

Interview with Pastor Dave A. Kehl 12-7-2008

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Theme: Focusing on differences and similarities in the ministry of a WELS foreign 'home mission' and a typical WELS ministry as experienced by Pastor David A. Kehl.

Pastor David Kehl received the call to be the Pastor of St. Johns, Antigua in the winter of 1990. Before this time he served as Pastor at Redwood Falls, MN and then at a small mission church in Rhode Island. His first congregation in Redwood Falls was a typical Wels congregation. It was well established with 1,000 members primarily of German descent and with a rural background. The Rhode Island congregation was smaller with around 50 members from various European descents and mostly blue-collar workers. Pastor Kehl speaks with years of pastoral experience. He brings a good perspective of the differences and similarities between traditional, mission, and foreign ministry work.

### Part 1 – A Foreign 'Home Mission'

The call to Antigua just seemed to fit. He received encouragement and advice from Pastor Pete Kruschel while first contemplating the call. As a member of the home mission board Pastor Kruschel would be able to maintain contact with Pastor Kehl in Antigua. Pastor Mark Henrich, who was pastor in Antigua at the time, also gave some key information about the ministry and the island.

In this mission field there was more of a dependency upon the mission support than a normal home mission. One of the intentional goals was to help the local people take ownership of their church. Progress was made through the Caribbean Christian Training Institute. It was established to further Christian Education and provide strong Christian leaders. At the time of this interview, some of the students are on their way to becoming Pastors and Teachers. One particular student, Jason Richards, was installed as a Pastor at St. Johns on July 27, 2007.

Antigua was well connected to the Wels. There was more of a connection with the Wels at large than most other home missions. St. John's was featured in the Wels connection introduction. The Lutheran Women's Mission Society also regularly heard about St. Johns. There was plenty of support shown when hurricane Louis devastated the island. Project Timothy annually connected students from Luther Preparatory School with the mission.

### Part 2 – Ministry Experiences in a Foreign Home Mission

The connection to the local staff was close and friendly but not as close as the connection to the other Pastor families at each of Pastor Kehl's former and current congregations – Holubs, Schnecks, Jankes, Meyers, and Henrichs. This is somewhat similar to his experiences in Rhode Island and Minnesota.

Pastor Kehl described a typical week in the Antiguan ministry. There were two Sunday Services and later a Spanish Service. Monday through Thursday mornings were spent shuttling kids to and from school and doing office work. Afternoons were for

prospect calls, shut-ins, and hospital calls. Friday mornings there was an opportunity to do sermon studies and catch up on church information with the other Pastor at St. Johns, Mark Henrich. Evenings were a time for meetings with the various groups such as ladies aid, choirs, and youth groups.

There were some unique challenges and interruptions from the normal flow. Government customs paper work was a real hassle – lasting up to a day at times. Most things they received had to come through customs from off island. Tires on the vehicles wouldn't last very long on the rough roads. September was the hurricane month. If there was a threat of a big storm, everything would be canceled. A regular interruption was the loss of power. Carnival and a cricket matches would also interrupt the normal flow of life.

In Antigua, St. John's had unique worship. The people would sing with real gusto. If the worship service was less than an hour then people would complain that they were missing out. Part of the culture was appreciating and enjoying fully the moment you are in. They would have Easter sunrise service out on the beach and midway through the service the sun would rise over the island.

There were many programs at St. John's. Bible Information Class was a shorter course they designed to be the beginning of life long learning. The class had about 10 lessons. Caribbean Christian Training Institute was a training organization that helped encourage growth for any and all lay people, not just those training to be Pastors. The School taught from 1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The school had somewhat of a rough reputation but changed as their teachers grew in quality and kids scored higher on tests. Evangelism was typical as done in America. It was a little easier to meet people because people were more open to talk. The Ladies Aid was very similar to the States.

Funerals were very plain. There was no hiding what was going on. It involved bringing a plain wood casket out to the cemetery. The family sang songs while the casket was lowered into the ground and covered with dirt.

Prisons were a harsh reality. They would not hesitate to have a misbehaving prisoner hung right in the jail commons.

### Part 3 – Summary

Although St. John's in Antigua was labeled a home mission, the unique challenges and opportunities made ministry in the Caribbean a mission like none other. The most unique of these experiences was living through hurricane Louis. Louis crushed the island. Pastor Kehl and his family sat huddled under a bunk bed while the roof of the house was blown off and the front wall of the house caved in. It was a great time for him to reflect with his family on the protection that was theirs from the Lord despite the harsh situation. It was also a great opportunity to grow closer to the people of the area following the hurricane.

Pastor Kehl feels that his experiences in the foreign home mission helped him grow in his patience with people and understanding how very important listening is to ministering to people. He also had the opportunity to step out of the norm to see how sometimes we try to fit our culture to other cultures even though they don't always mesh. It is important to recognize your reason for being in the ministry you are at and to let go of the things that are non-necessities for the sake of the Gospel. After all each mission or

ministry can be very different outwardly but the heart and soul will always be the same. Every mission will have as its chief goal preaching Law and Gospel faithfully in order to bring light to the dark sinful world.