

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



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—Rev. Carleton Toppe, president of Northwestern College

EVERY STATE BY '78

When WELS ended fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1961, many felt it would mark the end of the synod. WELS would take its pure doctrine and hide in its mostly Midwest corner. Instead, God in his grace blessed WELS with astounding growth in the next quarter century.

There were signs of this growth in the 1950s. Churches and schools were rapidly expanding. Five new area Lutheran high schools opened. The ministerial education schools carried out building projects. In addition to new overseas missions in Africa and Japan, the synod entered California and Florida.



Norman Berg (left) and Edgar Hoenecke, WELS Home and World Mission administrators respectively, reviewing mission strategy in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

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came pouring in from across the country. Initially, the challenge was a lack of manpower. The Lord answered prayers for more workers. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, larger seminary classes allowed more missions to be started. The seminary added dorm space, a new library, and a larger cafeteria.

The rate of expansion was phenomenal. By 1965, eight new states had WELS missions. The mantra for the Board for Home Missions was "every state by '78." The race was on. By 1973, only six states didn't have a WELS congregation. That same year, the South Atlantic District was formed. In 1983, Maine became the last state with a WELS presence. That year also saw the formation of the North Atlantic and South Central Districts.

All this took place while ministerial education schools continued to build, another 11 area Lutheran high schools opened, and World Missions expanded into 7 new countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. WELS had become a truly nationwide and worldwide church body.

This rapid growth was evidence of God's grace and power working through the proclamation of the gospel. Today, WELS is present in 48 states, and mission opportunities continue. The harvest is still plentiful. We continue to pray that the Lord provides the workers, gives us the resources, and blesses the work of telling people about Jesus.



Beautiful Savior, Portland, Maine.

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