

**A Perspective of  
The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod's  
Involvement With Jewish Missions in North America**

A Brief Overview prepared for the LCJE  
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**Eine Kleine Background:**

We want to act in a Christian way towards them and offer them first of all the Christian faith, that they might accept the Messiah, who, after all, is their kinsman and born of their flesh and blood and is the real seed of Abraham of which they boast... We still want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord. So said Dr. Martin Luther in the last sermon of his life delivered in Eisleben on February 15th, 1546, just three days before his death.

Luther's attitudes concerning the Jewish people spanned a vast spectrum from compassion and love to ignoble and quite abrasive. Yet throughout his life, he held out high hopes that he would see a mass returning of the Jewish people to their Messiah! While we today would disavow some of his rasher statements, we would not dismiss his heart... that all Israel might be saved.

Luther did not see a mass conversion of Jewish people, but, the fruit from his vision carried forward in seeing of German Jewish people coming to faith such as Carl Caspari (1814-1892), Old Testament scholar; the church historian Neander (1789-1850), Frederick Philippi (1809-1882) a New Testament exegete and defender of the Lutheran Confessions; and Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890) who was under consideration for being called to teach at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis by C. F. W. Walther himself.

The first organized efforts to reach Jewish people in North America came from the Norwegian-Lutheran piety movement. In 1878 a conference was held in Stoughton, Wisconsin, which led to the organizing of the Zion Society for Israel. The goals were to encourage, promote and conduct a missionary program among the Jewish people of the world. Because American Lutherans were mainly concerned with reaching those of their own ethnic background, the various bodies developed little enthusiasm for reaching Jewish people. Thus, much of the work that was supported was outside the US in Russia and Romania where interest could be stirred. The Zion Society eventually turned over their overseas work to European missions. A close liaison with the Norwegian Israel Mission was kept with centers at various times in Baltimore, Brooklyn, Chicago, the Twin Cities, and Omaha.

In 1881, the Central Illinois District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) sent a petition to, consider the responsibility for establishing a Synodical means for enlisting and coordinating the interest and obligation of every Christian to bear witness to his Jewish fellowmen. The Synod delegated the responsibility of organizing Jewish

mission work to its districts. The net result was that only one handful of workers served from 1881 to 1981. In 1884, the Synod did establish a Kommission fuer Judenmission which functioned until 1932.

This reflects both the polity and policy of the church and surfaces a tension that North American church bodies need to consider: in light of the cultural mandate towards individual rights and tolerance of those who believe differently from us, there tends to be a clash with the Biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers. In my opinion, specialized Jewish mission agencies and emphasis would not be necessary if local evangelism initiatives in LCMS congregations intentionally included Jewish people.

It takes a lot of initiative just to get the attention of those who would make the decisions to allocate the resources needed to help get started. The LCMS is a church body in which the individual congregation is at the top of the organizational pyramid. Who would be willing to champion as difficult a task in the light of all the other church work to be done? Where is the missiological priority of Romans 1:16?? As one theologian told me recently, it ultimately boils down to a spiritual issue & is the Bible authoritative in our lives and are we willing to be obedient to God's call (read commission) and reach out to all with His love?

### **Early Workers of the LCMS**

In 1863, Daniel Landesmann became a Jewish Christian while residing in Jerusalem. He served for 18 years as a missionary among the Jewish people in Constantinople under the Scottish Society for Jewish Missions. Samuel Keyl, a Missouri Synod emigrant missionary invited Landesmann to come to the US and work in Jewish missions. When he arrived, he expected to find an assignment waiting for him. He soon learned that outsiders did not break into the synodical ranks of membership without first passing formidable doctrinal tests.

The Central Illinois District of the sponsored Landesmann to attend Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois for training in Lutheran doctrine. However, Landesmann, already in his 40s and already having 20 years of missionary service under his belt, preferred to do the mission work. In May of 1883, the New York City pastoral conference took the initiative into their own hands. Three congregations undertook his missionary support until his death in 1896.

He was never ordained by the LCMS. His status, that of evangelist, is a lay designation which is the best any layman can receive even in the church today. During his 13-year ministry, 37 Jewish people were baptized in Lutheran churches. One was Rabbi Nathaniel Friedman who came to New York City from Russia. He became a missionary with the LCMS until 1941. The Missouri Synod also conducted outreaches in Chicago from 1930-1939 under Isadore Schwartz and in St. Louis from 1930 to 1934 under Kenneth Frankenstein.

[The above, apart from my comments, is taken from Witnessing to Jewish People 3<sup>rd</sup> edition by Rev. Bruce Lieske]

### **Mission Activity Since 1973**

In response to a resolution to a 1973 Synodical Convention, a Task Force for Jewish Evangelism (TF) began under the leadership of Dr. Erwin Kolb, Secretary for the Board for Evangelism Services (BFES) for the LCMS. Funds were provided for a committee to meet 2-3 times a year in various locations. The main emphasis of the TF was to study and develop materials to assist the nearly 6,000 LCMS congregations in understanding and involving themselves in Jewish evangelism.

They produced a Manual on Witnessing to Jewish People, which caught the attention of Rabbi James Rudin of the JCRC's Task Force on Cults and Missionary Activity in the 1970s. He called for a private meeting to discuss the LCMS initiatives in Jewish evangelism. The meeting turned out to be an ambush. Rudin said he would only meet secretly without media exposure, but he called for a press conference immediately after that meeting! The media fallout sent some LCMS church leaders and local pastors reeling while others were trying to figure out why the Jewish leadership was so upset. What had gone wrong? A hard lesson was learned that day. Good relationships can be maintained with Jewish leaders who seek dialogue only so long as Jesus - the Way, the Truth and the Life - is excluded from the dialogue.

I was first introduced to Dr. Kolb in 1979. He came out to San Francisco to spend a week with Jews For Jesus during Avodah, a time of staff re-training. Dr. Kolb invited me to visit one of the TF meetings in St. Louis. As a result of that visit, I became a member of the TF.

We gave conferences in different locations throughout the US, had workshops, Oneg Shabbat evenings, had displays at various Synodical conventions including the Lutheran Women's Missionary League conventions. The TF members were given opportunities to give workshops at the early Great Commission Convocations -- tri-annual national gatherings focusing on evangelism. We sought to do what we could to give rise and bring influence for the cause of Jewish missions.

One way we sought to keep the eyes of the church at large on Jewish missions was to encourage congregations to bring forth memorials to the Synodical conventions. They would be included in the workbook for the convention itself. Those memorials would then be up for floor votes.

The most critical resolution passed to date was the Resolution 3-09 at the 1983 St. Louis convention. This resolution disavowed Martin Luther's anti-Semitic statements:

Whereas it is widely but falsely assumed that Luther's personal writings and opinions have some official status among us (thus, sometimes implying the responsibility of contemporary Lutheranism for those statements, in not complicity with them); but also

Whereas, it is plain from scripture that the Gospel must be proclaimed to all people that is the Jew also, no more and no less than others (Matt. 28: 18-20) and

Whereas this scriptural mandate is sometimes confused with anti-Semitism; therefore be it

Resolved .... that we affirm that the basis of our doctrine and practice are the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and not Luther as such; and be it further

Resolved that while, on the one hand, we are deeply indebted to Luther for his rediscovery and enunciation of the Gospel, on the other hand we deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people, and, by the same token, we deplore the use today of such sentiments by Luther to incite anti-Christian and/or anti-Lutheran sentiment...

The LCMS was the first Lutheran body in North America to pass such a resolution.

[In the 1990s, the ELCA passed a similar statement. In 1999, I had the opportunity to tour the National Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. While on the top level, I viewed a brief film on Hitler's rise to power. That film implied a direct link between Luther's 1543 statements in *On the Jews and Their Lies* (Vol. 47 of Luther's Works) and the Holocaust. At the end of the film was a commendation to the ELCA for their position against anti-Semitism. The LCMS was not mentioned in this film for obvious reasons: The ELCA subscribes to the dual covenant theory calling efforts to evangelize Jewish people offensive and wrong! I am proud to say that the LCMS firmly holds to the Biblical position of John 14:6- No one comes to the Father but through Jesus.]

## **TWO TRACKS TO ADVANCE ONE CAUSE &**

Since task forces are by nature temporary committees and their future was always unclear, the members of the TF wanted to ensure that the initiative carried forward! So a new organization was formed outside the Synodical structure: Lutherans Involved in Jewish Evangelism (LIJE). Rev. Bruce Lieske and two other former TF members headed this up and left the TF in 1982.

The emphasis was to keep moving forward. When it became clear that the TF was not going to be abandoned, there now existed two tracks: one inside the structure of the church [the Synod] and one alongside the structure of the church. It took some time to try to define roles and tasks that the groups would share. Eventually LIJE found their niche in developing school curricula that emphasized the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

Dr. Kolb retired in 1989 and I became the chairman. There was also a change in the focus of the TF when it was moved out from under the Board for Evangelism Services and placed under the Board for Mission Services (BFMS).

We had temporary links to a couple of individuals in the BFMS including Dr. Leonard Harms, currently the missions executive for Lutheran Church Canada, and Dr. Rodney Rynearson who spearheaded deaf and blind ministries for the LCMS.

We participated in the new direction of the church following the path of Church Extension through Leadership Development (CELD). We attended seminars to help sharpen skills in these areas. Much of the material presented seemed to fit fine in traditional church settings, but seemed lacking when put to work in a cross-cultural setting.

## **REACHING OUT &**

In 1989, I sat with Dave Born, pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Rego Park, NY and member of the TF, at Kennedy Airport in between two flights. I outlined what it

would take to conduct our first ever short-term mission training event in New York City. The Synod provided the funding for these events. Dave took notes on paper napkins and later transcribed them. (Oh how I wish we had those notes now!) When we discussed what name we should give, it came quickly to us that since New York City is known as The Big Apple, we would call this The Apple of His Eye taken from Deuteronomy 32:10. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye & [15]

The title was the name of our very first produced filmstrip and seemed most appropriate for our mission effort then. Today it reflects the LCMS emphasis of including Jewish people in the overall mission of the church.

While Jewish missions may never be on the front burner of the LCMS, we seek to have it on the stove top until Y shua returns!

In 1989, Dr. Harms led us through a series of sessions to develop a ten-year strategy statement. We shifted from creating materials to developing leaders, opening new mission stations and planting new Lutheran messianic congregations. We envisioned developing ten sites by the year 2000. This was quite a leap of faith for this historic Lutheran body that, in the preceding one hundred years, had but a handful of individual workers among the Jewish people.

Mr. Milt Kohut was the first one invited to step forward. He served by primarily speaking in congregations in the Los Angeles area. He gave encouragement to the congregations of that district and brought a renewed emphasis to the need for Jewish people hearing of Y shua.

In 1990, I received a call to open a new mission station in the Atlantic District in New York City. I declined the call since the start-up funding available would not support a family with five children. Mr. Marc Danzis did accept the call and opened The Apple of His Eye New York City. Marc began a congregation in Rego Park, Beth El, that continues to exist today and now as a congregation of the Atlantic District.

Marc opted out from being under The Apple of His Eye umbrella. Once the congregation as established, Marc's focus shifted away from the evangelistic thrust of Apple of His Eye. This is something that would only be remedied through team ministry: that is to involve people in a given area who have the gifts of pastoring paired with those who have the gifts for evangelism. This is now a goal of all our mission stations, though we have not achieved it yet.

Darla Schmidt, (now Lucero) was brought on board and started ministry in the Chicago area in September of 1992. She recalls being invited to a TF meeting held in NYC. Darla was briefly interviewed and her heart for Jewish missions was apparent to us all. Therefore, that day we asked her how soon she could move to Chicago to get started. Darla was trained in the church and commissioned as a Deaconess and this helped her when she moved to Chicago to gain a hearing in area congregations.

As funds became available, Rev. Steve Baldoff came along side to serve in Chicago. He showed much enthusiasm and spoke Russian, a valuable tool for ministry in the Chicagoland area. Steve's effectiveness was hampered by some personal problems which, if we had had our screening and training act together, we might have foreseen

them. He did nothing to raise personal support and once his startup funds were depleted, his contract with the Northern Illinois District was not renewed.

We now have a process in place to qualify thoroughly candidates via short-term mission events, extensive application and referral process and an in-depth interview. New workers must attend a pre-field deployment training session in St. Louis. These sessions are tailored to the individual needs taking into consideration prior training, experience and life service. This was a hard but vital lesson to learn.

In the 1990 s, Dave Tengbom stepped forward to serve in Los Angeles. Dave was ordained in the ELCA, and the LCMS decided that he would not be simply given the right hand of fellowship for ordination. The leadership called for him to take an additional 36 hours of classroom training in a colloquy program. It was not easy for Dave to both be involved in a startup of a new ministry, take classes and care for his family, too.

In 1992, the LCMS made an historic shift in North America. In the past, missions only took place outside the USA. Now the world was coming to us and the USA was redefined as a mission field, too. Dr. Robert Scudieri was named North American Secretary and a system of Counselors and Field Counselors was expanded. The counselors were specialists who served a given field of ministry full time i.e. Hispanic, deaf, and blind ministries. The field counselors were volunteers with expertise in a given field: Korean, Chinese, Hmong, Muslim, American Indian and Jewish for example. The focus of these workers was to work with District Mission Executives so that they in turn would carry the ball and take the initiative to facilitate ministries in their district.

However, here we face the historic problem of a century ago: a lack of enthusiasm for this ministry among many of the district leaders. I would not say that there is a lack of interest. The problem, in my opinion, is that when a central person is the channel through which much ministry is to take place, including the beginning of new traditional ministries & what else can go on their plate? There is a lot of competition for their time and attention. The TF and Field Counselor spent many hours seeking to win the hearts of those in leadership positions to begin mission efforts in their Districts. We still seek to demonstrate to leaders today the Kingdom values through our mission efforts. To the Jew first was not just a slogan for the past, but a mission strategy even today.

For Instance &.

In a survey the TF took in the 1980 s of the Synod s member churches, of those churches that did respond & over 50% had Jewish people in their parish, only 2% indicated that they had Jewish people worshipping with them. The buildings were built, the pastors sent & but the Jewish people certainly did not come!

The TF tried to win the hearts of the Canada East District to start a new mission effort among Jewish people in Toronto or Montreal. Dave Born and I made an hour-long presentation to their Mission Board. At the end, the Mission Exec asked, What current ministry do we stop in order to start something new? We just don t have the extra dollars for new ministries.

The traditional method for new mission starts was to secure the dollars, buy the property, build the first worshipping unit and send in the pastor. If you build it they will come was

the generic modus operandi. But we were presenting a new model of incrementally decreasing District support leading to missionary self-support done in a partnership with the Mission Society.

## **A Renewed Model Needed &**

We in the TF began calling for a new model (actually an old model revived) that of establishing a Mission Society to partner with the Districts and give the support/encouragement/emphasis essential for a new ministry. In this era, little attention had been given to the model we were presenting & that the District and local congregations assist in supporting the mission effort during the startup period. During that period, the missionary was personally to develop his/her support base. Thus, ministries like these could become self-supporting even if there were not a congregation of 200 worshipping each week to give support to a mission leader.

The other shift from traditional Lutheran new mission starts was to what is called the missionary mode. The worker is to raise up and train other leaders. He would serve a specific geographical area (field), and when the time was right, he would move on to make another start in a different location. This is in contrast to the historic LCMS model of doing ministry: one parish one pastor.

## **Two Mission Societies --- One Problem**

In 1994 Rev. Bruce Lieske was called by the Florida/Georgia District and began ministry in Orlando. The District provided office space in their Orlando headquarters and \$150,000 in start up funding to be distributed on a declining basis over a four-year period. During that period, Bruce was to develop his financial support base.

Moishe Rosen, the founder of Jews For Jesus negotiated for my release to serve with the LCMS in 1996. The focus of the Apple of His Eye Mission Society (AOHEMS) is to recruit, train and deploy missionaries. Since we are developing a missionary training center, seeking to give administrative assistance centralized for the various mission stations, develop and maintain a database and secure funding for new mission starts and establish a web site, AOHEMS took on national aspects quickly. Why two societies in one synod???

LIJE had become our mission society, and was concerned with the supervision of mission workers already in place. It turns out that they were ill-equipped to undertake that supervision. As AOHEMS grew, the lines between the two societies became blurred causing confusion in the church body.

The problem: while they had a sense of what the ministry ought to be like, and while several on their board had traditional LCMS congregational experience, no one on their board had actual Jewish missionary experience. As the TF tried to give guidance to LIJE for the direction and daily operation of the ministries, their board did not share common core values and resisted direction from outside.

Dave Tengbom in LA was the first person to come under the LIJE banner based in Orlando, but only for a very short time. He withdrew from that system. Sadly, due to personal problems, Dave Tengbom was asked by the District President to step down from

Jewish missions. Dave did not share the core values and that would have shown up earlier had we used proper screening and training back then.

LIJE's philosophy of missions was different from that which I learned while with Jews For Jesus. Those differences in core values made it impossible for us to bring together the overlapping aspects of the two societies and join as one.

More workers &

Another worker who was a recent graduate of one of the Synodical colleges was recruited to work with LIJE. The agreement was for her to receive missionary training in St. Louis for a year. Sadly, nine months after she began her training, she went through a faith crisis when her brother was killed and family members applied heavy pressure concerning her faith. She decided to step down.

Darla was invited to come to St. Louis because the church she was operating out of was sold by the English District. I invited her to come for two years to help build the ministry and she did. We had not money so to speak, so she got a part time job working at Concordia Publishing House while working part-time in our office. A year later, funds were there for her to work full-time in St. Louis. Darla was involved in an auto accident that took quite a toll. Though she was not seriously injured, it took some time for her to return to work. News of the accident led to her having her hearts desire. A past relationship was rekindled and those sparks led to a fire that culminated in marriage in August of 1999. In order to prepare for that relationship, Darla moved back to Chicago two years after we asked her to begin.

Rev. Kevin Parviz, a Jewish believer from the Denver area, was a student at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis when I was introduced to him. Kevin came from a parochial teaching background before pursuing parish ministry as a second career. Because the LCMS BFMS was testing a new program in partnership with the seminary, funding was available for two people to take part in a new missionary track. In effect, instead of going on vicarage the third of four years, the last two years would be switched. The third year was to include studies that emphasized missions and the fourth year was to be a mission effort that was convertible to a full-time call. Kevin did his vicarage/internship with the Apple of His Eye in St. Louis and on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1998, a month prior to his graduation, the first services were held at congregation Chai V Shalom. Kevin was called by the Missouri District to lead that ministry and follow through with the mission and ministry plan developed at the 1998 summer Church Planters Institute held in Irvine California. Since Kevin began his ministry, has received calls to other congregations, but feels God's call to continue serving in St. Louis.

Early in the 1990s, the TF held a meeting in Dallas to seek to win the hearts of the District to begin Jewish missions. It took some time for that meeting to come to fruition. In 1997, Rev. Don Peymann, then pastor of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, a chair of the Texas District Task Force on Jewish Missions came to St. Louis to take part in the 10 Days in July outreach. When the hoped for worker chose to not accept the call to Texas, Don prayerfully decided to step down from 29 years of congregational ministry. He took the call to begin The Apple of His Eye Houston in January, 1998. Don, a gentile, had conducted parish ministry within one mile of the Jewish Community Center and developed a heart to reach Jewish people. He now has an office in a strip mall, volunteers



to assist, is developing small groups for outreach. His salary is graciously given by the District and he is doing deputation for program support development.

In 1998, Gary Timm and Ted Martin took part in our 10 Days in July outreach. While this event was the smallest of the three conducted to date, the 18 participants distributed 57,000 gospel tracts, received 721 contacts, saw 13 people confess Y shua on the streets, went door to door in University City offering free messianic literature.

As a result of that event, Ted, a Jewish believer, had a reawakened desire to be involved in Jewish missions and re-opened The Apple of His Eye in Los Angeles in 1999. In February of 2000, Gary is re-opening The Apple of His Eye - New York City. Gary had nearly a year of training and eastern US deputation prior to his deployment.

We are also awaiting completion of immigration papers for Mr. Yuri Butsak to come and work in the Atlantic District among Russians. Since there is a substantial Russian Jewish community in Queens, Yuri will be working with Gary and Marc, too. It is hoped that Congregation Beth El will soon have a Russian component. Yuri, Gary and Ted participated in the 1999 Mission Planters Institute in Irvine California in the summer of 1999. This week long intensive training event yielded a detailed working plan for their ministries.

At present discussions are moving forward concerning a partnership between AOHEMS and a group in Israel to give venue for increased scope of ministries.

### **Conclusion:**

Certainly mis-steps have been made along the way. Yet under God's grace, we live in the forgiveness of sins! Taking risks often lead to failures, but as we learn from those failures we strive to do better. We seek to leave a legacy, should the Lord tarry: that the LCMS would intentionally and effectively bring the message of Y shua to the Lost Sheep of Israel in an ever expanding way.

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. For in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.