymond Wiechmann had long been a mentor for younger pastors in the district. The fit seemed to be a good one.

Pastor Wiechmann had a special gift to make people feel welcome in just a few sentences of conversation.²⁰ It is no surprise that, despite his short tenure at Zion, he had some of the largest adult classes in the congregation's history—sometimes in double digits. This gift also helped him fulfill the desires of some of Zion's members who lived in Ocala—exploratory work in their home city. By 1985, Ocala had formed its own congregation, called a pastor, and transferred a portion of Zion's members. Despite this loss of manpower, Zion continued to reach new people, allowing the congregation to maintain its size.

¹⁹ All quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the following: Rev. Richard L. Wiechmann, interview by author, 21 April 2000, Milwaukee, WI, e-mail transcript.

Before Zion had really started to recover from the Ocala transfers, Pastor Wiechmann received and accepted a call to Bethany Lutheran College. In July of 1985, he and his family departed for Mankato, and Zion, much sooner than expected, was in vacancy again. The turnover in members and people made it difficult for the congregation to focus on larger goals. Debt reduction was still an issue, but the school concept was moving farther away from people's minds. As another vacancy approached, the congregation braced themselves for more transition.

Pastor Wiechmann also enjoys fond memories of his time in Gainesville. Having spent some time in Orlando already, he realized that Gainesville "is not typically Florida," with cooler winters and warmer summers than the Orlando area. He soon realized that, with the university influence, the members of Zion were "a bit more educated than the average WELS church in Florida." Finally, he remembers the spiritual qualities of the members: "They inspired me, even though I was the pastor and should have been inspiring them!"

Although one might guess that the loss of members transferred to Ocala would be the biggest challenge during his time, Pastor Wiechmann identified a different one. "The greatest challenge I faced was the challenge that most mission congregations face when they receive less and less subsidy each year from the synod." Debt reduction was still a priority for the congregation, but for some, "teaching good stewardship can easily be construed as 'yelling at people because they are not giving enough money'"²⁰ Perhaps the member turnover contributed to this challenge as well.

Pastor Wiechmann enumerated many joys: "...preaching on Sundays, greeting the wonderful people as they left church, fixing up the church property...inviting people to

²⁰ *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 4

adult class..and letting all the hard work to be done by the Holy Spirit.” Despite the short amount of time that he was at Zion, Pastor Wiechmann sincerely enjoyed his time there.

Undoubtedly the biggest milestone during Pastor Wiechmann’s time in Gainesville was the beginning of the Ocala congregation. Some improvements to the facilities were made as well, such as the addition of pews to replace the folding chairs, and a new large church sign on the corner. The largest adult class in congregation history should not be overlooked, either. Due to the large amount of transition over this time, the congregation also was developing a desire for a bit more stability.

Stability: Rev. Lynn E. Wiedmann²¹

Stability was such a concern to the congregation that they repeatedly stressed this need during the calling process of 1985.²² Thankfully, the Lord blessed Zion with another short vacancy: In the winter of 1985, Rev. Lynn Wiedmann accepted the call to Zion and was installed early in 1986. In terms of longevity, Pastor Wiedmann would prove to provide the stability the congregation was looking for—his pastorate would extend until 1998, more years than the first three pastors’ terms combined.

The Zion which greeted Pastor Wiedmann was considerably different than the Zion of 5 years prior. The congregation which once had considered beginning a school now only had one child under the age of 6 in the entire congregation.²³ The school project had not (and has never) been officially abandoned, but it was evident at the time that the opportunity was no longer immediate. This demographic would turn around again over time, but the congregation’s immediate attention would need to focus elsewhere.

²¹ ²¹ All quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from the following: Rev. Lynn E. Wiedmann, interview by author, 28 April 2000, Milwaukee, WI, e-mail transcript.

²² *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 5

²³ *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pg. 4

For the third time in less than a decade, that attention settled on another mission congregation. A core group of WELS members were gathering in the Tallahassee area, some of who were members at Zion. Work began there in 1987, and by 1990 a full-time pastor was assigned. Unfortunately, this mission ended up leaving the synod in 1993, but a new mission was started and has had some small success in the area. Due to the distance of Tallahassee from Gainesville, Zion did not lose as many members in the transfer, but a significant portion of time and manpower was dedicated to this sister congregation during these years.

In some respects, the decade of the 1990s shows a slowing of activity at the congregation. The “major” events are fewer and farther between. While the yearly statistics show growth in membership (at one point eclipsing 160 communicants²⁴, another doubling of membership), the worship attendance statistics fluctuate between 65 and 75—only slightly higher than during the final years of Pastor Olsen. Even the 25th anniversary service folder stops reporting events after the starting of Tallahassee in 1990. To some observers, stability may also have fostered stagnation.

In the opinion of this author, the label of stagnation is unfair and inaccurate. During these years, the congregation spent some time repairing and remodeling its 20-year-old facilities. The congregation did retire its debts, becoming self-supporting (or, as Pastor Wiedmann preferred, “mission supporting”) in 1991, and debt-free in 1998. New members have been brought in. An unfortunate recurring debate over the *Christian Worship* hymnal caused some divisions in the church, and even the loss of a few members. In 1997, the congregation pursued the development of a mission statement,

²⁴ *WELS Statistical Report, 1996*

and some members participated in the synod-sponsored School of Outreach. The congregation has not been dormant, nor has it become stagnant.

However, there are significant challenges to be met. Over recent years, some new members have been “disappointed by the unfriendliness of the congregation.” Pastor Wiedmann comments that “some of this problem is perception, some reality”. Even if the problem was totally perception, this is an issue that must be addressed so that the church doesn’t hinder the spread of the Gospel. Another key issue is for the congregation to take some time planning specific goals to reach its mission objective. Whether this takes the form of a pre-school, day school, or other activities, Zion seems to be in a position where setting some immediate and long-term goals would help the congregation sharpen its focus.

In August of 1998, Pastor Wiedmann accepted a call to work in the world mission fields in India. The vacancy which followed was much longer than any other in the congregation’s history—almost a year and a half. Most recently, Pastor Thomas H. Hilliard has accepted the position as Zion’s shepherd, and was installed in January of 2000. Only the Lord knows what is in store for Pastor Hilliard’s ministry at Zion congregation.

Pastor Wiedmann’s initial impressions of Zion were of “Southern hospitality”. He was warmly received, especially in light of the recent transitions. He especially appreciated the university atmosphere: “I loved ministering in a city where the university and education dominated the city.”

There were a number of challenges which Pastor Wiedmann identified. Some problems were rooted in doctrinal misunderstanding: the role of men and women, and the

introduction of the new hymnal. Some challenges were related to the dynamics of people: too many strong leaders with differing opinions, and some (previously mentioned) problems of integrating newer and older members. As many of the other pastors observed, the transitional nature of the congregation and the community has not stopped affecting the membership of the congregation.

The joys which Pastor Wiedmann remember all center in the people. He enjoyed seeing people ask intelligent, difficult questions as they became more and more involved with the Word. He also appreciated the attitude and manner of the South Atlantic District—another common theme mentioned by many of Zion's former pastors.

Perhaps the major milestones have already been mentioned. Certainly the start of the Tallahassee congregation was a major event, as was its self-removal from the synod. Mission-supporting and debt-free status are major milestones in any congregation. For better or worse, the introduction of the new hymnal has had a continuing effect on the congregation. Finally, the development of a mission statement is a good step toward helping the congregation refocus and rededicate its mission efforts.

Conclusion

By now, the reader has had an opportunity to form an opinion about Zion congregation. Several trends have been highlighted—the challenges and joys of working in a university town, the willingness of the congregation to begin other missions, and the blessings which God has demonstrated in the lives of Zion's members. Overall, the interviews with each pastor have been characterized by enjoyment and fond memories of their time in Gainesville.

It is impossible to say what the future holds for Zion. Recent years have tested the congregation with different types of setbacks. At the same time, in the author's opinion, Zion is now poised to begin any type of ministry that it chooses. The debts are gone, and the cash reserves are growing. The number of children has rebounded, especially in the younger grades. A new veteran pastor has been installed. With some planning and the Lord's blessing, Zion can begin new mission efforts to reach out into the community once again. The opportunities are out there, and the desire is building once again. Best of all, God's promise is to bless the congregation's Gospel outreach. As the congregation has seen again and again—the time to begin is now.

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