

Faith/ Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church, Billings, Montana
1954-1975

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Wisconsin Synod mission work officially began in Billings, Montana on June 21, 1953 when Pastor Harry N. Wiedmann was commissioned as a missionary by the Dakota-Montana mission board. This mission was formed at the request of several families that cherished the teachings of the Bible and the confessions of the Lutheran church. The first service held by Pastor Wiedmann took place on August 2, 1953 in a church building rented from Bethlehem Lutheran Church. At the end of 1953, Pastor Wiedmann reported 23 souls, 6 communicants, 7 in Sunday School, and Average Home Mission offering of \$27. Though hardly eye-popping, these numbers were normal for a mission that had only begun five months prior.

In June of 1954, the several families who had requested a pastor officially organized a congregation adopting the name, *Faith Evangelical Lutheran*. Wilbert Byxbe, Erwin Becker, Frank D. Enns, Warren A. Parker Jr., and James D. Copen were the five men who signed Faith's constitution as voting members. Since Montana state law required that all congregations have an elected board of trustees, Enns, Byxbe, and Parker were nominated and elected. By November, Faith had applied for membership into the Dakota-Montana District and the Wisconsin Synod.

Already in June of 1954, this new congregation started looking for a suitable building site. With the search underway, Faith Evangelical Lutheran continued to worship in Bethlehem Lutheran Church and held their congregational meetings in the church basement. By January of 1955, the mission board had purchased a piece of land at the northeast corner of Lewis Ave. and 24th Street West. In that same month a loan was secured from Synod. Finally, excavation began in April for the building that would be a temporary chapel for the congregation and a residence for their pastor. James Copen and Frank Enns were appointed to be the building committee in April of 1955, and it became their responsibility to make recommendations to the congregation regarding the pulpit, altar, sanctuary, and seating provisions for the new chapel. A special voters'

meeting was held on June 29, 1955 to finalize the seating, insurance and other final details before the dedication of their new parsonage-chapel building. That was their last meeting in the basement of Bethlehem as the Lord blessed Faith congregation with its first building in September 1955. They dedicated it with great joy on October 2, 1955.

After a busy year of planning, it seemed that the congregation would be able to settle down quietly and enjoy their new home, yet the Lord had other plans as he presented them with new changes and challenges. Only three years in existence, and the Lord presented this congregation with the challenge of finding a new pastor as Pastor Wiedmann accepted a call to serve at St. John's, Burlington, WI, in February 1957. To replace Pastor Wiedmann, the congregation first called Ralph Hoenecke, but he declined their call. Then, the congregation went to the assignment committee for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and the Lord saw fit to bless this congregation with seminary graduate Norbert Meier.¹ Meier soon moved to Billings with his wife and was ordained and installed in September of 1957.

The greater challenge now facing this little congregation with an inexperienced pastor was their building situation. Soon after the completion of their chapel-parsonage, the structure itself was presenting some problems. One immediate issue was the fact that the parsonage had

¹ This was a special blessing in light of the large number of vacancies throughout the Dakota-Montana District. District-President Paul G. Albrecht mentioned this special problem only a few years earlier in his report at the 1954 district convention, "The vacancies were too numerous, some of them of far, far too great duration. *The exodus from our District was unprecedented. We wish that some of the pastors who accepted calls into other Districts had stayed with us a little longer.* But who are we to dictate to the Lord when he calls one of His servants into another field of labor? It is our blessed Savior who rules and builds his Church, and He uses His servants where and as He pleases. We are supremely confident that whatsoever He does always redounds to the best interest of His kingdom. As of today, ten parishes comprising twenty-one congregations do not have a pastor of their own. However, it is comforting to be able to report that the Committee on Assignment of Calls saw its way clear to assign a candidate to all but one of its parishes. We thank God that each year He gives us a goodly number of consecrated men who, after graduating from our Seminary, are willing to leave home and friends to go wherever He calls them to bring the comfort of the Gospel to those who are to inherit eternal life. If it were not so we would not know where to turn for servants of the Word. It is only proper to state here that when the Committee on the Assignment of Calls met in May to assign the new class of candidates to the various fields, the other Districts were very considerate of the special needs to congregations of our District. Nine of the eighteen available candidates were assigned to congregations of this District. Otherwise no half the vacancies could have been filled. There were two vacancies for every candidate at our disposal. The pastor shortage is severe. Let us pray more fervently that the Lord send more laborers into His harvest. The laborers are few, and the harvest is great."

Proceedings of the Seventeenth Convention Dakota-Montana District. Northwestern Lutheran Academy. Mobridge, South Dakota. 8-10 June, 1954. p. 3-4.

been built too low. Mud holes had developed in the front of the building, which were both unsightly and dangerous. Therefore, the mission board advised that the congregation raise the building and put in a fill. Since \$3,000 dollars was the least expensive bid to do this operation, both the congregation and the mission board agreed that this was not a feasible option. They investigated further and inquired of the city what their options were. The city of Billings informed them that the building was structurally sound, and the only pressing need was to find a way to build a sidewalk from the road to the parsonage. With that in mind, the congregation's temporary solution was the erection of a retaining wall to provide enough support for a sidewalk. For the time being this first problem was under control, yet another issue with their location also developed in the first year after the dedication of the parsonage-chapel.

Just months of Faith's building-dedication, an ALC congregation bought a plot of land and erected a huge A-frame chapel within a few blocks of Faith's new building. As time went on, the congregation felt overshadowed by this large, new structure nearby. The members of Faith realized that it was the Word of God alone that turns blind, unbelieving hearts to the light of the Gospel, yet they were also concerned that they may be losing opportunities to share that pure gospel with prospects because of their building's smaller stature and its location in the immediate vicinity of a much more imposing and beautiful A-frame. Of course, this was a secondary issue to the structural problem mentioned above, and the congregation realized that the Lord would bless their gatherings around his word in spite of the building situation, yet this issue certainly exacerbated the whole state of affairs regarding this parsonage-chapel.

Finally, this parsonage was only meant to be a temporary worship facility. By the end of 1957, the congregation now had 51 souls (19 communicants and 7 voters). With 23 children enrolled in Sunday School as well, the space for worship, teaching and fellowship opportunities

was increasingly limited, especially considering that this was also the residence of Pastor Meier and his growing family.

After much prayer, deliberation with the church members, and discussion with the mission board, Faith decided to find a new location. Voters Ervin Becker and William McMahon volunteered to check into property and sites for a new location already in January of 1957. By April, they had investigated a number of properties and were soon consulting with the mission board as to their possibilities. The congregation's initial thought had been to merely relocate the whole parsonage; however, after the mission board researched the cost of that operation and considered the needs of this growing mission, they thought it wisest to sell the old property and building, to buy a new plot of land, and then to build a new chapel.

The congregation along with the mission board explored a few possibilities for the plot of land and decided upon a triangular piece of land in the Sweet Acres subdivision. In April of 1959, the board purchased a new property at the corner of 19th St. West and Howard Avenue. With a new construction project nearing, Faith once again formed a building committee and elected William McMahon, Ervin Becker, and Milton Pietz to it.

The plans for construction progressed smoothly until high building costs delayed the chapel project at the end of 1959 and into 1960. Things were only slowed temporarily as the mission board reported to the District Convention on June 21-23, 1960, "we are happy to announce that the final 'green light' was received from the Board of Trustees during the month of May and chapel is now underway and should be completed early this fall."²

Things did move quickly as the new church was finished in fall of 1960 and dedicated on October 16th, 1960. In 1963, they also built a new parsonage on a lot adjacent to the new

² *Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention. Dakota-Montana District.* Northwestern Lutheran Academy. Mobridge, South Dakota. 21-23 June, 1960. p. 14.

chapel. The old parsonage was sold to West Side Baptist Church in 1964. Throughout this second building phase in this congregation's short history, the key thing to note is member involvement. Many members donated their time and energy to assist the construction of both the church and the new parsonage. One such example was Jim Kimmel who donated and installed the sheetrock into the new parsonage.

In 1961, with a new chapel and 118 souls (53 communicants), things quieted down for this busy congregation. The voters elected their first church council, and they met regularly on the second Monday of each month. From 1961-1964, there were very few changes or noteworthy decisions in Faith Lutheran congregation; however, on September 12, 1961, Pastor Meier reported to the church council that the Wisconsin Synod had finally severed connections with the Missouri Synod on doctrinal matters. This matter-of-fact statement was duly noted as a matter of deep concern and great significance for Wisconsin Synod as a whole, yet in a mere seven years, this split would eventually prove to be a pivotal moment for this little mission congregation in Billings as well.

In October 1964, Pastor Meier announced his decision to accept a call as a missionary to Japan, and he was commissioned in January of 1965. The congregation extended a call to Pastor James Schneider in November 1964, who was currently serving at Altamont, South Dakota. Pastor Schneider accepted Faith's call and was installed in Billings on January 31, 1965. It was during his years of service, that the Lord provided the congregation with one of its biggest changes.

Soon after Pastor Schneider arrived at Faith in Billings, he was invited to a gathering of Lutheran pastors in Billings. Since Pastor Meier had attended in the past, Schneider also decided to attend. A Missouri Synod pastor, Harold Wood, opened the meeting by saying, "In view of

Pastor Schneider being here and his view of prayer fellowship, we'll dispense with the prayer today."³ The meeting then continued with a discussion of the doctrinal differences among their church bodies using "The Brief Statement." Pastor Schneider describes the meeting, "The first item on there was inspiration. Well, we never got past it. There was arguing and debating and we just dropped the whole subject."⁴ After that, Pastor Schneider never attended again. The importance was not really in the meeting itself, but that Schneider was now acquainted with Harold Wood, and the stage was now set for future discussions between the two.

Harold Wood was the pastor at Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings. Mount Olive had been started in 1960 as a daughter to the large Missouri Synod congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church, which had had a presence in Billings since 1914. After seven years in the Missouri Synod, Pastor Wood's eyes were gradually opened to the doctrinal errors that had taken hold in his church body. He recollects in an anniversary-history,

Sad to say, your former pastor began to realize that the vast majority of the professors of Concordia Seminary were contradicting God's Word with no disciplining action being taken by the synodical officials [of the Missouri Synod]. After writing letters and talking to the elected officials about these public sins against our Lord and Savior, your former pastor had to make a decision so that he could live with his conscience.⁵

In 1967, Pastor Wood contacted Pastor Schneider to discuss some of the doctrinal problems of the Missouri Synod, especially the issue of Boy Scout membership. Pastor Schneider recalls,

He [Wood] said, "You know, I'll be honest with you, I've just accepted whatever has come out of St. Louis, but now I'm interested in the issue of the Scouts." So I

³ Schneider, James. Taped Interview. Watertown, Wisconsin. 11 Dec. 2004.

⁴ Schneider, Interview.

said, "Let's get a manual." So we got a scout-master manual, and we looked at it. They [Missouri pastors] were told that as long as you had the scout as your member, it was acceptable. Yet, as we looked at what the manual said, he slowly began to see that this was a national affiliation and the emphasis was on work-righteousness. Even worse, they were wishy-washy about God. After that, we had a series of talks on other issues. We did that every couple months or so.⁶

Those informal discussions then led Pastor Wood to invite Pastor Schneider to talk with his church council on Wednesday nights after the Lenten services in spring of 1968. These meetings continued for several Wednesdays until Pastor Schneider decided to contact Arthur Kell, the president of the Dakota-Montana District, to come and discuss matters further with Mount Olive's church council.

As these meetings progressed, the church council members of Mount Olive were deeply concerned over what they were hearing about their synod. They did not agree with their church body's statements about inspiration and creation. They were dismayed that their seminary in St. Louis was riddled with heresy and false doctrine. They were especially troubled that nothing was being done about these problems. The council inquired of Pastors Schneider and Kell as to what the Wisconsin Synod did with those adhering to false doctrine. Pastor Kell informed them of the Wisconsin Synod's disciplinary process and described how they had just finished taking action against one such persistent errorist. That process and the fact that the synod actually followed through on it impressed the council members of Mount Olive.

Pastor Wood continued to discuss matters with his church council and the whole congregation. Finally, on Reformation Day 1968, he announced from the pulpit that he was

⁵ *Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church and School 25th Anniversary*. Booklet. 1994., p. 4.

⁶ Schneider, Interview.

leaving the Missouri Synod, and he encouraged those who had a heartfelt concern for the purity of the Christian faith and the Lutheran confessions to do so as well. On November 6, 1968, Mount Olive held a congregational meeting to discuss their pastor's resignation and their course of action for the future as a congregation. Since the majority of the congregation decided to stay in the Missouri Synod, a sizeable minority of about 100 souls, including most of the church council, withdrew their membership at Mount Olive and left with their pastor.

The question that now had to be addressed by this group was "Where do we go from here?" This break-off group met together for the first time on November 10, 1968 at Faith Lutheran Church. Gary Boggio was elected as acting secretary along with Gilbert Mattes as the Sunday school superintendent. Their first order of business was to find a place to worship. Thankfully, Faith Lutheran offered their facilities to this break-off group for worship and Sunday school, and the two congregations held separate services on Sunday mornings for the next several months.

The second thing this break-off group wrestled with was what they were to do with their twenty-two children who were enrolled at Trinity Lutheran School since it was Missouri Synod. After some discussion with District-President Kell, they realized that they could not have their children attend that school on an ongoing basis, yet they decided that their children would finish out that school year since it was already in the middle of the school year, and they had already committed money to the school.

At this meeting on November 10, 1968, this group also discussed their possibilities for the future as a congregation. They determined that their possibilities were to

1. remain independent forever.
2. remain independent and study the possibility of joining the ELS or WELS.

3. wait for a possible split within the Missouri Synod.⁷

At this time Pastor Wood had already applied for colloquy in the Wisconsin Synod since he had been in discussion with that synod for almost two years and felt that he was in agreement with the doctrines and beliefs of the Wisconsin Synod. With that in mind, the congregation resolved to wait until after Pastor Wood's colloquy, scheduled for December 10, to decide what direction they would take in the future. For the time being, they decided to form a congregation, and they took the temporary name *Lamb of God Evangelical Lutheran Church* for legal purposes.

Pastor Wood passed his colloquy on December 10, 1968, and was accepted into fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. On December 29, the congregation met and decided that it was sensible for them to apply for membership in the Wisconsin Synod too, especially because of the availability of doctrinally-sound pastors and synodical publications as well as the accessibility of funds for building needs. At this meeting, they also decided to send a delegation of four men to meet with Faith congregation to present their desires and problems and to listen to Faith's.

By January 10, 1969, Faith had already sent a letter inviting Lamb of God to join them as part of their congregation. District President Kell advised against this immediate merger since Faith's present building would not provide enough space for the significantly larger congregation that would form though he did advise the two congregations to explore the possibilities of eventually merging into one congregation.

On January 27, District President Kell and Pastor H. Birner, a district mission board member, met with both congregations separately. These two men felt that it would be wise for the two congregations to merge, provided that they follow these eight steps,

1. Dissolve both congregations

⁷ Lamb of God Evangelical Lutheran Church. 1968-1969 Voters' Assembly-Minutes. 10 Nov. 1968.

2. Merge the congregations into one
3. Change or adopt a new name
4. Elect temporary officers
5. Adopt new constitution
6. Purchase land
7. List the old property for sale
8. Build a new plant

If the merger did not materialize, Pastors Birner and Kell assured Lamb of God that the district would help them in whatever way possible; however, if the union with Faith did come to fruition, the new congregation would receive top priority for funds. Lamb of God prayerfully considered their options and sent this letter regarding their feelings to Faith on February 6,

At the January 30th meeting with representatives of both congregations, it was felt at that discussion that the merger following the steps outlined above would be beneficial to the Kingdom and both congregations. Your concurrence with the merger would enhance the potential for growth in this area. This proposed merger plus that potential would necessitate the need for more worship area as outlined in the steps above.⁸

At first, this eight-point proposal sparked some resentment among Faith's members, especially in regard to the sale of the present property. This building was *their* building, especially as each member had their own story of how they had poured time, money, and some sweat into some part of this building. In addition, it was not even ten years old. The fact still stood that neither the present worship facility nor the fellowship area would be able to support

⁸ Congregational letter from Lamb of God to Faith dated 6 February, 1969. This letter was found in Lamb of God's 1968-1969 Voters' Assembly-Minutes.

the needs of the new congregation, almost double its present size. As the merits of the entire eight-point plan for merger were discussed, Faith's opposition was soon dropped though there were occasional emotional flare-ups on both sides. Pastor Schneider relates,

When the mission board suggested exploring the possibility of merging, that brought in our two councils and two pastors. As we were exploring, there would be a little fire every now and then. Somebody would get mad about something. I would get a call from Harold saying, 'Come on over we have to talk to someone.' Or I would call Harold and say, 'Come on the two of us have to go meet with somebody on my side.' It was an emotional time.⁹

On the whole, Pastor Schneider and Pastor Wood handled situation delicately and played an integral role in gently guiding the two congregations through the merger.

On February 14, 1969, the two congregations held a joint meeting. Men from both churches were selected as temporary officers. An anniversary history of Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church recalls,

The congregations both voted to merge and follow the steps recommended by President Kell. The merger was consummated at a meeting held on Sunday, February 23, 1969... The new congregation chose as its name *Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church*, and called Pastor Harold A. Wood as its pastor.¹⁰

What about Pastor Schneider? At the time of the merger, Pastor Schneider held a call to a congregation near Tomah, WI. As he considered his call and mulled over the situation that the Lord had now presented to this new congregation, he decided to accept the call to Wisconsin. Pastor Schneider describes the heart-rending nature of his departure, "It was very emotional. I

⁹ Schneider, Interview.

¹⁰ *Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church and School 25th Anniversary*. Booklet. 1994. pp. 2-3.

didn't want to leave, but after talking to Harold, we just thought that this was God's way to resolve the situation. It was a tough thing. It was really hard leaving."¹¹ Pastor Schneider still remembers the people of both Faith and Lamb of God fondly,

I got to make good friends with these people [members of Faith and Lamb of God]. When I was dean of the academy, we were hosting the Synod Convention. Lo and behold who comes as a District delegate. . . it was one of those fellows that I had met as part of Lamb of God. Since that time, he had moved to Washington for his business. We talked fondly about old Billings. It really reminded me that I'm looking forward to seeing these people in heaven. . . Some great people.¹²

At the formation of the two congregations, new officers were elected, Milt Gibbs as president, Perry Roberts as vice-president, Gary Boggio as secretary, Alvin Bailey as treasurer. The elders were John Beck, Herb Noennig, and Jim Kimmel. They also elected a finance chairman, a board for Christian Education, and boards of trustees, evangelism, stewardship, worship, and public relations.

After the consummation of the merger in February, 1969, much of the church's efforts revolved around building a new chapel and starting a Christian day school. While the building would take more time, founding the school would not. The former Lamb of God members had already decided that they could not continue to send their twenty-two children to the Missouri Synod Trinity Lutheran School. With some families from Faith interested as well, Apostles set out to start their first Christian day school. Though the new church building was only in the planning stages, they planned to start a school in the back of the present chapel in the meantime,

¹¹ Schneider, Interview.

¹² Schneider, Interview.

and the Lord blessed their plan by providing them with a teacher. In May of 1969, Apostles went to the assignment committee for Dr. Martin Luther College, and Jerome Scheitel was assigned to Apostles Lutheran as teacher and principal. Scheitel was installed on June 29 in their regular Sunday service, and he spent the rest of the summer of 1969 ordering books, finding desks and school equipment, and getting to know his students. In August, less than two months after Mr. Scheitel's arrival, the school started with twenty-one children enrolled. Mrs. Scheitel also started a kindergarten with an enrollment of five.

At the turn of the new year 1970, the new building was still in progress. The architect for the Wisconsin Synod had already been to Billings on November 5, 1969 and had drawn up a tentative plan for their new church-school building. In January of 1970, the mission board approved the purchase of six acres on 30th West and Broadwater, but that deal did not go through. Instead, the congregation bought 10 acres of land at 32nd West and Broadwater in April. Soon thereafter, ground was broken and construction of the new chapel was underway.

The 1969-1970 school year came and went, but things were difficult for Mr. Scheitel, who was trying to teach all eight grades himself. Before the school year of 1970, the congregation made efforts to provide at least an assistant for Mr. Scheitel; however, they had to turn to the district mission board for funding due to the strain of all their other financial obligations. Unfortunately, the mission board denied the request explaining that they could not subsidize more than two called workers at one mission congregation. Fortunately, the Lord moved Mrs. Scheitel to volunteer her services to assist her husband with his workload.

At the beginning of 1971, Pastor Wood reported that Apostles had 137 communicant members, 79 unconfirmed souls and 216 total souls. Construction of the new chapel was progressing well, and plans for a new teacherage on the property were also in the making. By

May of that year, the old property and chapel were sold to the Church of Open Bible for \$80,000, which would help with the \$110,000 price-tag on the new property and church building. On August 29, 1971, the church held a valedictory service at the old chapel to thank God for all the blessings that he had provided the congregation there. On September 26, the new chapel was dedicated. After two years of dealing with spatial constraints, Mr. Scheitel especially appreciated this new structure, "The move to a new church and school was much appreciated by everyone, especially since space in the old church was so limited. The sanctuary became the kindergarten classroom during the week, and in the overflow section desks had to be moved aside so that chairs could be set up for evening and Sunday services."¹³

From 1972-1975, the Lord continued to provide Apostles with rich blessings. In September of 1972, Apostles built a new teacherage adjacent to the chapel. After the completion of that structure, the congregation now turned its attention to furnishing the beautiful chapel that God had blessed them with. The members donated their money, time and effort to help take care of needs such as the kitchen, landscaping, timed fans, and exterior lights. The final large project that the church took on during 1972-1975 was the purchase of a pipe organ. A member had lent an electronic organ to the congregation for the new building until something better could be found. On April 16, 1973, Apostles purchased a new pipe organ from a congregation in Chinook, Montana for \$2000. Comprised of some 312 pipes, some more than eight feet long, and a 600-pound windchest, this new organ was no small project for the congregation. Thirty-two people volunteered their time and abilities to modify, install, re-assemble and refinish the organ over a three-year period as well as to reconfigure the balcony to accommodate the organ's pipes and windchest. This organ was dedicated in a worship service and concert in November 10, 1976 by Professor William H. Birsching from Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge,

¹³ *Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church and School 25th Anniversary*. Booklet. 1994., p. 5.

SD. One of Apostles' members gave this recollection of the organ in a congregational history, "Many have enjoyed the organ over the years- none more than a visiting organist who came into the organ loft following the dedication service and was so carried away with the sound of the organ that more than one hint had to be made that it was time to lock up the church since everyone else had gone home."¹⁴

As the years passed by for Apostles Lutheran, things continued to change for the congregation. Pastor Wood took a call to start a mission congregation in Missoula, Montana in 1977. Mr. Scheitel took a call to Milwaukee, WI in 1974. By God's grace one thing has remained unchanged throughout the congregation's history and even to the present day- The Gospel. The members of Apostles have continued to gather around the gospel preached in sermons and taught in Bible classes. God has continued to pour out his grace upon Apostles' members individually and collectively in the Sacraments. May God continue to bless and keep them in the truth of that gospel.

¹⁴ *Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church and School 25th Anniversary*. Booklet. 1994., p. 4.

The Blessings and Challenges of Ministry at Faith/ Apostles during 1953-1975

The Changing Face of the Congregation

In 1970 Professor K. G. Sievert of Northwestern Academy presented a paper to the Dakota-Montana District, entitled, "Preaching the Gospel on the Dakota-Montana Prairies or a History of the Dakota-Montana District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod." In that paper, Sievert noted this change within the district during the years 1940-1950, "Because farms became larger and larger and because machinery became larger and larger, the youth of the area migrated into the larger urban centers, where they were able to find well-paying jobs. And they hoped that there they would find a better life. The result for our congregations was a gradual loss in membership."¹ That trend continued through 1950-1960 as Sievert observed, "The continued growth of farms and the development of ever better machines to cut down on the use of manpower continued to keep the District static numberwise, or even to lose members. This is also true because many grain farmers were converted to farms devoted to the cattle industry."² For this predominantly rural district, that which affected the farms also impacted the district's congregations; however, these winds of change did not affect Faith/ Apostles to the same degree because of their urban setting.

In these years Faith was changing, yet their main challenge was to deal with the transitory nature of their members' jobs. Many came to Billings to take advantage of the larger job market with more lucrative job-offers, and many eventually left Billings for even bigger and better opportunities. This cycle gave the congregation a continually changing face that was both a blessing and a challenge. James Schneider, who was pastor at Faith from 1965-1968, relates, "I'd

¹*Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Biennial Convention: Dakota-Montana District.* Northwestern Lutheran Academy. Mobridge, South Dakota. 23-25 June, 1970. p.79

²*Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Biennial Convention.* pp. 79-80.

say we had huge turnover in our congregation. Billings was a town where a lot was going on. It was like Milwaukee for the eastern part of the Montana. There were quite a few businesses, couple of colleges. Many came; many left. . . . When I left, I think there were only two families still in Billings that were there when I got there."³ The greatest congregational change took place when the congregation added the 100 Lamb of God members in 1969.

Publications

The changing face of the Faith/Apostles made it all the more vital that its members find opportunities to stay in touch with their fellow Lutherans at Faith/Apostles and beyond. One such avenue was publications, be it synodical or their own. From Faith's inception in 1954, the congregation paid for subscriptions to Northwestern Lutheran, seeking to keep their families connected with the fellowship of the whole synod. At that time, they also agreed "to show educational and informative films and slides relative to church work from time to time." Though not a regular occurrence since this was long before the days of the WELS Connection, they did prove true to their words as they bought a projector to watch the new *Martin Luther* film in 1956. During Pastor's Meier's tenure, Faith also started producing a church paper of their own to inform their members of the congregational news and events. From 1957 on, Faith and Apostles also provided Meditations for their members' devotional lives.

Meetings and Fellowship

The congregation also provided their members with opportunities to enjoy the company of their fellow Christians through different meetings and groups. In 1958, Pastor Meier started a men's group, meeting once a month to discuss church matters and serve as a social gathering. Occasionally, the congregation had a "family night" throughout the years. Teens and adults of

³ Schneider, Interview.

Faith/Apostles regularly joined a bowling league. In 1961 the congregation started a youth group and also participated in an annual summer camp for the teens of Faith/Apostles to attend with other teens of the conference. Around 1975 they also organized a branch of Lutheran Boy Pioneers for the younger boys.

Service Opportunities

The congregation also presented its members with an abundance of opportunities for service. Some served on the various boards, from the church council to the boards of education, stewardship, Christian education even on down to the building committees. All found some way to serve their Lord and help their fellow congregation members from fixing leaks on the church roof to running a vacation bible school, from doing carpentry work at the parsonage to teaching Sunday School, even mowing lawn and cleaning the church.

Evangelism

The people of Faith/ Apostles were also involved in evangelism efforts. In the early years the congregation tried many tactics to publicize their church. Occasionally they purchased advertisements in the Billings newspaper. They made fliers and did neighborhood canvasses, yet very few contacts were made through these avenues. Former Faith pastor James Schneider shared this observation on the difficulty of evangelism in Billings, "The further west you went, the less concerned people were about spiritual matters. That's just my observation. . . Why was that the case? Big country. People were just more independent. Then too, they moved so much. If they don't have roots for occupation, then they won't have roots spiritually either." Very little of their early efforts worked, so the main tactic that the church relied on was friendship

evangelism, encouraging their members to use the connections they had to build bridges that might eventually lead to a presentation of law and gospel. James Schneider describes the evangelism efforts that he utilized in Billings,

It was a matter of experience of talking to people. When I got there [Billings] I remember talking to a friend, a fellow pastor. He said, "Don't waste your time knocking on doors. Don't waste your time with leaflets." He said, "Use your members." So before they coined this expression 'Friendship Evangelism' we were doing it, because it made sense. I always had a list of names in my filing cabinet, and I was always getting more from people. Neighbors, friends, coworkers. They were kind of indoctrinated with that, to do that sort of thing. It wouldn't be that uncommon for me to be working, and the phone would ring. It would be a stranger who had been given my name by one of the members.⁴

Of course, even this style of evangelism also required persistence. "That spiritual laxity was a problem. You'd run into that over and over again. You would meet some nice people, but often it seemed like nothing would happen. My advice to anyone doing work with people like that is don't give up. Don't give up. It might take a long time, but always continue to be friendly."⁵

Christian Education

The emphasis of all that Faith/Apostles did was clearly on their children's education. Though the congregation did not start a Christian day school until after Faith and Lamb of God combined, Faith's children still had numerous opportunities to learn about their Lord and grow in

⁴ Schneider, James. Taped Interview. Watertown, Wisconsin. 11 Dec. 2004.

⁵ Schneider, Interview.

that knowledge. Sunday school was held weekly and vacation bible school every summer.⁶ In 1969, Apostles did start a grade school. Feeling a need to continue their Christian education of their young adults on the high school and college levels, Apostles established a grant in aid in 1970 to help any who were willing "to attend a high school that will further their ambitions and desires for entering the fields of ministry of our fellowship." By 'high school' they had the synodical schools in mind, especially Northwestern Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota. When Apostles set up this scholarship, they saw this as their opportunity to encourage more young adults to consider the public ministry and in this way to provide more called workers for the ever-growing fields throughout the world. As they said, "The word MINISTRY [from the previous quote] will be used to mean that of either teaching or preaching the word of God and furthering the knowledge of others in God's Word. We wish this to be a stepping stone to help fill vacancies that exist in the ministry field by encouraging students to attend schools that will give them the necessary background so they may serve the Lord at the earliest possible date. This will be available to both girls and boys."⁷

⁶ Statistics are available in Addenda (Part 2).

⁷ Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church. 1970 Voters' Assembly-Minutes. 4 May 1968.

Statistics for Faith/ Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church (1954-1975)

Year	Members			Baptisms		Confirmations		Ave. Times Comm./ Commn	Enrollment			Budget		
	Baptized	Communi- cant	Voting	Children	Adult	Children	Adults		CDS	SS	VBS	AveComm All Purposes	District Ave.	Synod Ave.
1953-54*	40	15	6	11	--	--	--	4.6	--	28	35	60.20	38.37	51.39
1955-56	53	17	7	5	--	--	--	4.0	--	27	14	80.23	42.69	56.33
1957**	51	19	7	2	--	--	--	3	--	23	--	62.76	42.27	60.19
1958	74	31	12	10	2	--	3	4.5	--	28	34	70.75	48.91	59.72
1959	95	37	14	9	--	--	1	5	--	35	54	83.00	51.83	63.57
1960	93	38	14	14	--	--	2	5	--	54	40	155.00	54.31	67.30
1961	121	58	20	9	4	2	4	7	--	51	50	84.43	57.89	73.50
1962	117	56	19	8	1	2	7	6	--	56	51	79.98	58.79	72.08
1963	113	52	19	4	1	4	2	6	--	56	60	86.34	62.34	72.27
1964	107	60	20	7	1	4	3	6	--	48	58	80.81	62.00	76.49
1965***	92	57	11	2	--	6	--	6	--	32	26	115.58	64.41	80.46
1966	117	64	14	5	2	1	7	3	--	49	37	86.91	71.06	89.16
1967	122	61	10	4	--	2	--	5	--	50	42	81.20	81.92	92.86
1968	129	66	10	4	--	4	--	4	--	38	45	89.96	83.97	98.38
1969#	229	133	23	6	1	9	6	4.3	21	79	68	104.66	86.14	103.70
1970	216	137	17	6	4	10	11	7.3	28	64	56	124.70	88.72	108.41
1971	228	155	20	9	3	11	5	6.6	17	86	61	152.73	92.09	115.60
1972	268	173	20	16	3	7	7	6.1	18	50	84	144.66	104.32	124.92
1973	251	166	15	14	2	5	3	5.9	13	59	67	148.66	113.08	134.21
1974	267	183	NA	17	2	13	7	6.5	NA	51	65	185.83	122.79	148.40
1975	247	170	NA	8	--	3	--	8.5	16	46	54	226.33	133.98	160.22

*Pastor Harold Wiedmann (Faith Lutheran)

**Pastor Norbert Meier (Faith Lutheran)

***Pastor James Schneider(Faith Lutheran)

Pastor Harold Wood (Apostles Lutheran)

All statistics were taken from Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for 1954-1975

Divine Calls

As I scoured the minutes of Faith from 1954-1969, it occurred to me that the pastors at Faith received large number of calls in relatively few years. As seen below, Pastor Wiedmann did receive three calls to other churches in the short span of four years after he was commissioned in Billings. Pastor Meier's numbers were even more eye-popping as he received at thirteen documented calls in his seven years at Faith. At first, I detailed the calls below merely out of curiosity; however, as I saw the numbers and reflected on how weighty and often agonizing each decision can be over which call to accept, I began to appreciate the fine-tuning that has been done both in the administrative process regarding calls (communication between district presidents) and in the technology now used to document calls. Undoubtedly, these changes have benefited both the pastors and the congregations, especially newer mission congregations.

Pastor Wiedmann

Commissioned (August 2, 1953)

1. To South Dakota (November , 1954)
2. To Jamestown, ND (April, 1955)
3. To Burlington, WI (February 1957, Accepted)

Norbert Meier

Ordained at Faith in 1957

1. To Lincoln, MI (Nov, 1958)
2. To Kenton, OH (Feb. 1960)
3. To Tyler, MN (Aug. 1960)
4. To ?????? (July, 1961)
5. To Dexter, MI (Sept, 1961)
6. To Michigan (1962)
7. To Warren, AZ (February, 1963)
8. To Courtland, MN (June 1963)
9. To Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, WI (Dec. 1963)
10. To Minneapolis (July, 1964)
11. To Racine, WI (Oct. 1964)
12. To Detroit, MI (Oct. 1964)
13. To Japan (Oct. 1964, Accepted)

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