

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



"By sheer grace and God's guidance, the 'WELS Forty-Niners' struck rich 'pay dirt' in the 'mother lode' of Christian missions in Central Africa."

– Edgar Hoenecke, a member of the "WELS Forty-Niners" mission exploratory team to Africa

THE WELS FORTY-NINERS

As the Great Depression began, the Wisconsin Synod was saddled with a crippling debt of nearly \$750,000. Building projects in New Ulm and Mobridge and years of deficit spending coupled with the depressed economy led to a debt that hindered mission work and left seminary graduates without calls.

Beginning in 1935, the synod began a concerted effort to pay down the debt. This effort was spearheaded by Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, a pastor in Michigan. He produced bulletins that were sent to congregations and members highlighting the work of the synod, showing the progress of the debt repayment, and encouraging people to make contributions. God blessed these efforts. By 1945, the synod had a surplus of almost \$350,000.



**The 4,000-mile trek of
Hoenecke and Wacker.**

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



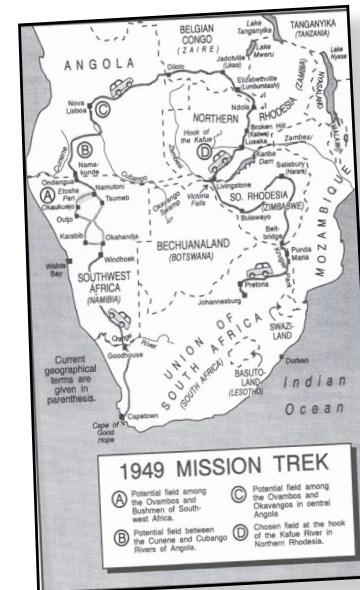
"By sheer grace and God's guidance, the 'WELS Forty-Niners' struck rich 'pay dirt' in the 'mother lode' of Christian missions in Central Africa."

– Edgar Hoenecke, a member of the "WELS Forty-Niners" mission exploratory team to Africa

THE WELS FORTY-NINERS

As the Great Depression began, the Wisconsin Synod was saddled with a crippling debt of nearly \$750,000. Building projects in New Ulm and Mobridge and years of deficit spending coupled with the depressed economy led to a debt that hindered mission work and left seminary graduates without calls.

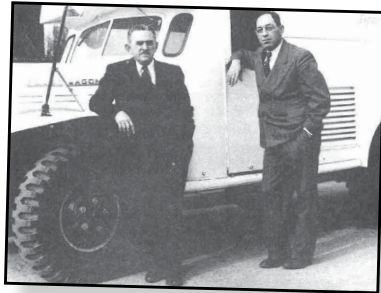
Beginning in 1935, the synod began a concerted effort to pay down the debt. This effort was spearheaded by Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, a pastor in Michigan. He produced bulletins that were sent to congregations and members highlighting the work of the synod, showing the progress of the debt repayment, and encouraging people to make contributions. God blessed these efforts. By 1945, the synod had a surplus of almost \$350,000.



**The 4,000-mile trek of
Hoenecke and Wacker.**

At the 1945 synod convention, Hoenecke encouraged the synod to pursue overseas mission work. The end of World War II brought optimism and opportunities. It took until 1947 for the synod to decide to send an exploratory team to Africa and until 1949 to find two men willing to go. Hoenecke and his friend and fellow Michigan pastor, Arthur Wacker, volunteered to leave their congregations and families for over three months.

Their journey included an 8,000-mile sea voyage to Cape Town, South Africa, followed by a 4,000-mile trek across southern and central Africa in a five-ton Dodge Power Wagon that served as their sleeping quarters, kitchen, and workspace. Overcoming weather problems, difficult travel on muddy roads and bridgeless rivers, and vehicle repair needs, they eventually arrived at Lusaka in the British territory of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).



Edgar Hoenecke and Arthur Wacker with their exploratory mission vehicle the day before their departure.

In 1953, this became the first WELS mission in Africa. Work expanded to Malawi in 1963. A seminary and Bible Institute were established in the 1960s to train African pastors and evangelists. The Central Africa Medical Mission was founded in 1961. Today, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Zambia and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi are independent, self-governing church bodies numbering more than 45,000 baptized members between the two synods.

Hoenecke and Wacker have been dubbed the "WELS Forty-Niners." Hoenecke wrote 40 years later, "By sheer grace and God's guidance, the 'WELS Forty-Niners' struck rich 'pay dirt' in the 'mother lode' of Christian missions in Central Africa."

At the 1945 synod convention, Hoenecke encouraged the synod to pursue overseas mission work. The end of World War II brought optimism and opportunities. It took until 1947 for the synod to decide to send an exploratory team to Africa and until 1949 to find two men willing to go. Hoenecke and his friend and fellow Michigan pastor, Arthur Wacker, volunteered to leave their congregations and families for over three months.

Their journey included an 8,000-mile sea voyage to Cape Town, South Africa, followed by a 4,000-mile trek across southern and central Africa in a five-ton Dodge Power Wagon that served as their sleeping quarters, kitchen, and workspace. Overcoming weather problems, difficult travel on muddy roads and bridgeless rivers, and vehicle repair needs, they eventually arrived at Lusaka in the British territory of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).



Edgar Hoenecke and Arthur Wacker with their exploratory mission vehicle the day before their departure.

In 1953, this became the first WELS mission in Africa. Work expanded to Malawi in 1963. A seminary and Bible Institute were established in the 1960s to train African pastors and evangelists. The Central Africa Medical Mission was founded in 1961. Today, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Zambia and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi are independent, self-governing church bodies numbering more than 45,000 baptized members between the two synods.

Hoenecke and Wacker have been dubbed the "WELS Forty-Niners." Hoenecke wrote 40 years later, "By sheer grace and God's guidance, the 'WELS Forty-Niners' struck rich 'pay dirt' in the 'mother lode' of Christian missions in Central Africa."