

## REPORT OF THE NEBRASKA DISTRICT MISSION BOARD

### “The Witness of a Little Girl”

*“Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. She said to her mistress, ‘If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy!’” (2 Kings 5:2,3).*

If there was anyone who may have had an excuse not to verbalize her faith, it would have been this little Israelite girl. Taken from her home and her homeland, forced into service as a slave, and not owing a thing to her captors, still she had compassion on the husband of her mistress and shared information on where he could find help for his disease.

Wasn’t she afraid? Wasn’t she bitter about what had happened? Didn’t she feel at least some animosity toward those who had so cruelly disrupted her life? For some reason, all that took a backseat to her desire to help. In so doing, Naaman not only found a cure for his leprosy but also for his sinfulness.

As individuals we may wonder what impact we can make on a world infected with the leprosy of sin. We can learn something from the witness of this little girl! Our Lord doesn’t ask us to convert the world all by ourselves, but he gives each of us our own opportunities to make a difference with those around us. Pray that he opens our eyes to see these opportunities, so that we can emulate the example of the little servant girl who made such a difference in the life of those around her.

The Nebraska District Mission Board (DMB) exists to help congregations in training and equipping people to be the Lord’s witnesses. We do so by offering support to the missions under our care and by exploring new fields that are ripe for harvest.

Here’s a summary of the work that we’ve been privileged to do and the challenges that lie ahead:

### STATION REPORTS

#### **Peace, Shenandoah, Iowa**

**20 souls, 20 communicants**

#### **Pastor Thomas Jeske (Vacancy Pastor)**

Three towns in Southwest Iowa work together to make up the membership of Peace: Shenandoah, Clarinda, and Red Oak. The congregation meets for worship on Saturday evenings. Their white-frame house of worship is said to be the oldest building in Shenandoah. The interior is currently receiving a fresh coat of paint. The majority of members work in area window or tool factories. The members of Peace had put in a request for a graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to serve them in a tent-ministry capacity but did not receive one when the graduates were assigned in May. Future plans involve additional research by the DMB and its mission counselor, Mark Birkholz, to see if a connection can be made with a nucleus of people from the Council Bluffs area in some form of dual parish.

**Grace Hmong, Kansas City, Kansas**

**55 souls, 26 communicants**

**Pastor Bounkeo Lor**

*Grace Hmong Lutheran Church* is the new official name for the Kansas City Hmong congregation, formerly a part of the ministry of Rock of Ages in Kansas City, Missouri, but now in the process of organizing to become its own separate congregation. In the past two years the membership has increased from six to ten families. A desire to be closer to the Hmong population in Kansas City prompted a move to Wyandotte County -- the "Kansas side" of Kansas City. A lease agreement was signed that allows the members to rent a LC-MS church for services and office space. An opening weekend celebration was held on June 5-6, with invitations extended to the Hmong in the Kansas City area. There are several Hmong families moving into the area. Contacts are being made by Pastor Lor, who is also heading up the Pastoral Studies Institute in his congregation and teaching five men interested in ministry. Pastor Lor also keeps busy with some international evangelism efforts through e-mail and phone contacts, sending materials to those who live in China, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Hope, Manhattan, Kansas**

**70 souls, 50 communicants**

**Pastor Philip Hirsch**

Hope has expanded their child care ministry by leasing a west campus in addition to their current early learning center. They're welcoming Kristin Mantey, who accepted a call from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Kristin will be replacing Lauren Moll, who recently completed her one-year assignment and was reassigned to Doral, Florida. The members of Hope are planning to attend a School of Outreach in Topeka in September to enhance their awareness of outreach opportunities, both within and outside of their early learning centers. Planning efforts are ongoing as to how best to utilize the opportunities available to do gospel ministry in Manhattan.

**Good Shepherd, Kearney, Nebraska**

**100 souls, 71 communicants**

**Pastor Kurt Schaser**

Good Shepherd is in the process of building a new worship facility. The total project cost is \$430,000. They are receiving a matching down payment of \$86,000 along with an additional construction loan from the WELS Church Extension Fund to cover the cost. The facility will be 4500 square feet, with room for a 140-seat sanctuary, gathering/worship overflow, nursery, pastor's office, multipurpose room, bathrooms, and mechanical room. Builders For Christ have been enlisted for the project. The target completion date is the end of July or early August.

**Living Savior, Hays, Kansas**

**9 souls, 9 communicants**

**Pastor Timm Meyer**

Living Savior worships weekly on Sunday nights on the third floor of the Hadley Center, a former hospital. Weekly attendance is usually a dozen or more. In December of 2009, six members were welcomed into membership by adult confirmation. An adolescent youth center for teens has opened in the building and is looking for pastoral help. An assisted living center will also open soon and is advertising Living Savior in their

brochures. We appreciate Pastor Meyer making the weekly journeys from Norton to serve this group of saints.

### **BHM TASK FORCE**

At the April meeting of the Board for Home Missions (BHM), a preliminary report was received from the BHM Task Force with recommendations involving the BHM structure, the Mission Counselor program, and future funding efforts. More discussion will be held on this report later during the convention.

### **VICARS IN MISSION SETTINGS**

This program offers vicars to congregations that may be unable to afford the full cost of a vicar but offer a mission setting in which a vicar may gain valuable experience. The BHM has joined in partnership with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the assigning of these men to their fields of service. Four requests were submitted from our board for the Vicars in Mission Settings program. Two of them were granted: Daniel Laitinen was assigned to serve at Messiah in Wichita, Kansas. Donald Tilbury was assigned to serve at Gethsemane in Omaha, Nebraska.

### **MENTORING/SHEPHERDING OPPORTUNITIES**

As a DMB we stand ready to serve in an advisory capacity for any congregations seeking to begin any type of new ministry, especially those in need of little or no additional funding to do so. In most cases we will assign a DMB member to work with you as a “mentor/shepherd.” Some of these new ministries may end up seeking BHM funding, with others continuing to provide the needed dollars on the local level.

### **FUTURE FIELDS**

The DMB has targeted several cities within our district as potential locations for exploratory work to see if there might be a field for a future mission congregation. One of those cities is Council Bluffs, Iowa. Mission Counselor Mark Birkholz made a February visit to research this area. As mentioned previously, future plans would likely include tying Council Bluffs in with the congregation in Shenandoah. Research is also being planned for Lawrence, Kansas in an effort to see the validity of hooking up something in this area with our congregations in Topeka and/or Overland Park.

### **WELS KINGDOM WORKERS**

If you'd like some short-term funding for mission endeavors, WELS Kingdom Workers (WKW) offers grants on a year-to-year basis. Such requests are to have a heavy emphasis on lay involvement. The proper forms can be found online and are to be sent to the DMB by August 15 to ensure proper accountability and priority. Faith In Action (FIA) requests, which usually utilize students for outreach work, can be submitted at any time through the DMB, but try to plan at least six months in advance when doing so. The forms to do so can also be found on the WKW website.

### **MISSION COUNSELOR**

Pastor Mark Birkholz continues to serve our district in this capacity along with the Colorado, North Atlantic, and Michigan mission districts. If you think Mark can help you and your congregation in any way, or if you have an area in need of demographic research, give us a call and we'll set something up.

**DMB ELECTIONS**

Steve Helwig, Jeff McKee, and I all have terms expiring at this convention, and only Steve Helwig is eligible for reelection. Jeff McKee is completing 12 years of service on both the DMB and the BHM. I have had the privilege of serving on the DMB for the past 18 years, including 14 years as chairman and as a member of the BHM. A new chairman will be elected by the board at the first DMB meeting after the convention. My thanks to Jeff McKee for his time and faithfulness during his time on the board -- and for accompanying me on over two dozen trips to Milwaukee! Thank you also to all those who have aided me greatly over the years in being able to serve in this capacity. Your prayers have been appreciated, and your willingness to serve your Savior in gospel outreach has not gone unnoticed. Blessings upon the newly-elected members of the DMB and on the new chairman! May the Lord continue to use you to his glory and for the spread of his kingdom.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Jonathan J. Rockhoff, Chairman  
Rev. Stephen Helwig, Financial/Recording Secretary  
Mr. Jeff McKee, BHM Representative  
Mr. Don Niemann  
Rev. Tyler Peil  
Rev. Joel Frank, District President