

**The Foreign Mission Efforts of the Joint Synod  
During the Great Depression**

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The week before, the market had swung violently from huge losses to tremendous gains, so the brokers were nervous. Now one hour after the opening of the New York Stock exchange, the market had dropped drastically and was not coming back up. For the next five days, the market would continue to drop and drop and drop. On Tuesday, October 29th, 1929, 16 million stocks had been sold off, more than four times the average. A messenger boy offered a dollar for a set of stocks that had been worth \$100,000 a week earlier, and he got it. The Great Depression had begun, and even though no one knew it, it would last for over a decade. It would destroy the economy of much of the world, and it would push the population of the United States into a struggle to survive.

The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States did not escape the economic struggles of the 1930's. Every area of work in the Synod was paralyzed. At one synod convention the Board of Trustees reported after drastic cuts that "It was a matter of live or die for the Synod."<sup>1</sup> The thirties were difficult times for the Synod and especially for its world missions. Their history during this time is amazing. Their history demonstrates the blessing hand of God. Even during the Great Depression, even under bone scraping mission support, our world missions endured and even grew by the grace of God. This paper will look at the world mission efforts of the Joint Synod during the Great Depression.

In 1893 the Federation of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan sent three missionaries to Arizona to work among the Apache Indians. It was the first foreign mission of our small group of churches, and for the next thirty years, it would be our only foreign mission. The work began slowly, seeing little growth and gaining few converts, but the Holy Spirit began to bring Apache

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<sup>1</sup>Proceedings of the Evangelical Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1933, p. 24.

children and some adults to faith. The missionaries' main tool at the beginning and throughout our work in Apacheland was our synod strength, the school system. Almost immediately at their first station in Peridot, they built a schoolhouse, and the Lord blessed our efforts. By 1923 the mission had its own newspaper, the *Apache Scout*.

In that same year, 1923, our synod, now called the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, began what might be called its second foreign mission and first overseas mission, Poland. After World War I, the Allied Powers reinvented the country of Poland which separated many Germans from their homeland. They had little or no spiritual care under the state church, and what little existed was not confessional. So under the leadership of Pastor Angerstein, they began to look for help, and they found the Synodical Conference. In 1923 the Joint Synod sent Pastor Engel to Poland, and the Lutheran Free Church in Poland was started. These two missions were the beginning of our synod's foreign mission work. But difficult times were coming, times that would threaten the existence of both of these missions. By God's grace both survived the economic struggles of the 1930's, and by God's grace he allows us still to work in one of these fields.

The General Mission Board of the Joint Synod met in Milwaukee, WI at the Republican Hotel on May 15th and 16th, 1929. Pastor Eckert, Chairman of the Poland Mission, reported the news that Pastor William Bodamer had accepted the call to be the Superintendent of the Polish Mission. For the next decade, this man would work tirelessly traveling the countryside in Poland between congregations and reporting, sometimes even in person, to the General Mission Board. The Lord would truly bless this mission through Pastor Bodamer. The mission now had 3 pastors and 4 students being trained at the Seminary in Zehlendorf near Berlin. Soon one student would graduate and fill one of the two vacancies. Pastor Eckert submitted a budget of \$25,000

for the next biennium. Unfortunately because of the shortage of candidates for the ministry, President Bergemann said that the synod couldn't afford to put any more men in Poland at the present.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor F. E. Stern was the Chairman of the Indian Mission, and he reported that almost 200 hundred children were attending our schools on the reservation and that 27 children were housed in the orphanage. The Indian mission proposed a budget for the next biennium of \$89,295. The General Mission Board seemed to be in high spirits because Holy Spirit had blessed their work, and they ended the meeting by thanking Pastor Grabowski for the cigars.<sup>3</sup>

Just before the Synod Convention on August 13th, 1929, the General Mission Board met with the Board of Trustees to discuss the proposed budgets. Both missions were asked to cut their budgets, and they did. The synod had a large debt and was trying to pay it off. Unfortunately this debt would be part of the reason why the synod would struggle so much in the coming years.

Superintendent Guenther of the Indian Mission was present, and he explained the rationale for the Upper Cibicue church, and the need for the interpreters and their homes. The first was included in the budget. The second was not. The Board allowed Pastor Guenther to build the homes so long as there was no expense to the synod or Pastor Guenther. Over the next ten years, because of the shortage of funds, the Indian Mission would be prevented from many needed building projects.<sup>4</sup>

From August 14th -21st, 1929, the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other

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<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, May 15 and 16, 1929.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, August 13, 1929.

States met for their twentieth convention. The main issue at the convention was Prof. Koehler, but in the background the world mission work of the Joint Synod was growing. Pastor Stern and Superintendent Guenther reported to the Convention and expressed the needs of the Indian Mission. The Synod resolved to send a new teacher to Peridot and add a classroom there, build a parsonage in Cibicue, build an addition to the home of Missionary Meier, send another helper to the East Fork Orphanage and install a new water system at that mission, and grant the proposed budget of \$91,414 for the next biennium. Pastor Eckert submitted an exhaustive report on the mission in Poland and ended by saying that this mission has a 'bright future'. The synod approved a budget of \$23,000 for the next biennium. The synod had either met or exceeded the budget that each of these missions requested. The Joint Synod was dedicated to its foreign mission work.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time that the synod was supporting these two missions, the synod now had the opportunity to begin foreign mission work in a new field. The members of the Negro Mission board proposed that the synod begin mission work in Africa. It seems that a young man from Nigeria found the Synodical Conference and encouraged us to go to Africa. The Synod recommended that the Negro Mission Board "encourage the Synodical Conference to use the \$4321.80 collected by Negro Christians for mission work in Africa for an exploration of mission possibilities in Africa."<sup>6</sup> Any further action by the synod would wait until the exploratory work was done. The 1929 convention had demonstrated the synod's dedication to and support of its foreign mission work, but the economic crisis had not yet begun.

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<sup>5</sup>Proceedings of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of WI and Other States, 1929, p 26-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 46-47.

On October 22, 1929, the General Mission Board met for its usual fall meeting. Little happened at that meeting that affected the foreign fields. Pastor Stern did report that the building project at Peridot was finished.<sup>7</sup> That same week Black Thursday, Friday, and Tuesday would send the New York Stock Exchange into chaos.

The spring meeting of the General Mission Board already began to show the effects of the economic difficulties in the US. The Indian Mission asked for three new workers: a pastor candidate for Bylas, a lady nurse/teacher for the East Fork orphanage, and a New Ulm man for the East Fork mission. The board granted the teacher for East Fork. Pastor Bodamer asked for \$3,000 for Poland, but the board could not afford it. Nebraska asked for another missionary, but the budget couldn't afford it. And the Michigan members reported that the depression was very noticeable in Michigan. But missions continued to report blessings. The Apache mission reported that 268 students attended our schools and that they had two Indian proteges to help with the mission: Geo. Wallum and Audrae Bullis. Pastor Stern also reported on the mission work of Rome among the Apaches. Apparently, in Whiteriver the priest would hand out one cent vouchers that the children could redeem for a piece of gum. (Unfortunately Pastor Stern does not report any further on the subject.) Throughout the early life of the Apache mission, the Catholics would cause frustration continually for our missionaries. Because the adult Apache would not as a rule go to church, only the children would, the missionaries would begin to go to the Apache adults with the Gospel. In Poland, the numbers were growing: 7 congregations, 3 preaching stations, 874 communicants, and 1277 souls. The mission work continued.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, October 22, 1929.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, May 15, 1930.

On October 20-21, 1930, the Mission Board met for their fall meeting, and once again, the Lord blessed the mission efforts even though they were hindered by financial troubles. The enrollment in our mission schools in Apacheland was up to 277, and they discussed extending the school in East Fork through High School (the beginnings of our East Fork Lutheran High). But the buildings of the Indian Mission needed some work. Pastor Stern reported that the missionaries in Lower Cibicue needed a new school house and that the chapel in Miami (an old mining town outside of the reservation) was rundown and ought to be sold. The Board decided to sell the Miami chapel but made no mention of replacing it, and asked that the Apache committee bring the plans for the Lower Cibicue school to the next meeting. Most interesting of all, the board resolved to encourage George Wallum to return to Northwestern College. Pastor Eckert reported, "Our work in Poland shows great gain." The mission had three students in the seminary at Zehlendorf and one student out vicaring. But they were having a lot of trouble renewing Pastor Bodamer's visa, so the board resolved to appeal to the Polish Council in Chicago for help and use Sen. Bob LaFollette if necessary. The Church Extension Fund was in great need, and the mission board was too, but the Lord blessed the work.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately the minutes of the General Mission Board jump from the fall meeting of 1930 to the fall meeting of 1932, possibly because Pastor Bergholz, the former secretary who took very thorough notes, died in 1932.<sup>10</sup> Exactly what happened during those two years in our missions can only be determined by the synod convention report of 1931. But during those two years, the depression deepened. When President Hoover was in office, he promised numerous

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid, October 20 and 21, 1930.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, September 20-21, 1932.

times that recovery was just around the corner, but as the depression dragged on, some began to doubt his words and mock him. As some put it, President Hoover promised that "prosperity was hovering just around the corner."<sup>11</sup> In 1930 the country and the synod truly believed that the depression could not last much longer, and the synod continued to support its work with that in mind. But by the time that the Twenty-First Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States met, the country and the synod had realized that prosperity was not hovering around the corner and that the depression would last. Yet they generously supported their missions.

From August 12-18, 1931, the synod met in convention. The Indian Mission reported that the first year of the past biennium was rough. The mission had many vacancies (severed fellowship with three workers<sup>12</sup>) and several sick workers (because of illness Superintendent Guenther was unable to work full time until the end of 1930<sup>13</sup>), but other workers filled in and took care of the work. The second year of the biennium had been much better. The board had filled all of the vacancies by the beginning of 1931. For the sake of efficiency, the work of Superintendent was now divided between Pastor Guenther, who served the north half of the reservation, and Pastor Uplegger, who served the south half. The workers were generally healthy now, and the attendance in the schools was up about 50 students to 274. George Wallum an Apache student at Northwestern College expects to enter the service of the mission this fall. In the last two years

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Bailey and David Kennedy, The American Pageant. Vol. II (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1987), p. 776.

<sup>12</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, May 15, 1930.

<sup>13</sup>Proceedings of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1931, p.53-59.



by the grace of God, the missionaries had baptized 281, married 66 couples, and buried 118 people. The average attendance at the beginning of 1931 had been 1250 souls for the mission, and slowly the people were showing fruits of faith by their contributions and communion attendance.<sup>14</sup>

But the mission did need help. Pastor Krueger in Lower Cibicue needed help with the school because of increased enrollment, Pastor Sprengler needing help in Bylas asked that George Wallum be sent there, Pastor Niemann in Upper Cibicue holding worship services in an old garage needed a chapel, the school in Lower Cibicue had grown so much that it "MUST" make space in the utility shed, the building that housed the boys at the boarding school in East Fork was uninhabitable, San Carlos which had outgrown their building would like to build an altar niche to create space in the old building, Globe needed a new chapel because the old one was "dilapidated", and in Miami the chapel had to be ditched because it too was run down. Besides all that, the chairman of the mission told many "Pathetic Stories" about the conditions that the people lived in: epidemic, great need, want, poverty, and unemployment, no work so no income. But the missionaries used the many opportunities to hand out food and clothing to also share the Bread and Water of Life. The synod even in the face of a huge synod debt supported its mission, its missionaries, and the people of that mission. They resolved to send additional workers to East Fork, Cibicue, and Bylas, granted Lower Cibicue, East Fork, and San Carlos the building funds they needed, and recommended that the General Mission Board work on getting a chapel at Globe. The synod amazingly approved a budget of \$83,198 (not quite what the mission requested) for the next biennium. The Apache mission had gone through some rough times and

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

needed a lot of help, and the synod, whether wise or not, gave the mission almost all the help it needed.<sup>15</sup>

Although the mission in Poland had not suffered like the Apache mission had, they still had their troubles. The Polish government was not renewing Pastor Bodamer's visa, and the mission board had little success in changing the situation so they brought it to the synod. The synod said that they needed Pastor Bodamer's supervision of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Poland, so they resolved as a synod to petition the government of Poland to extend his stay in Poland (and apparently it worked). In the past two years the church in Poland had grown from 4 to 7 churches and to 6 preaching stations. The number of souls in their care jumped from 521 to 1254, and they had two students studying at Zehlendorf. The Poland mission asked for and received a budget of \$24,000.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the convention, a letter from the Board of Trustees was read. They said that the offerings had increased slightly, but not enough. They were still not yet getting the budget down, and there would be an \$82,000 deficit in the budget that the synod had just passed. They asked everyone to please encourage their churches to increase their contributions. But even with the growing budget, the members of the synod gathered still saw reason to praise God. A quote by Pastor Stern, chairman of the Apache mission, demonstrates this: "But Christ, the Head of the Church, indeed proved in these troublesome days how man's extremity is His opportunity, and how all his gracious promises are yea and Amen in Him to His glory."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 54.

In September 1932, the mission board met, and elected Pastor William F. Pankow as the new chairman of the Apache mission. For the first time the minutes record that the depression caused disagreement and tension in the synod's world missions. One of the missionaries on the reservation had more students in school than his budget allowed him to teach. The Board told him to drop some students in order to meet the budget, but the missionary refused and said that he would solicit his own funds. The board resolved that he listen to the decision of the board and the synod. In regard to the rest of the Apache mission, the minutes only describe Pastor Stern's report by saying, "some alarming things mentioned, most likely necessitating another cut in endeavor to balance budget." Communication with the Poland mission was difficult, so the board decided that either Pastor Bodamer come to the US, or the chairman of the mission go to Poland in order to meet and discuss the mission work (a practice that the board would follow more and more through the years). There was also the sad note that on September 1, Pastor Bodamer's wife had died. The depression had hit hard, and the minutes reflect frustration on the board. Unfortunately the depression had not yet reached bottom.<sup>18</sup>

The spring meeting of 1933 of the mission board reflects the economic crunch in the synod and the whole country. The proposed budget for 1933-35 of Poland had dropped to \$8,900 a year, and the budget of the Apache mission had dropped to \$31,900 a year. Even though both missions had grown and even though they were in need of many repairs and building projects, especially in Arizona (some of the building projects approved by the 1931 convention were not carried out because of funds), they cut their budgets considerably. The whole synod had to do the same. Pastor Roepke succeeded Pastor Eckert as Chairman of the Poland mission, and in

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<sup>18</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, September 20-21, 1932.

accordance with the last meeting, Pastor Bodamer was at the meeting. He gave a very detailed report and thanked God for his numerous blessings to the Free Church of Poland. Pastor Bodamer, even through all the difficulties of the depression and through the future struggles with the state church in Poland, would continue to rejoice in the blessings of God.<sup>19</sup>

From August 2-9, 1933, the Synod met in convention, and at first the picture seemed a little brighter. The Board of Trustees had reduced the debt considerably from \$752,000 to \$597,000, but the cost of doing so was tremendous. In October 1931, they cut missionaries' salaries "to the bone", cutting them by 10%, and in October of 1932 they had to cut all of synod departments by 20%. They admitted that unfortunately they practically paralyzed our mission board so that they were unable to open any new missions, but they also admitted that all of the cuts and tough economics did help to reduce the debt and meet the budget. But they gave an impassioned plea for the members of the synod to work hard at stewardship.<sup>20</sup>

Pastor Schulze, chairman of the mission board, delivered an impassioned report as well. "The mission work of the Synod continued under God's blessing to prosper although not in the measure in which it could and should have, had it not been severely restricted by Synod's own resolution."<sup>21</sup> That resolution of the last convention said that no new stations could be opened if they caused additional expense to the synod. He continued by reminding the synod that there are lots of workers waiting to be sent, but no funds to send them, and he asked if the synod was really so restricted that it can't use these men in some way. Pastor Schulze pleaded with the

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<sup>19</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, May 29-30, 1933.

<sup>20</sup>Proceedings of the Joint Ev. Luth. Synod of WI and Other States, p 22-25.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 57.

Board of Trustees for \$6,300 to place some of these men at \$25 a month somewhere in the field. He also spoke up in defense of the missions, "In these pressing times throughout Synod crying voices are heard: 'Drop the mission in Poland and use those funds in our own country where they are now so sorely needed. Cut to the bone, yea, to the very marrow, the work in Arizona among the Apache Indians. For forty years we have been laboring and sinking enormous sums there with apparently little visible rewards.' Your board gave serious attention and consideration to these cries."<sup>22</sup> But the work in Poland was going so well that the board could not cut it, and the Apache missionaries looked at other ways to do the work while cutting money but couldn't find any way, so the board resolved to continue. He closed his report by saying that the harvest is ready and the workers are plenty, but "Only one thing lacking -- and that one thing -- money. How sad! Sadness sufficient to drive to tears!"<sup>23</sup>

The separate mission committees delivered their reports as well. Pastor Pankow, chairman of the Apache mission, was pleased to report that around 350 students were attending their schools, and the mission had an average attendance of 600. The total number of Apache baptized during our work there rose to over 2,000 with 113 in the last biennium. But the mission did have many needs, and they asked the synod for a high school teacher at East Fork, repairs at Whiteriver, Lower Cibicue, and East Fork, and a budget of \$31,900 for the next year. The synod referred these things to the board for consideration but only as long as they didn't exceed the budget. But the synod did resolve that under the present conditions no high school should be established at East Fork. That would have to wait for now. The synod was still having trouble with Pastor

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 59.

Bodamer's visa and passport so they resolved again as a synod to respectfully request the Polish government to allow him to stay and to respectfully request that the Department of State at Washington give him either an extension on his passport or give him a new one. The convention was adjourned, and the tide of the debt had turned. But the depression had not reached rock bottom. Drought and crop failures had to come first. But in the synod, things for the most part now would not get worse and would slowly, very slowly improve, especially under the guidance of the new synod president, Pastor Brenner.<sup>24</sup>

From October 23-24, 1933, the board met for its fall meeting. The Apache mission reported that not too much had changed recently and that they were doing the best they could under the circumstances. The work in Poland was going satisfactorily with manifest blessings. The other areas of the synod were suffering still under the weight of the depression. Michigan members again said that Michigan had been hit extremely hard especially with so many banks failing, and the Nebraska crops were failing.<sup>25</sup>

The May 21-22 meeting of 1934 picked up right where the last meeting left off. Michigan, especially Detroit, was hit hard by the depression. The Apache mission also reported some trouble. It seems like some missionaries or teachers resigned. The minutes say, "Let the storm blow over." The Apache committee encouraged the missionaries to learn the Apache language. The minutes do not say why, but the salaries for the interpreters might have played into the decision a little bit. In any case, the encouragement was a good one. The synod had been working in Poland now for 10 years, and God had "abundantly blessed" the mission. The

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid, p. 69, 75.

<sup>25</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, October 23-24, 1933.

mission would place two new students graduating from Zehlendorf and had opened one new congregation. The minutes mention that difficulties were encountered. Although the minutes don't mention what those difficulties were, it is likely that the Free Church in Poland was having its first trouble with the state church which would torture the Free Church for years. A question was raised about the seminary at Zehlendorf and whether it was advisable to send our students there. Fellowship was the issue. The board decided that if Pastor Bodamer thought that it was advisable, then it was all right.<sup>26</sup> The Apache mission had passed its most difficult point, but the Poland mission would soon begin to suffer.

The Apache mission celebrated its 40th year in the fall meeting of 1934, and all of the vacancies from the resignations had been filled. The mission had baptized 2,200 Apache in those 40 years, and they had a new native worker named Vardette who served as an interpreter and visited the sick. The Poland mission was going along nicely except for a vague reference to "hindrances".<sup>27</sup>

Michigan began the spring board meeting by reporting that things had improved and their offerings had too. The Apache mission was encouraged to employ Apache workers to help with the work. They asked for a budget of \$29,000 to carry on their work. The Poland mission reported that the church was growing and so were the contributions, so they only needed \$10,910 to carry out their work for the next year.<sup>28</sup>

The 1935 Synod convention met in New Ulm, and the main item of discussion was the synod

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid, May 21-22, 1934.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, October 21-22, 1934.

<sup>28</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, May 20-21, 1935.

debt. It had shrunk now to less than \$400,000, but the synod owed another \$250,000 to the CEF totaling \$638,067. The Board of Trustees also reported that salaries were paid only once on time in the past biennium. The synod resolved that the total debt of the synod not pass \$640,000 and that the pay of the missionaries be raised by 10%.<sup>29</sup> The Missouri synod sent their resolutions concerning the Africa mission. They wanted to start work on it immediately with the help of any of the other Synodical Conference synods who were interested. When the Synodical Conference met in 1936, they would take over control of it.<sup>30</sup> A committee was appointed who<sup>which</sup> recommended that the synod begin working in Nigeria at once under the direction of the Board for Colored Missions and that we appropriate the sum of \$1,600 as our share of the initial expense of the mission.<sup>31</sup>

Pastor Schulze, chairman of the Mission Board, delivered a report on the mission work of the synod. He said that the statistics "show that God in His mercy has also in the past biennium - 1933-1934 - showered his blessings upon the Synod's mission work and caused it to prosper."<sup>32</sup> The important parts of the work God was blessing, but the financial part of the statistics was not so good. The missionaries are paid barely sufficient to sustain life, and the missions are saving money in every way that they could. He ended by saying, "Surely, it would not be displeasing to God if in the current biennium we would think and grumble and complain less about the depression, but rather give serious thought and grateful voice for the manifold blessings our

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<sup>29</sup>Proceedings of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of WI and Other States, 1935, p. 50-52.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 68.



Heavenly Father is still showering upon us and permits us to enjoy." He reminded the synod that for years the synod needed workers, now they had them (32 candidates did not have calls), but they couldn't afford to place them.<sup>33</sup>

Pastor Pankow started the report on the Apache mission by saying that the work continues, and God's word is accomplishing work. The Apache people are willing to help finance a chapel at Upper Cibicue, Can the synod help them? asked Pastor Pankow. He did report that almost all of the vacancies caused by the resignations have been filled, but the mission still needed more manpower in Bylas, Peridot, and Lower Cibicue. The synod granted the Apache mission a budget of \$29,750.68 for the next year and resolved that the school at Bylas be enlarged so that the teacher would not have to turn students away.<sup>34</sup> Pastor Roepke reported on the Poland mission. Many difficulties, hindrances, and persecutions troubled the church in Poland the last couple of years. "It is no unusual thing anymore for the members of our Free Church to experience the sad incident of having their modest chapels, their houses of prayers, which they built with their meager means, padlocked immediately before or after the dedication."<sup>35</sup> The government took many possessions from the members to pay for the state church and locked the doors of their chapels until the members paid all of their taxes. Pastor Roepke reported several strange events that the church suffered on account of the state church. But in spite of the hardships, the church body continues to grow. They now have ten congregations, 2401 souls, and the average attendance is 1730 on Sunday. Pastor Roepke said, "Blessed under bitter

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid, p. 69-71.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, p. 73-4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, p. 74.

hardships' might be put as a caption to our mission in Poland."<sup>36</sup> The synod granted the budget requested by the Poland mission. The situation of our synod and her missions certainly wasn't much better, but it wasn't any worse. And the Lord continued to bless the work.

The fall meeting of the mission board basically reviewed what happened at convention, but they did resolve that the General Mission Board the Executive Committee of Poland to have its workers trained here in America.<sup>37</sup>

The next meeting was almost as quiet, although Superintendent Guenther had resigned, and the board took time to discuss that. After years serving as the superintendent, Pastor Guenther stepped down from that position. He was a gifted man and a true blessing to the mission. He would still continue to serve for quite a few years as a missionary, but Pastor Uplegger became full Superintendent now. The board also resolved that they ask the General President to take the necessary steps to make it possible for our students from Poland to attend our seminary at Theinsville.<sup>38</sup>

The fall meeting of 1936 began by electing new officers. The new chairman of the Apache mission was Pastor Ruege. Then Pastor E. Guenther asked permission to present a matter to the board regarding salary and painting of the station. The board asked him to discuss the matter first with the Apache board, and then they would report. It seems as though the facilities at Whiteriver had gotten extremely dilapidated and the pay of the missionaries was so low that it

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, October 21-22, 1935.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, May 25-26, 1936.

was difficult to live on. But nothing more is discussed at this meeting.<sup>39</sup>

The spring meeting picked up on the concerns of Pastor Guenther, and the board adjusted Pastor Guenther's salary. The board also resolved that because of the conditions peculiar in the Indian Mission, \$4.10 per child for missionaries kids be extended to include all children irrespective introspective of age, and that the chairman of the Indian Mission inform Superintendent Uplegger of this and get a list of children that would fall under this ruling. The exact conditions that this refers to are not mentioned. It is a little difficult to say exactly what is going on, but it seems to be a way to help out the missionaries.<sup>40</sup>

It was time once again for the synod to meet in convention. From August 11-17, 1937, the synod met to discuss the progress of the work and future of the church. The Board of Trustees reported that for the first time in years, the salaries could finally be paid on time over the last few months. Although slightly smaller than two years earlier, the debt however still remained very high at \$623,690.14. Pastor Schulze reported that the mission board was actually able to open 18 new fields over the last biennium, but asked for \$10,000 to help place some of the 43 candidates who were not placed.<sup>41</sup>

In the Apache mission report, Pastor Ruege said, "the preaching of the cross...in the last two decades shows a marked spiritual progress over the work of the first two decades," even though no organized congregation of Apache exists. Pastor Guenther celebrated 25 years of service on the mission in 1936, and the people of Whiteriver threw a celebration of gratitude for him. That

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid, October 12-13, 1936.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, May 24-25, 1937.

<sup>41</sup>Proceedings of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of WI and Other States, 1937, 21, 25-6.

same year, he stepped down from being Superintendent, and Pastor Uplegger Sr. of San Carlos was appointed to fill the position. After Pastor Ruege spelled out the mission's needs, the synod resolved that the money for painting and repairs at East Fork, Bylas, and Whiteriver be granted, that the money to expand the school at Bylas be granted, and that the teacher needed for Bylas also be granted.<sup>42</sup> Pastor Bodamer wrote a letter to the convention, and the letter reflects the remarkable attitude of this missionary: "In preparing my Report on the work of our Synod in Poland covering the year 1936 my heart is filled with fervent praise and thanks to God, Who again in the past year took our mission under His gracious protection, and permitted our work to go on without almost any disturbance, and has accompanied it with his blessings."<sup>43</sup> Apparently the attempts of the state church to drown the Free Church failed, and through the struggle the pastors were strengthened. Two more congregations were added, and the number of souls was up to 2,797. Because of government officials who like to meddle in church affairs, the churches officially organized into a synod this year and named it the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Poland. The mission was trying to get their students to the US for training, but all of the bugs with the US government were not quite worked out yet. Then Pastor Roepke gave the amazing statistic that Pastor Bodamer travels over 4,000 miles a year in his work.<sup>44</sup>

The Western Conference of the Dakota-Montana District suggested a memorial, the Fenske Memorial, that the Apache and Poland missions form their own board, a world mission board. The synod decided that they didn't need their own committee yet, so they created on the General

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid, p. 31-32.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

Mission Board separate committees for each of them and provided for occasional visits to the fields.<sup>45</sup> The World Mission Board wouldn't be formed until the mid 40's. The synod adopted the budgets for the mission fields as follows: Apache - \$36,174.36, Poland - \$10,400, Africa - \$1,630.20.<sup>46</sup> The financial woes of the synod had not disappeared, but the situation was not getting worse. And the synod was able to grant some funds for the much needed repair work and for the placing of candidates. Things were slowly improving.

At the fall board meeting they resolved that the Apache committee investigate whether the basic salary of missionaries in AZ ought to be raised. This was still dealing with Pastor Guenther's concerns. Pastor Bodamer was back in the US and reported to the board in person. Apparently the mission <sup>was</sup> is using an evangelist to serve one of the congregations. Bodamer and the board were against this arrangement but agreed that he may continue temporarily. They left the matter in Bodamer's hands. The mission board also resolved that they send their greetings to their Poland brothers through Pastor Bodamer.<sup>47</sup>

In May the board met again and discussed a matter that had come up between the Apache missionaries and the Executive committee for Apacheland. The two parties were told to discuss and settle the matter privately, and if they couldn't solve the problem, then the board would hear them. Nothing further is stated. Poland submitted its report "with sincere rejoicing." They discussed the importance of getting the seminary students here to study at Theinsville and also

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p. 83, 93.

<sup>47</sup>Minutes of the General Mission Board, October 18-19, 1937.

discussed the evangelist question.<sup>48</sup>

The main job at the fall meeting was to reorganize according to the resolution made at the last synod convention. Two executive committees were formed on the board, one for Poland and the other for Apacheland. The new chairman for Poland was Pastor Maas. The Apache committee reported, and the board resolved to raise the salary of missionaries by 10%. They also resolved that the missionaries not do any extraneous work, just the work of the mission.<sup>49</sup>

The board met in May of '39, and Pastor Maas reported on the work in Poland stating also that Pastor Bodamer would be at the fall convention. The Apache mission reported, and the board resolved that the salaries of the Indian missionaries be raised 10% and that the *Apache Scout* be a paper mainly for the mission and not the whole synod. Someone again raised the question, "What should we do with the children of the orphanage who have finished 8th grade?" Nothing else is recorded, but after several years, the prospect of a high school at East Fork was coming up again. It is a sign that the board was no longer focusing just on survival, but on the future too now.<sup>50</sup>

The Board of Trustees reported at the 1939 convention that the synodical debt was now \$320,799.04. The committee had done an incredible job in reducing the debt of the synod.<sup>51</sup> The Apache committee reported and defended the work in Apacheland. The work was being blessed, and he reported on the condition of each of the stations. The mission asked for a budget of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid, May 16-17, 1938.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid, October 17-18, 1938.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid, May 22-24, 1939.

<sup>51</sup>Proceedings of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of WI and Other States, p. 53.

\$32,000. The synod resolved that most of the concerns and needs of the Apache mission be referred to the Indian Exec. Committee, but they did resolve to add \$1,600 to the Indian budget for needed buildings and help at Bylas and East Fork.<sup>52</sup> So the synod passed a budget of \$33,900, more than the mission had asked for! Pastor Maas reported on the Poland mission and stated that even with all of the difficulties and annoyances over the last few years, the Lord has blessed the mission, and it continues to prosper. He reported on each individual station and then gave a statistical summary: congregations - 12, pastors - 9, souls - 2,818, average attendance - 1,966. The biggest difficulty in regard to the Poland mission was the training of future pastors. Military regulations would not allow the synod to bring them into this country for education, and it was becoming very difficult to go into Germany to train them at Zehlendorf. The Poland mission had no idea what to do. They were open to suggestions. The Poland mission requested the budget of \$10,856, and the synod granted that budget. God was blessing the mission in Poland too.<sup>53</sup>

The Colored Mission board submitted a report on the work in Africa. Apparently one of the missionaries got sick and had to return home to recover which left Pastor Schweppe there alone. But soon Candidate Justus Kretzmann was sent to help him along with a teacher for the girls' school. Later Missionary Koeper recovered and returned to Nigeria. The missionaries <sup>had</sup> have 36 churches and 8,633 souls under their care at the moment, and many more churches <sup>were</sup> are beginning to look to them for guidance. A seminary was built in Obot Idim and a girls' school in Nung Udoe. The report delivered by Pastor Hoenecke ended, "The Lord has indeed placed an open

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid, p. 26-27.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. 29-35.

door of opportunity before us in Africa. But, with the opportunity also goes the great challenge and the great responsibility to meet this opportunity - will we?"<sup>54</sup> The opportunities in Africa would be a challenge, but with the help of God, that mission has blossomed and flourished. The 1939 convention demonstrated remarkable recovery. The debt was cut significantly, and mission work was no longer cut to the bone. In a sense, the synod was coming out of its depression. By the grace of God, the synod came through.

Although technically the depression did not end in the United States until the US joined World War II, the signs were already there in 1939, and the signs were there in our synod. Recovery was on the way. The Apache mission would continue to grow and prosper continuing even today. The Poland mission would not fair quite the same. Pastor Bodamer had returned in August 1939 for the Synod Convention and for furlough, but he was not able to return. On the dawn of September 1, 1939, Hitler sent his divisions into Poland and his bombers to Warsaw. The rest of the story of the Poland mission is for another paper. But unfortunately our efforts in Poland would not continue once communist Russia took Poland. The African Mission, just beginning during the depression, would continue. Not only does Missouri have a large mission there, but the Wisconsin Synod also has a large church body in Africa. Nigeria and Cameroon are well established, and the Zambia and Malawi missions are growing extremely fast.

The Lord of the church certainly taught the Joint Synod a few lessons during the depression. First of all practice Christian stewardship even in times of plenty. If the synod had worked hard during the booming twenties, the huge synod debt might not have crippled the church body during the thirties. Second, the Lord will provide. Somehow during the worst economic crisis in

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid, p. 160-1.



our country's history, the synod not only maintained the status quo, but also grew by the grace of God. By the blessings of God, the debt was paid, and missions were started. Third, the Word is powerful and active. Even with a lack of funds, even with our missions cut to the bone, yea, to the marrow, the missions grew in size and number. It is the word that makes disciples. Strange that these are lessons that a Bible-based church body needed to learn. They seem so obvious, yet that is true for all lessons that God teaches us. All we can say as we look at our Foreign Missions during the depression is "Thanks be to God for his patience, for his blessings, for his Son."

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