

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF LCMS MISSION HISTORY

Dr. Douglas L. Rutt

January 13, 2003

Mission among Native Americans

Since its inception, the Missouri Synod had appointed a board for the purpose of establishing mission work among the heathen. Of especial concern were the American Indians scattered throughout the Midwest. One of the most famous mission endeavors was Loehe's plan to settle several Bavarians in Tuscola County, Michigan, in order to establish a "mission colony" near the Chippawa Indians. Between 1844 and 1845 Loehe conducted training sessions in Neuendettelsau for those who would immigrate to the U.S. to form that community in 1845, a year before the founding of the synod. The leader of this group of immigrants was August Craemer. Another talented missionary, Edward Baierlein, joined Craemer. Both were able to master the native language of the Indians and soon produced a 47-page catechism in Chippawa. However, Baierlein was soon called to work in India by the Leipzig Missionary Society. After only four years of work directly with the Chippawas, August Craemer was called to teach at the newly established seminary in Fort Wayne.

The work among the Indians suffered its ups and downs, and soon it became apparent that enthusiasm among the colonists was waning. In 1858 almost all of the Indians were removed from Tuscola County to another reservation, and the work died out. However, after the closing of the Indian missions in Michigan, money continued to come in to support that work. C.F.W. Walther favored forwarding those funds to the Leipzig and Hermannsburg mission societies, although in 1876 the Missouri Synod relationship with those organizations had been broken over doctrinal issues.

Ferdinand Sievers, the pastor of the congregation at Frankenlust, Michigan, did all that he could to hold up before the Synod the need for mission work among the Native Americans and beyond. He was a member of the Synodical mission board for 43 years, traveled throughout the Midwest in search of mission opportunities among the Indians, and was constantly on the lookout for candidates who would be suited to the exigencies of mission work among a people who had suffered so much at the hands of the government agents, whisky sellers and Methodists. It is also true that the spiritual need among the huge numbers of German immigrants to the United States soon was so overwhelming that most of the energy and resources of the Synod were dedicated to reaching those people with the gospel, gathering them into congregations, and training a sufficient numbers of pastors to serve the growing number of congregations.

In 1877, Sievers made a plea for Missouri Synod involvement in mission work beyond the German immigrants in an editorial in the *Der Luteraner*:

But one thing lies heavily upon our hearts constantly: "We do not have our own mission to the heathen anymore." For more than 10 years our Synod has stood idle in the marketplace with regard to the mission to the heathen. We have missed

that direct, fresh, joyous participation in the mission field. May a heart beating for the cause of mission to the heathen has been saddened over this and has sighed often to God concerning our failure. Many have silently wished that the former times of love for missions would return. True, our Synod has from year to year increasingly exerted her strength to meet the needs of training preachers or teachers for our congregations which already exist or are being added daily But the field of foreign missions we have left fallow, and all the excuses, which claim that our full capacities are demanded in building the Lutheran Church within our already existing German Lutheran congregations here in our new fatherland, are only of relative validity. The admonition presses home to us all the more: "we should do the one, and yet not leave the other undone."

Mission among "Negroes"

Siever's appeal caused a stir among many pastors and lay-people of the synod. In July 1877, a meeting of the Synodical Conference took place in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in which a decision was made to begin work among the "American Negro." The basic strategy was to appoint a missionary who would tour the South in search of the most likely areas. He was to gather into circles the responsive blacks and appoint "presbyters" from among the gathered blacks who would serve their groups in the missionary's absence.

Later that year, John F. Doescher was appointed to be the first missionary among blacks. He soon settled in New Orleans where he served as the pastor of the St. John's congregation and as missionary to the blacks. In 1878 Friedrich Berg was called fresh from seminary to consolidate the work begun by Doescher in Little Rock, Arkansas. Soon another missionary was sent to Mobile, Alabama. But the most distinguished of the early pioneer missionaries among the Blacks was Niles J. Bakke, who served 40 years in New Orleans and North Carolina.

In 1889 the General Council Synod of North Carolina permitted four black pastors to form their own synod, known as the "Alpha Synod." Soon, due to a lack of support from the General Council Synod of North Carolina, the young Alpha Synod turned to the Synodical Conference for help. In 1891 Bakke was sent to North Carolina to supervise the work under the Synodical Conference.

An important personage in the history of Black ministry of the Missouri Synod is Rosa Young. Rosa Young was interested in opening an academy for Blacks but was unable to find support after appealing to several groups. She wrote to Booker T. Washington for help, who answered that she should turn to the Board for Colored Missions of the Lutheran Church. He said they were "doing more for the colored race than another other denomination he knew of," especially in the field of education. In 1922 the Alabama Lutheran Academy was opened (Now Concordia College-Selma) with the support of the Missouri Synod.

Today there are approximately 50,000 African Americans in the LC-MS. The ministry among African Americans is overseen by the Board for Black Ministry Services. There

is also an annual Black Ministries Convocation that brings black pastors, lay-people and other supporters together. The goal set by the Convocation is to increase the membership of Blacks in the LC-MS to 100,000 by 2010.

Mission among the Jews

Walther had a great concern for mission work among the “children of Abraham according to the flesh.” Mission work toward Jewish people became a reality when Daniel Landsmann, a Jewish missionary, made his way to New York via Turkey. He was sent to the Springfield seminary for a nine-month training program. In 1883 he was given a “provisional call” to work among the Jews in New York.

Mission in Foreign Lands

India

In the 1880s officials of the Missouri Synod began to look for foreign mission opportunities. In 1893 a decision was made to begin mission work in Japan after a Japanese man, Henry Mizuno, graduated from the Springfield seminary. These plans were never realized, in part because of some disagreement with Mr. Mizuno, and in part because the Japanese government was seeking to squelch Christian mission work in that country, making it very difficult to gain an entrance.

In 1894, two men who had had a falling out with the Leipzig Mission Society over doctrinal matters, Rev. Theodore Naether and Rev. Franz Mohn, were commissioned to be Missouri Synod missionaries to India. In 1895 they set sail to India, thus launching the Missouri Synod's first overseas mission activity. After nine years of seemingly little result in his missionary work, Naether died in India of the plague. Tradition says that when he discovered he had contracted the plague, he put his house in order, wrote to his parents, admonished his heathen household staff to put their trust in the One True God, stayed a safe distance from his wife and children, dressed himself for burial, and laid himself inside his own casket. To this day Christians in India honor his grave. Today the India Evangelical Lutheran Church numbers approximately 60,000.

Brazil

In the Synodical Convention of 1899, held in St. Louis, Missouri, a decision was made to send a missionary on an exploratory trip to Brazil. The previous president of the LCMS, H. Schwann, who had immigrated to the U.S via Brazil, was never in favor of attempting work there. He felt that the Germans in Brazil were too indifferent and the other people were too entrenched in superstition (i.e. syncretism--the mixture of African, Native American and Roman Catholic beliefs). However, when Franz Pieper was elected president of synod, it seemed the way was clear to begin work in Brazil. In March of 1900 Christian Broders was sent to explore the mission opportunities there. After several months of finding little interest in the message of Missouri Synod Lutheranism, he was about to return home when he heard word of a small group of Lutheran settlers who

desired to remain true to Confessional Lutheranism. This group was located in a remote area called *Morro Redondo* (Round Hill), about 50 miles from the nearest city of any size, Pelotas. On July 1, 1900, the first congregation of what would become the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil was organized in that location. In 1903 a seminary was formed, and in 1904 the Brazil District of the Missouri Synod was organized. In 1980 it became an independent partner church of the LC-MS. Today this church is the largest partner church of the LC-MS, numbering approximately 220,000 members, with two seminaries (San Leopoldo and Sao Paulo) and the Lutheran University of Brazil, with 40,000 students on 14 campuses.

Cuba

The mission work in Cuba began in 1911 when a certain Rev. R. Oertel of Nebraska traveled to the Isle of Pines, a smaller island to the south of the Cuban main island, to take advantage of medicinal baths that he had seen advertised in a magazine. He was evidently suffering from some health problem. He soon became acquainted with several English-speaking fishermen who had migrated to Cuba from the Cayman Islands. He and several short-term pastors and vicars ministered to these people on an occasional basis until after WWII, when full time missionaries were placed on the Isle of Pines and in Havana. With the revolution of 1960, the LC-MS missionaries fled Cuba, and our contact with most of the Lutherans on the Island was cut off. Interestingly, however, the missionaries were soon called to ministries in the Miami area, where the ministry among Cubans was more prosperous than it had ever been on the island itself. Today there are several groups in disarray in Cuba who claim to be the descendents of Missouri.

When visiting Cuba in 1998, I received a certificate of appreciation from the "Cayman Islander-Jamaican Club" of Cuba, a cultural club of the descendents of settlers from those islands. This club is not sanctioned by the government (they had to give me the certificate in private). The hand-made certificate was given in appreciation for what the Missouri Synod had done during those early years to minister to the Cayman Island immigrants to Cuba.

China

Mission work began in China in 1913 through the vision of Eduard Louis Arndt. Up to this time, the Missouri Synod had hardly prepared one man for mission service, but rather had depended upon missionaries trained by other societies or groups, who, for various reasons, usually doctrinal in nature, felt compelled to appeal to Missouri for help. Arndt was a product of the Missouri system of education, from primary school to *gymnasium* in Fort Wayne to seminary in St. Louis. After serving a parish in Michigan, in 1896 he accepted a call as a professor at the preparatory school in St. Paul, Minnesota. He served for fourteen years in that capacity, but when he took on two unruly students, the sons of prominent Missouri Synod leaders, the school administration sided with the families of the unruly students, and Arndt was asked to leave.

At the age of 47 years, he found himself without a job. He had been serving as a pastoral assistant at a local congregation, but several of the school's faculty members who were of that congregation refused to receive the sacrament from him and pressured the congregation to dismiss him altogether. Somehow he remained in the Missouri Synod, but he commented during a time of frustration and discouragement: "If the Missouri Synod tosses me on the scrap heap, then I will serve God somewhere else."

A missionary couple from the Augustana Lutheran China Mission were visiting St. Paul in 1911, and suggested to Arndt that perhaps a future existed for him as a missionary to China. He soon set up a makeshift headquarters in St. Paul for his new venture. To raise money for himself, he wrote two books of sermons, which were published by Northwestern Publishing and the Danish Lutheran Publishing House. Later that year he acquired an old horse and buggy and began to make rounds to sell his books and persuade pastors of his mission idea.

Soon he had collected \$2000.00 and pledges of continued support from several congregations. In December he taught his children typesetting and began publishing a one-man mission magazine, *Missionsbriefe*. He spoke of the great opportunities for mission in China, and to his credit, never used that magazine to air his grievances with the treatment he had received at the hands of the synodical hierarchy. He was a consummate self-promoter, telling of his skill in growing his parish in Michigan, his skill as a teacher, and even referring to missionaries in China who said things like: "You have a good ear for the pronunciation and a good memory for the signs of the Chinese dialect." All of this was hype, of course.

Such was the birth of the first "Mission Society" within the Missouri Synod: The Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society for China (chartered in New Ulm, Minnesota). Soon support increased, but official recognition or authorization was not forthcoming. The Missouri Synod was having a difficult time keeping the India mission afloat, which was in debt to the tune of \$5000.00! He was dismissed as an unrealistic dreamer. However, they underestimated his resolve. Soon he had over 1000 teachers and pastors supporting him and his society, which took to itself the authority to commission him as a missionary to China. Arndt and his family reached Shanghai, China in February of 1913, and soon traveled up river to Hankow, which was his selected sight to begin his mission work. He was able to preach his first sermon in Chinese 10 months after arrival, and by 1917 had a group of 17 baptized souls.

The Missouri Synod recognized this mission work in 1917. Arndt died alone in 1928 while his family was visiting in the United States. There are many other interesting things to say about Arndt, but Dean Lueking summarizes his discussion of Arndt by saying: (Read pages 260-261)

Nigeria

Mission work in Nigeria had its beginnings when a Nigerian man by the name of Jonathan Udo Ekong traveled to the U.S. to study at Howard University. He soon

became acquainted with Lutheranism and found himself studying for the ministry at Emmanuel Lutheran College in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Black pastors of the Synodical Conference urged the opening of mission work in Nigeria, and raised the first sums of money to support that work.

In 1936 Dr. Henry Nau, who at that time was presiding over Emmanuel Lutheran College, was granted an 18-month leave of absence to begin the work in Nigeria. In 1938 Ekong was ordained and returned to his homeland to work along with his brother, who was also soon ordained. From the beginning Nau felt that the foreign missionaries should take on only an advisory roll in the organization of the new church, and that all final decision making should be carried out by the Nigerians themselves. In the first 20 years of its existence the Lutheran Church of Nigeria grew from zero to almost 30,000 members. Today this church body numbers around 50,000.

Note: The work in Nigeria was begun as a project of the Synodical Conference, but after the split up of the Conference in 1972 it passed to the Missouri Synod.

There are many other interesting stories of how the Missouri Synod opened several mission locations around the world. Unfortunately, there is no up-to-date history of Missouri Synod missions. The most important works are Carl S. Meyer's *Moving Frontiers*, which provides basic, although sketchy, information, and F. Dean Lueking's *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, 1846-1963*. Lueking has much helpful information, but the thesis of his book is somewhat controversial, in which he puts what he calls "Scholastic Confessionalism" and "Evangelical Confessionalism" at odds with each other. Again, however, it certainly is the most comprehensive treatment of LC-MS mission history up to 1963.

After WWII things in the LC-MS began to "heat up" in terms of how the synod understood the mission. In the first place, many new fields were opened shortly after WWII. However, other developments were taking place. At the 1965 Synodical Convention in Detroit, the Missions Affirmations were adopted. Long-time missionary to India, Martin Kretzmann, had written them. The Mission Affirmations read as follows:

1. The Church is God's mission.
2. The Church is Christ's mission to the world.
3. The Church is Christ's mission to the Church.
4. The Church is Christ's mission to the whole society.
5. The Church is Christ's mission to the whole man.
6. The whole Church is Christ's mission.

The Mission Affirmations were controversial because the meaning behind them seemed to promote a more open and liberal interpretation of the mission of the church in the world. Many felt that they promoted "social ministry" more than proclamation of the gospel. Although the Mission Affirmations have never been rescinded by Synod, they were reinterpreted by a CTCR document in the 1970s (available in the library).

Another action taken by the convention of 1965 was the consolidation of some 15-16 boards, committees, commissions, etc., into the "Board for Mission Services." In this move, the control over several different mission activities and special interests was centralized under one board.

The walkout of most of the faculty of Concordia Seminary in 1974 also had an effect on the LC-MS' mission effort. Most of the Mission Board staff in St. Louis and many of the missionaries also left the Synod at that time, tearing apart several mission fields. You will note that the only new mission fields of the LC-MS from 1958 to 1980 were Chile (which was really begun by our partner church Argentina) and Liberia (1978). Certainly the conflicts that the LC-MS experienced during those years had an impact on our missionary work.

In 1981 great impetus was given to the LC-MS' mission efforts through the "Forward in Remembrance" fund drive. FIR made it possible to send many new missionaries to the field, and to fund worthwhile construction and theological education projects. An example is CRISP (Committee Responsible for International Student Programs) which continues to make it possible for pastors from partner churches to prepare themselves for teaching theology in their homelands.

Today, LC-MS' missions can be characterized by:

- Volunteerism (people going for short trips to mission fields to help out with specific small tasks)
- Creation of many "mission societies" to support specialized mission work
- Work done in partnership with our sister churches, for example
 - LC-MS and the Ev. Lutheran Church of Argentina working together to begin mission work in Spain
 - LC-MS and Ev. Lutheran Church of Brazil working together in Panama, Angola and Portugal
 - LC-MS and the Lutheran Church in Ghana working together in Benin
- People supporting specific mission activities directly
- Development of a national pastorate as soon as possible
- More congregations sending their own missionaries (both long-term and short-term)
- Called and ordained missionaries willing to make only short-term commitments (2-3 years)

SOME IMPORTANT DATES (dates to remember are marked with an *)

Mission work began:	Approximate Size of Partner Church
1845 *American Indians	
1877 *African Americans	50,000
1883 Jews	
1894 *Deaf	
1895 *India	60,000
1900 *Brazil	220,000
1905 Argentina	30,000
1911 Cuba	
1913 *China (Independently by Arndt, accepted officially in 1917)	
1936 *Nigeria	50,000
1938 Paraguay (by Argentina)	
1940 Mexico (Texas Dist.)	
1941 Panama (Armed Forces, 1980 among Panamanians)	
1946 Philippines	20,000
1947 Guatemala	3,000
1948 Papua New Guinea	75,000
Japan	
1950 Lebanon	
Hong Kong	
1951 Venezuela	
1952 Taiwan	
1956 Portugal (by Brazil)	
1958 Ghana	20,000
South Korea	
El Salvador	
1960 Chile (by Argentina)	
1978 Liberia	
1980 Togo	
1983 Sierra Leone	
1986 Thailand	
1988 Macau	
1991 Cote d'Ivoire	
1992 Russia	
1993 Kazakhstan	
Puerto Rico	
Jamaica	
1995 Viet Nam	
Indonesia	
1996 Guinea	
Benin (by Ghana)	

1997 Angola (by Brazil)
1998 Kenya
Sudan
Kyrgyzstan
1999 Myanmar
Spain (by Argentina)

LC-MS MISSIONARIES, 1968 - PRESENT

<u>Year</u>	<u>Clergy</u>	<u>Non-Clergy</u>	<u>Total</u>
1968	183	168	352
1971	177	179	356
1973	142	148	290
1975	109	102	211
1977			170
1979	72	87	159
1981	64	83	147
1983	62	59	121
1986	84	67	151
1989	97	71	168
1992	71	95	166
1995	not reported		
1998	not reported		
2000	(clergy/non clergy breakout not reported)		106
2003			78
2004			74

Note the trends.

(revised February 2004)