

# **50 Years of the Lord's Favour - Forward in Faith**

A church's Anniversary is an occasion for reminding ourselves of what God has done for and through the church, to praise and thank Him for His many blessings, and to look to the future with renewed confidence in His continued guidance and blessing.

## **1954 The ELCE is Born**

While celebrating this year the 50th Anniversary of the ELCE becoming an autonomous Sister Church of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we will appreciate more the significance of this event if we remind ourselves what led up to this development. To understand the character of the ELCE, we go back to its beginnings 58 years earlier. In the early 1890's a group of German Lutheran immigrants to London were meeting weekly in the home of a Lutheran School Teacher, Ernst Rabe, to read and discuss the sermons and theological articles of C F W Walther and Luther's Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession. Not satisfied with the theology of the German Lutheran Church in London, which was part of the German State Church, a union of Lutheran and Reformed churches imposed by the Prussian Union, six young German bakers wrote to Concordia Seminary in St Louis, Missouri, asking for a pastor, each pledging 5 shillings a week of their 30 shillings weekly wage to support their pastor. The Call was given to the Revd F W Schulze, who arrived at the end of August 1896, and was installed as pastor of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Camden Town on September 13th. The congregation grew quickly, so a factory was rented for their place of worship.

In 1898 a preaching station and Sunday School was established in South Tottenham, which developed into a second congregation, Holy Trinity. Two year later they opened a Christian Day School, and built their church at 53 Antill Road, which was dedicated in 1901. That same year Immanuel congregation acquired a property in Leighton Crescent, Kentish Town, consisting of two houses with a hall behind, where their Sunday Worship was held and a bi-lingual Christian Day School was established. The bi-lingual ministry continued until 1914, when the German ministry was discontinued because of the anti-German climate at the start of World War 1. The bi-lingual Christian Day Schools also were closed, at Tottenham in 1914, and at Kentish Town in 1915.

In 1937 Immanuel Lutheran Congregation decided to build a church on their site in Leighton Crescent. When the new church was dedicated on the 1st Sunday in Advent 1938, the congregation changed its name to Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church, to symbolise the kind of church they wanted to be: a community of Christians proclaiming the Gospel in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions, in the language of Tyndale.

## **A Lutheran Mission Springs up in Cornwall**

A Lutheran Mission was established at Redruth in Cornwall at the instigation of Joe Pedlar. He was a native of Cornwall who had emigrated to America, and while living and working in Wisconsin and Michigan, had come into contact with a congregation of the LCMS, received instruction and was confirmed. On his return to Cornwall in 1935, he was keen to see Lutheranism grow and spread throughout England. He conducted Bible study, along with Luther's Catechism, in his home for his family, friends and neighbours. In 1952 they received their first pastor, Joseph Peterson, and 41 people attended his first Service. He conducted Lutheran Services in Redruth and Falmouth until 1955. Desmond Jose, a Cornishman who had become a Lutheran under the influence of Joe Pedlar, decided to study for the Lutheran Ministry at the Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. In 1955 he returned to Cornwall and became the first British Lutheran pastor in the ELCE. Sadly, the Lutheran ministry in Cornwall had to be discontinued in 1956 because of lack of funds, but when the Plymouth mission was launched, the ministry to the Cornish mission continued under the care of St Peter's.

## **A New Vision for the ELCE**

A new vigour was manifested in the ELCE in the early 1950's. The Revd Edward George Pearce accepted the Call to Luther-Tyndale and Holy Trinity in 1946. Out of his weekly Bible studies grew a strong desire for mission outreach, and the London Lutheran Mission Society was formed. They began to discuss mission strategy, which in time developed into "The Master Plan". But they felt that their mission efforts were hindered by the general impression that the Lutheran Church was a foreign church; it was regarded by many as a German church for German immigrants, and by many others as a modern American sect like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Luther-Tyndale and Holy Trinity were two financially independent congregations belonging to the Atlantic District of the LCMS from 1896 until 1953. In the hope of changing the impression that the Lutheran Church was a foreign church, the joint meeting of Luther-Tyndale and Holy Trinity congregations resolved on September 18th 1952, to adopt the name "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England" and to seek to establish the ELCE as an autonomous Sister Church of the LCMS. The Resolution, that Luther-Tyndale and Holy Trinity be released from the Atlantic District of the LC-MS and become an autonomous Sister Church of the LCMS, and that the LCMS support the ELCE Master Plan for mission expansion, was put to the Convention of the LCMS in the Summer of 1953. The Resolution was adopted, and was put into effect on January 1st 1954. On Sunday, January 3rd, the Revd Norman Nagel was installed as pastor of Luther-Tyndale, the Revd Louis Brighton was installed as pastor of Holy Trinity, and the Revd E Geo Pearce was commissioned as Missionary-at-Large.

Under the leadership of Pastor Pearce, the ELCE immediately embarked on its "Master Plan" for mission outreach to the unchurched millions in Britain. It was a 30-year plan, from 1954 to 1984: 15 years of expansion, and 15 years of consolidation. The aim was to establish 5 more congregations in the Greater London area, and 13 in other major population centres of Britain. -- The target was for the ELCE to grow from 2 congregation to 20, and its communicant membership to grow from 200 to

4000 during that 30-year period, to become a self-supporting and self-propagating church by 1984. To achieve the goal of self-support, the Plan envisioned an annual 10 percent growth in communicant membership and an annual 10 percent increase in giving.

During the Master Plan era, the following missions were launched.

1954 -- Ruislip; Sunderland

1955 -- Downham, Bromley, later merged with Christ Church, Petts Wood

1956 -- Petts Wood; Borehamwood

1957 -- Cardiff; Grindon, later merged with St Timothy, Sunderland

1958 -- Cambridge

1959 -- Harlow

1962 -- Plympton, Plymouth; East Kilbride

1965 -- Coventry

1966 -- Liverpool; Sheffield

1967 -- Sunbury

1972 -- Fareham

## Equipping Men for the Ministry

For the ELCE to become a self-propagating church, it was deemed necessary to establish a Seminary, to train British pastors for the British church. Dr William Arndt, the renowned Greek professor at Concordia Seminary in St Louis, was invited to help establish a Seminary connected to Cambridge University. Dr Arndt arrived in the Summer of 1956, and negotiated an arrangement with Fitzwilliam College, whereby suitably qualified students could read for the University of Cambridge degree in Theology, while the specific Lutheran courses and practical training required for the Lutheran ministry would be provided by the Westfield staff. On October 11th 1956, Dr Arndt launched the Seminary programme at Tyndale House, where he was residing. Sadly, Dr Arndt died on the train from London to Cambridge on February 22nd 1957. In September 1957 Pastor Nagel was called to continue the Seminary programme.

He embarked on a Cambridge PhD programme to better equip himself for the task. In the Summer of 1960 Westfield House was purchased and the ground floor was converted for the purposes of the Seminary library and teaching rooms, and the first floor prepared for student residence. The inauguration of Westfield House took place on February 22nd 1961, the inaugural lecture being given by the Right Revd Bo Giertz, Bishop of Gothenburg. The Dedication Service was held the following Sunday, February 25th. An "Internal Course" was also developed to provide the entire curriculum for students who failed to gain a place in Cambridge University.

## Mission Methods

The Master Plan was about places and methods. Some of the main methods were:

- 1) To launch a new mission, a **Christian Film Festival** was conducted. During the month of October, a series of four Lutheran films was shown, each film shown on Sunday at 6:30 pm and a midweek evening at 7:30 or 8:00 pm. Each film was advertised with about 5000 professionally printed leaflets being distributed on the

previous Saturday to the homes in the neighbourhood. After the film showing, the pastor gave a brief evangelistic message, and a welcome to stay for tea and biscuits. A team of church members attended to be there to talk to the visitors over the cup of tea and to bid them "Good Night" and "Come again". For the launch of the mission, volunteers from the nearest ELCE congregations provided the teams of leaflet distributors and film-night hosts.

2) In the final week of the Film Festival, visitors were informed that this was the end of the film series, and a welcome was extended to them to the Worship Services which would take the place of the Sunday evening film showing, and Sunday School for children aged 4 to 14 on Sundays at 3:00 pm, and a Youth Fellowship which would take the place of the midweek film showing, -- a Junior Club for 11 to 14 year-olds, and a Senior Club for 15 to 20 year-olds. And a Bible study/discussion series was offered to everyone wishing to learn more about the teachings of the Bible and the Lutheran Church, which was a course leading to Confirmation for those who wished to become members of the Lutheran Church at the end of the series.

3) Throughout the Month of November the group of Lutheran hosts attended the Worship Services to help the new congregation learn the Lutheran liturgy and hymns, and to make people welcome at the Worship Services.

4) The Christian Film Festival was usually repeated the following October, but then the leaflet distributors and hosts would be those who had become regular worshippers in the new mission, to invite and welcome their neighbours.

5) The **Lutheran Hour** was a great asset to our mission outreach. Through the Lutheran Hour people became acquainted with the name "Lutheran", and it was a source for mission contacts. Listeners to the Lutheran Hour were attracted to the Lutheran Film and Lutheran Worship Services. People in the area who wrote to the Lutheran Hour were visited by the pastor to offer them the Gospel ministry of our church. The Lutheran Hour was broadcast from the popular Radio Luxembourg from 1947 to about 1965. When Radio Luxembourg ceased religious broadcast in the English language, the Lutheran Hour was broadcast for about a year from the offshore Pirate Ship, Radio Caroline, and then for a few years from Trans World Radio Monte Carlo, but it had few listeners in the UK, so it was discontinued.

6) Series of **Family Nights** and **Guest-Host Nights** were used, mainly to introduce families of Sunday School children and Junior Youth to the church, and sometimes for the members to introduce their families, friends and neighbours to the church, in an atmosphere of fellowship and fun.

7) **Holiday Bible School** was conducted for a week during the summer holiday or during the Autumn Half-term Holiday. It offered to children of about 4 to 14, a half-day programme of Bible teaching, worship, craft, games and refreshment. The HBS was advertised with about 2000 leaflets to the homes in the neighbourhood, and the Sunday School children were encouraged to bring their friends and neighbours. At the end of the week, the children were invited to the Sunday School to continue with a programme similar to that enjoyed in HBS. -- Often ten or more children enrolled in the Sunday School on the following Sunday.

8) **Neighbourhood Surveys** were conducted to introduce the church to the community, and to ask people what they expected from the church, and to offer the services of the church to them.

9) **Annual Every Member Visits** were conducted by the pastor and a team of the leaders of the congregation, to listen to any complaints, suggestions and ideas of the members, and to respond to any misunderstandings, hurt feelings, loss of interest, etc, and to encourage their interest and support for the ministry and mission of the congregation, especially any special projects, with their time, talent and treasure, and to promote a spirit of unity and partnership in the congregation.

## How Has the Master Plan Fared?

During the first 15-year phase of the Master Plan, 1954-69, targets were pretty well achieved. The average annual rate of increase was 10 percent in Communicant membership and 13 percent in giving. However, the performance fell far short in the second phase, 1970-84. Some new mission methods, e.g. **Dialog Evangelism**, were tried, with limited results. The time for achieving self-support was extended by another decade. The ELCE had grown to 16 congregations, not 20, with a total Communicant membership of about 1000, not 4000, as had been envisaged by the Master Plan. --- After the end of financial support from the LC-MS, three of the congregations had to be closed down, at Sheffield, Liverpool and Sunbury, but thankfully one new congregation has been established, in Suffolk, so that the ELCE now consists of 14 congregations.

## So, What Are the Prospects?

Does this mean that our ministry and mission has no future here? -- On the contrary, Christ has called us into the ministry and mission of the ELCE! It is His will that we proclaim the Gospel here to the masses of people in Britain who have lost all living connection with the Church of Jesus Christ. To have the Gospel is to share it, or to lose it. Therefore we say with the Apostle Paul, "*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!*" 1 Corinthians 9:16 Difficulties are no excuse for giving up. Therefore we will continue to use all possible means and opportunities to fulfil our Gospel ministry and mission here, and trust "*the Holy Spirit to work faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel.*" Augsburg Confession, Article V.

With the Apostle Paul we declare: "*Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. . . . Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke", we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is*

*wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4:1,7-10,13-16*

*“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.” 1 Cor. 15:5*

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