

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF BETHANY LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

VOLUME 61 • NUMBERS 2 & 3

JUNE & SEPTEMBER 2021

The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
ISSN: 0360-9685

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 61 • NUMBERS 2 & 3
JUNE & SEPTEMBER 2021

The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Nicholas D. Proksch,
Timothy R. Schmeling
LAYOUT EDITOR Daniel J. Hartwig
PRINTER Books of the Way of the Lord

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* (ISSN: 0360-9685) is edited by the faculty of
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato, Minnesota 56001

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is a continuation of the *Clergy Bulletin* (1941–1960). The purpose of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, as was the purpose of the *Clergy Bulletin*, is to provide a testimony of the theological position of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and also to promote the academic growth of her clergy roster by providing scholarly articles, rooted in the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is published in March and December with a combined June and September issue. Subscription rates are \$25.00 U.S. per year for domestic subscriptions and \$35.00 U.S. per year for international subscriptions.

All subscriptions and editorial correspondence should be sent to the following address:

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Attn: *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*
6 Browns Ct
Mankato MN 56001

Back issues of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* from the past two years are available at a cost of \$10.00 per issue. Back issues of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* and *Clergy Bulletin* prior to the past two years are available at <www.blts.edu/lsq>.

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is abstracted in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, PO Box 215, Myerstown, PA 17067 (E-mail: rtaed@rtabstracts.org; Website: www.rtabstracts.org).

Copyright ©2021 by Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Requests for permission to reproduce more than brief excerpts are to be directed to the Editor-in-Chief.



Contents

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

The Life and Service of Norman Arthur Madson, Sr.	131
<i>Kyle J. Madson</i>	
The First Two Seminary Presidents, Ylvisaker and Teigen.....	159
<i>Erling T. Teigen</i>	
Later Life of Milton H. Otto.....	171
<i>Craig A. Ferkenstad</i>	
Professor George Oliver Lillegard.....	193
<i>Joseph C. Abrahamson</i>	
Rudolph E. Honsey	219
<i>Peter J. Faugstad</i>	
Reflections on the Life and Service of J. B. Madson	249
<i>John A. Moldstad</i>	
A Brief Biography of President Theodore A. Aaberg	259
<i>Michael D. Muehlenhardt</i>	
Glenn E. Reichwald: Interim President 1979 to 1980	293
<i>Theodore G. Gullixson</i>	
Wilhelm Walther Petersen: Pastor, President, Theologian.....	301
<i>Paul C. Fries</i>	
Sermon on John 14:1–6 for the Funeral of John A. Moldstad	309
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	
2021 Bjarne W. Teigen Reformation Lectures	315

Foreword

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

THIS YEAR IS THE SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, which was established in 1946. The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* through the year 2021 will include articles highlighting the history of the seminary. There will be articles concerning important events and significant individuals in the history of the seminary.

The first dean of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was Norman A. Madson (1886–1962). He was mainly responsible for keeping the infant seminary afloat. Madson was gifted and proficient in the study of homiletics and was known throughout the Synodical Conference for his homiletical expertise. The essay concerning him was written by his great-grandson, the Rev. Kyle Madson. He is pastor at Norseland and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Churches in St. Peter, Minnesota.

The seminary did not have a separate president from the college president until 1976. During this period, the college president was the titular or nominal head of the seminary, while the dean of the seminary carried out the main administrative and educational duties. The two men who were presidents of both the college and seminary and who taught in the seminary were S. C. Ylvisaker (1884–1959) and B. W. Teigen (1909–2004). Prof. Erling Teigen points out the relationship between these two men and their relationship to the seminary. Prof. Teigen is professor emeritus of Bethany Lutheran College.

In 1957 Milton Otto (1914–1982) joined the seminary staff and was named dean of the seminary in 1968. He had been the pastor of the Saude–Jerico parish in northeastern Iowa and had served as the president of the synod. The Rev. Craig Ferkenstad centers his essay on the later years of Otto’s life. Rev. Ferkenstad is the secretary of our synod. An essay concerning the early years of Milton Otto is found in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014).

George O. Lillegard (1888–1965) was installed as a professor of religion and Greek at Bethany Lutheran College and as a teacher in the seminary in 1952. Before this time, he had been a missionary in China and a pastor of Harvard Street (Cambridge, Massachusetts). He authored many articles, including his monograph on the *Chinese Term Question* and the book of sermons entitled *From Eden to Egypt*. In his essay, the Rev. Joseph Abrahamson, explores the early years of Lillegard’s life. Rev. Abrahamson is pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Clara City, Minnesota.

Rudolph Honsey (1918–2017) taught Old Testament courses in the seminary. He also taught a whole array of courses at Bethany Lutheran College, including history, Greek, Latin, Norwegian, and religion. His subject matter was important to him, but students were more important. The essay concerning Honsey was written by the Rev. Peter Faugstad, who is pastor of Jerico, Saude, and Redeemer Lutheran Churches in New Hampton and Lawler, Iowa.

Juul Madson (1920–2008) was called to the faculty as professor of New Testament studies in 1970. He served as dean of students and as registrar of the seminary. Virtually everything of importance produced in the ELS during his active years was proofread and edited by Madson. This essay was authored by the late Rev. John Moldstad, the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).

Theodore A. Aaberg (1925–1980) was called as the first full-time president of the seminary in 1976. He had distinguished himself as a parish pastor and as one of the leading theologians in the synod. During his presidency the first seminary building was constructed. The essay concerning the life of Aaberg was produced by the Rev. Michael Muehlenhardt, who is the pastor of English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, Minnesota.

Glenn Reichwald (1927–1995), who taught classes in both the college and the seminary, served as the acting president of the seminary for the 1979–1980 school year. Throughout his life, he was an avid reader of the latest and best theological books and magazines. This essay

was written by the Rev. Theodore Gullixson who is the archivist of our synod.

Wilhelm Petersen (1928–2018) accepted the call to be president of the seminary in 1980, and during his presidency the second seminary building was constructed in 1996. He always treasured the important text of his namesake, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* by Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. This essay was authored by the Rev. Paul Fries, who is the communication director of our synod.

The Rev. John Moldstad, the president of the ELS, was suddenly called home to be with the Savior on January 29, 2021. Included in this quarterly is the sermon preached at his funeral on February 6.

– GRS

The Life and Service of Norman Arthur Madson, Sr.

Kyle J. Madson
Norseland and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Churches
St. Peter, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

In the history business you never get clamoring requests.... We all have feet of clay, and people hate to learn from history. And yet it is true that we are constantly turning to the past to find out what happened and who was who. What would education be without the use of history? Men do not become useful in life only by the virtue of their own current experiences. They all borrow from the experiences of others, which is history.¹

THE EXCERPT ABOVE COMES FROM A LETTER addressed to Reverend Dean Norman A. Madson by an admiring colleague hoping to spur him on in the writing of an autobiography. History had surely been an invaluable instrument in the lives of both of these respected clergymen, the former even having taught the subject formally for several years of his life. These words concerning history hold as true today as they did on that particular summer day in August of 1958. Education will still be all for naught without an understanding of history. Humanity will still remain a shallow and useless vessel without thoughtfully dwelling upon the experiences of those who have gone before. The letter's author went on to plead, "Tell the story of the churches, which means the people, along the way you have walked consciously for more than 60 years."² Since there remains a great benefit to be drawn from the experiences of others who have gone before us,

¹ George Schweikert, letter to N. A. Madson, August 11, 1958.

² Ibid.

whose story remains untold, the following tells the brief story of the life and service of Reverend Dean Norman Arthur Madson, Sr.

From Whence He Came: A Background and Family History

Norman Arthur Madson was born on November 16, 1886 to Andrew and Mary (Hoverson) Madson on a farm in rural Manitowoc, Wisconsin, near the township of Valders. Andrew Madson and Mary Hoverson were both first-generation immigrants from their mother land, Norway. The Madson clan traces its roots back to a south-central district in Norway, Valdres, which is also the name-sake of the township established in northeast Wisconsin where they came to settle.

The first emigration from Valdres, Norway had its genesis in 1843. No one proved to be more instrumental in the emigration of the people of Valdres than Stephen Olson Kubakke Helle. Having arrived in Port Washington, Wisconsin in 1846, Helle soon found himself navigating his way through the forest in search of good farmland to the north. In time he came to a spot in Manitowoc County where he purchased several tracts of land and elected to make his future home.³

Norman's father Andrew was the second of eight children born to Jacob and Marie Madson. Born in 1844, he was the last of his siblings born on Norwegian soil before the family immigrated to the United States in 1846. They resided in Milwaukee for two years before moving north to Manitowoc to settle and establish the family farm.⁴

Andrew Madson together with his Norwegian-born, immigrant bride, Mary Hoverson, established their own homestead in 1871, purchasing forty acres of land in the Cato township due east of Valders, Wisconsin. Andrew Madson farmed the rural Valders land while also carrying on a small dairy production as was becoming more commonplace at the time in all of eastern Wisconsin. While this land had the potential to be much more fertile and farmer-friendly than the hilly, more rocky soil left behind in Valdres, Norway, it would prove to present its own challenges.

In addition to farming the land and carrying on a small dairy operation, Andrew Madson augmented his family's income by butchering meat and vending it in town. God, in his bounty, dispersed this load over the fourteen children he gave to Andrew and Mary Madson. Among

³ Hjalmar R. Holand, *History of the Norwegian Settlements* (Decorah, IA: Astri My Astri Publishing, 2006), 107.

⁴ Louis Falge, *History of Manitowoc County Wisconsin* (Manitowoc, WI: Manitowoc Co. Gen. Soc., 1979), 468–469.

the fourteen were six boys and eight girls—several of whom were taken to their heavenly home prior to adulthood.

Norman Arthur Madson, Sr. was the youngest boy of the fourteen (the second Norman born to Andrew and Mary as the first was one of the childhood fatalities) with two younger sisters, Alma and Jennie. The latter along with Norman's immediate elder in the family, Laura, would both go on to become successful nurses serving as such during World War I. Upon returning home both gained employment at the Norwegian American Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, each taking a turn as superintendent of that esteemed institution.⁵

Student Years

Given the size of Andrew and Mary's family, the youngest boy Norman would not suffer from loneliness as a child. His early schooling, in addition to all that he learned independently of the classroom as a contributing member to the family farm, occurred at a rural school in the Valders community. Amongst his boyhood passions were fishing, football, which he played in high school and college, and even a childhood boast of being able to butcher a cow on his own by the ripe old age of nine.

Norman's secondary education took place at Wittenberg Academy, a boarding school in north-central Wisconsin that was jointly operated by the Norwegian Synod, the Missouri Synod, and the Wisconsin Synod. For Norman, these boarding school years seem not to have commenced until the fall of 1903 when he was sixteen years of age. Records indicate Norman excelled in the scholastic setting as well as in his extra-curricular endeavors. He expressed vocational aspirations both toward the ministry as well as medicine. His proficiency in the classroom, and especially his oral skills, prompted his academy mentor, Mr. Onstad, to steer Norman toward the pursuit of the public ministry.

With his mentor's urging, Norman found himself continuing higher education studies at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Arriving on that campus in the fall of 1907, Norman quickly acclimated himself to his new surroundings. Outside of his class schedule, he busied himself in collegiate football as a successful fullback, forensics and debate, and also journalism. Norman exercised his gift for writing with the college's student newspaper. In the academic year of 1910–11, he served as the

⁵ Vivian Daschund, interview by Kyle Madson, June 20, 2007.

editor of Luther College's student newspaper, *College Chips*. In this capacity, he both wrote and carried out administrative duties.⁶

Seminary Training

The next academic venture that awaited Norman was his formal seminary training. After a year of teaching at his alma mater following his 1911 graduation, Norman, in the fall of 1912, continued in the course of his ministerial training at Luther Seminary in the St. Paul, Minnesota burgh of Hamline.

Luther Seminary's faculty at this time included University of Leipzig-trained Johannes T. Ylvisaker, Carl M. Weswig, and Olaf E. Brandt. In addition to the faculty trained primarily on foreign soil, there were several who attained all their theological credentials stateside: Professors Hove and Kildahl, the former having earned his theological training under the Germans in St. Louis while the latter underwent his formal training at the "Old Synod" seminary in Madison.

During this tenuous time in American Lutheranism, factions became evident and perhaps nowhere more clearly than amongst the theological faculties. Such was the case at Luther Seminary as well. In the early decades of the twentieth century, professors Ylvisaker, Brandt, and Hove were those known to represent the "strictly confessional *Old Synod*."⁷ A majority of the remainder would comprise the

⁶ Jacobsen Norlie Tinglestad, 137, citing an article in *College Chips*, 1911. The following is an excerpt from his first-prize oratory from 1910 entitled *Rome*:

Were we to choose a word whose utterance would reecho history such as no other, that word would be *Rome*.... Like a rock in the billowy ocean Rome has proudly lifted her seven heads through the turmoil of history for ages, and today she stands, though with altered mien, as queen of the world still....

Neither the land of the mighty Pharaohs, nor the powers which once flourished in the fertile valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, no, not even cultured and, in her day, powerful Greece has borne in her bosom a city like unto Rome.... History has nothing more wonderful to relate than the eventful life of this world metropolis, and it is with a feeling of admiration mingled with dread that we tread upon her historic threshold and with the eyes of an historian that we view her past....

She has passed through practically all the stages of political, social, and religious development; has, through language and literature, put her stamp on the world; has made the world tremble at her command. And when the minute hand of the great clock Time shall be making its final round, strange shall the vicissitudes of fortune have been, if the world no more looks up with reverent awe to the mistress on yon, yellow Tiber!

⁷ Frederick H. Gonnerman, *Thanksgiving and Hope—A Collection of Essays Chronicling 125 Years of People, Events, and Movements in the Antecedent Schools that Have Formed Luther Seminary* (Northfield: Northfield Printing Inc., 1998), 38. Note also the mention of "three theological professors" continuing in opposition to the settlement

middle-of-the-road mindset aligned with the *Opgjør* of 1912, while a few held the opposite end of the spectrum in the Haugeaner camp.

Upon graduation from the seminary, Norman was ordained as an assistant pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois during the summer of 1915. After only a brief stay there, Norman received a call to serve as a mission pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Hibbing, Minnesota.⁸ The church, which had first organized under the name "Tabor" in 1903, struggled in its early years with a total membership under forty only the year prior to Norman's arrival. Though it would be for less than a year, the rugged and blustery iron range of Minnesota would serve as the setting in which Norman A. Madson first independently served in the parish ministry.

"A good thing": Norman Blessed with a Faithful Wife and Family

Starting in 1907, a twenty-year-old Norman Madson spent four years of schooling and an additional year on the faculty at Luther College in Decorah. Following three years of seminary and a brief stint as a missionary in Hibbing, Minnesota, he landed back in Decorah on the faculty a second time in the fall of 1916. Norman served on staff for two more years. Through these "Decorah-years," God brought about the necessary meeting and courtship of one Elsie Haakenson.

The third child but only daughter of Martin and Marie Haakenson, Elsie Caroline Ingina was born on November 23, 1893. She spent the entirety of her youth in Winnishiek County in her parents' home at 715 Washington Street in Decorah. There she attended primary and secondary school. In addition to her studies and contributions to the workload at home, Elsie also found work at the Winnishiek County Bank on East Water Street in Decorah.⁹

While a courtship germinated between Norman and Elsie, "the war to end all wars" was raging in Europe. Toward the end of Norman's 1916–17 year at Luther, the U.S. declared their involvement in the conflict. Norman received his call to serve his country. While perhaps being involved in some local training during the spring and summer of 1918, Norman received his official orders on August 15 of that year.

effort. Sigurd C. Ylvisaker, *Grace for Grace* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 101, 107.

⁸ "Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Diamond Jubilee 1903–1978" (historical account as presented at a church festival held June 3–4, 1978—Hibbing, MN), 8.

⁹ Juul B. Madson, "In Loving Memory of Norman A. Madson (1886–1962) and Elsie C. Haakenson (1893–1972)" (address for the Madson Family Reunion, Mankato, MN, 2001), 3.

Enlisted as a chaplain, he was to report for training at Camp Jackson, South Carolina no later than September 5, 1918. So when the window of time availed itself, Norman returned briefly from training and God joined him and Elsie in Christian marriage on August 31 at First Lutheran Church in Decorah.

While it seems Madson's plans were to return to Camp Jackson alone, things may have transpired a bit differently. Norman departed on his own. It has been recounted, however, that Elsie, with persuasion by and assistance from a close friend and military wife herself, caught up with her newly-wed husband on the platform of the Chicago train station and they returned to camp together.¹⁰ With a rented hotel room just off base from Camp Jackson to call home, they spent their earliest married days anticipating a deployment date any moment for the young chaplain. So the suddenness of the armistice on November 11, 1918 was no doubt received with a deep sigh of relief and collective joy. Norman received his honorable discharge from duty at Camp Jackson December 31, 1918. After four months of military marriage, Norman and Elsie returned to Iowa in January of 1919 when he was called to his first flock in Bode, Iowa.¹¹

The couple was blessed with seven children: Vivian, Juul, Gudrun, Paul, Naomi, Norman, and Andrew. The struggles of life in this vale of tears would not remain foreign to this family over the years. The crash of the stock market and subsequent Great Depression would prove a most trying time especially as a parish pastor. Only by the grace of God did they survive as the congregation found itself at one point \$1,400 in arrears on their pastor's \$1,200 per year salary. Family illness also presented difficulties at times. Still the Lord, in His abundant mercy supplied for all their needs.

Norman has been remembered by all his children as a "very dear father."¹² Noted by many as an especially strict disciplinarian, Madson's children recall occasional sympathy for them from others on account of their father's rigidity. "Papa," as they called him, always wanted his children to be well-behaved. While certainly willing to "use the rod" when necessary, all his children concur that in this use he was never cruel. His fatherly love permeated even his sternest disciplinary actions.

Even though his reputation as a disciplinarian dominates the surface level discussion of Norman Madson, one son also noted how time and

¹⁰ Vivian Daschund, interview by Kyle Madson, June 20, 2007.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

a more mature perspective served well in properly understanding this rather firm veneer: "I assure you there were many times when as a kid I didn't appreciate his sternness, but when you look at things in retrospect ... retrospect is a great evener; You realize more clearly what he was after."¹³

Spiritual fathering also played an integral role in the bringing up of the seven children. "We were brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," said son Paul.¹⁴ Family devotions were a staple of evening meals as was the memorization of a Bible passage before bed each night. The memorization and singing of hymns also was fundamental to his fatherly activities. His affinity toward poetry left hundreds of hymns at his disposal, ready for use for family instruction at any time.

"Papa" was not only serious, however. "He'd take us fishing," remembered one son of their days outside Princeton, "if we begged him enough."¹⁵ Football playing and ice-skating were among the other light-hearted fatherly activities for Norman. Many also recall him as a mesmerizing story-teller, able to captivate his own children, others kids, even adults through his lively and engaging oratory. Even in his later years when living in Mankato, one resident of the same street recalled how "all the kids on the street would race to him to hear a new story."¹⁶

In the kids' teenage years, this fatherly care and concern often showed itself through written correspondence as many of the children were away from home during their secondary schooling at Bethany Academy. Whether an encouraging letter and a gift of money to his daughter during her arduous years of nurse's training in Chicago, or a gift of a dozen roses sent to a son second-guessing his credentials as a young teacher and coach, Madson never stopped being "Papa."

As a husband, Norman was "not a Casanova" but "he knew who he was and knew what he wanted."¹⁷ This decisive nature was surely attractive to a young Elsie, who was known to be "no pushover in the face of contrary opinions."¹⁸

Not without known faults, Norman had a reputation for showing up last minute nearly everywhere, often catching his trains in Becker, Minnesota "by the skin of his teeth."¹⁹ Madson also had a propensity to

¹³ Juul and Clarice Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, June 28, 2007.

¹⁴ Paul Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, July 6, 2007.

¹⁵ Norman and Amanda Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, June 28, 2007.

¹⁶ Bruno Wilinski, interview by Kyle Madson, July 16, 2007.

¹⁷ Naomi Petersen, interview by Kyle Madson, July 25, 2007.

¹⁸ Juul Madson, "In Loving Memory," 5.

¹⁹ Naomi Petersen, interview by Kyle Madson, July 25, 2007.

accept any extra churchly or synod task requested of him, a characteristic that would prove to take a toll on his health during his parish years.

Throughout their marriage, though, certainly an endearing character would come to be the dedication and devotion he demonstrated toward the well-being of the seven children. In the midst of ministering to hundreds of others in his various flocks, the nearest flock to Norman's charge, his God-given family, never became an oversight.

Post-War Parish & Tough Decisions

Upon returning from honorable military discharge at Camp Jackson in January of 1919, Norman, with new "helpmeet" Elsie, received a call to serve St. Olaf Lutheran Church of Bode, Iowa and was installed in February of 1919.

Norman spent six years of ministry serving the St. Olaf congregation at Bode. As his first post-war parish and the birthplace of his first three children, it no doubt came to hold a special place in the hearts of both he and Elsie. Though these sentiments were real, a genuine conflict remained with Norman regarding the present course of this 1917 merger body. Since its founding in 1918, Norman had known about the so called "little synod" (the present-day Evangelical Lutheran Synod). Over the course of the six years he was pastor at Bode, Norman saw several friends, former classmates, and colleagues from Luther College depart from the visible certainty and stability of the merger body to the visible uncertainty of the "little synod" of 1918.²⁰ One of these close college friends was Justin Petersen. A year his junior as a student at Luther, Justin had begun his ministry about sixty miles west of Bode in the small town of Rembrandt, Iowa.²¹ As close friends and neighbors in their parishes, much communication occurred between the two during these formative years of ministry. Sharing Norman's unrest in the merger synod, Justin was moved to resign from his call at Rembrandt. In May of 1925, Justin was installed as pastor at Scarville, Iowa as shepherd of both Scarville and Center Lutheran churches respectively.²² Through much consternation, prayerful consideration, and no doubt great encouragement of some close friends, Norman, only a little over a

²⁰ Other influencers would have included Orlando Overn and Sigurd C. Ylvisaker.

²¹ "Scarville Lutheran Church History," Scarville-Center Lutheran Parish, accessed December 21, 2007, <http://www.wctatel.net/web/scarvillutheran/scarvillehistory.htm>.

²² Ibid.

month later, followed Justin's lead, resigning his call at St. Olaf in Bode, entering into the reorganized synod of 1918.²³

New Parish: New Opportunities

While Norman was painfully breaking ties with the church body of his upbringing and a dear parish he had pastored for six years, another synod and parish were eager in waiting. Our Savior's Lutheran Church of rural Princeton, Minnesota swiftly issued a divine call providing Norman and his family not only a new synod but a new home as well. Norman together with Elsie and their three children, Vivian, Juul, and Gudrun, made their move northward. The family's move came shortly after Independence Day of 1925. One of the kids recalls specifically a stop by the Scarville parish for a brief visit with close friend Justin Petersen and family, which was fitting considering Justin's role in Norman's exodus from the merger.²⁴ Their arrival at the parsonage at Princeton, Minnesota on that mid-summer day of July ended up being a late one, yet it did not go unnoticed. In spite of arriving under the cover of July darkness and the blanket of mosquitoes that would accompany it, a staggering portion of this little rural congregation awaited the arrival of the Madson family.

We arrived so late at night and as we neared the parsonage it was all lit up and a good number of the congregation (members) were still there. The moving van had come the day before ... and the people of the congregation (Our Savior's) had that parsonage spick and span ... had all our furniture in the house and our cupboards were filled with food. They were wonderful to us.²⁵

Having left behind a synod, a dear parish, and parishioners who would certainly have a hard time understanding their pastor's resignation, this kind of reception could not have been of greater encouragement to the incoming pastor and his family.

Dedication to Christian Education

Seeing to the spiritual education of the children of his flock was a highlight for Norman. At Our Savior's in Princeton, this largely took

²³ "Eightieth Anniversary of St. Olaf Lutheran Church: Bode, Iowa" (historical booklet produced for the 1950 dedication of the parish hall).

²⁴ Juul and Clarice Madson, interview by Kyle Madson. June 28, 2007. The precision of the date can be determined because of the fireworks during this brief stopover.

²⁵ Vivian Daschund, interview by Kyle Madson, June 20, 2007.

place in the one-room school operated there. He had an unmistakably high regard for the gravity this instruction possessed in the Lord's kingdom. This sentiment shows forth in his encouragement in a letter to a young man who had just accepted the congregation's call to serve as teacher of the one-room school in 1939: "Thanks for your acceptance.... You will have my whole-hearted support in the serious and all-important task of bringing up the children here in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. **There is nothing I would rather do myself, had I but the time necessary, than to instruct the little tots in the one thing needful.**"²⁶

While the one-room Christian Day School was supported by the congregation, there were always members who viewed the efforts and funds required by the school mainly as a drain on the congregation. Norman relayed such challenges to a colleague, saying of this effort, "It is a constant up-hill pull to get the congregation to see the necessity of calling a permanent teacher."²⁷

In addition to the challenges from within, outside factors also played an obstructing role. In the final years of Norman's ministry at Our Savior's, the Second World War presented many of these obstacles. In 1942 the school's only teacher was called into military service. Though called pastors were essentially exempt from this call of duty, securing the same situation for an especially scarce crop like Christian Day School teachers proved no small task but one that Pastor and Principal Norman Madson, Sr. felt worthy of pursuit. Securing some lobbying power through the Missouri Synod's more substantial presidential office, Pastor N. A. Madson lobbied successfully to the teacher's unit commander that he as well as other Christian Day School teachers receive honorable discharge from their selected positions.²⁸

Norman A. Madson knew well that anything as important and vital to the longevity and preservation of true faith as the God-fearing instruction of children would indeed encounter some road blocks on the way. To that point he had this to say:

²⁶ N. A. Madson, letter to Robert Meyer, July 4, 1939.

²⁷ N. A. Madson, letter to Rev. Adolf Ackerman, WELS chairman of the committee of calls, regarding the procuring of a full-time teacher, summer 1939.

²⁸ J. W. Behnken letter to Unit Commander, July 4, 1942. Concerning the Christian Day School teacher, the letter reads: "The Lutheran Church has always regarded and still regards such religious workers as 'regular ministers of religion, not ordained' and for that reason honestly believes that they are entitled to classification IV-D."

A church which is concerned about erecting imposing cathedrals while it neglects the proper care of the precious souls of the lambs of Christ is not going to cause any disturbance in the councils of hell. But **Satan and his underlings do dread the sight of the humblest school house dedicated to this one all-important cause: The training up of a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.** Training not for the few years we are to spend here in the valley of the shadow, but for endless cycles of eternity.²⁹

Catechism Instruction

While Norman, under normal circumstances, did not do any of the school-house teaching he knew to be so vital, he certainly did do a great deal of teaching when it came to catechism instruction. Catechism class at Our Savior's took place Saturday mornings for three hours, 9:00 a.m. until noon, during which time the chief parts of the catechism were stressed. The explanation's questions and answers were memorized as well as important Bible passages. A few Bible stories relating to the lessons were to be known well enough that the catechumens could answer questions about them.

Certainly not least among the components of this catechism curriculum was the learning of hymns. Over the course of instruction, these hymns would be memorized *en masse* and learned in their English entirety. By his children's recollection, the total number learned after two years of confirmation instruction came to about a hundred hymns.³⁰ In justifying the value of memorizing and especially hymns, Norman was known to quote famous poet Robert Frost in this regard:

People keep saying it ain't no good
This learnin' things by heart,
But if a thing has well been said,
It's nice to keep it in your head.³¹

In further defense of this arduous practice of memorizing so many hymns, Norman A. made a point to note the Scriptural exhortations to dwelling on such things, even things perhaps not fully comprehended at the time. In keeping with Luther's logic, Norman had acquired an

²⁹ N. A. Madson, devotional on the opening of the Our Savior's—Princeton Christian Day School, n.d.

³⁰ Vivian Daschund, interview by Kyle Madson, June 20, 2007.

³¹ N. A. Madson, personal notes on "Teaching Our Children the Classic Hymns," n.d.

especially high regard for music's close connection with theology, certainly more so than any of the other arts. Adding to this fundamental belief in music, he paraphrased what he assumed to be an old Chinese proverb: "You may write the history of our country if I but have the privilege of writing the songs that they sing. It is what people sing about that becomes the warp and the woof of its very existence."³²

A high esteem for the catechism, but especially a love for hymns, has been passed down from Norman through his children and grandchildren, even great-grandchildren. It is of no surprise, then, that the comforting truths of such treasured hymns were the very words last upon his dying lips, with his family joining in at his side.

Pastoral Care

Though frequently remembered for his powerful preaching, for his distinct passion and gift to teach, or even in later years for his profound synodical presence, it is suggested by some that were closest to him that Norman's greatest love in the public ministry of the Word was simply visitations. Remembered as a "fervent visitor" by one son, Norman Sr. made frequent reference to a favorite saying regarding the visiting of parishoners: "A home going pastor makes a church going people."³³ None knew the reality of this saying in Norman's ministry better than his children who were often his companions on these visits. Of them, oldest son Juul recollects: "He would often take one or more of us kids along, particularly early on. We knew a lot of hymns and I guess we sang satisfactorily so we would sing hymns."³⁴

Pastoral care is exercised in many ways in one's ministry: visitation, teaching, ability to empathize in times of grief, simply keeping up with the individual goings on of the flock. Norman's care and concern for those of his flock was animated nowhere more obviously than through the vast written correspondence he carried out with approximately forty-two of his parishioners during their military service in World War II. Of this particular labor of love, a newspaper article chronicles several of the specific details: "He (Norman) wasn't too busy from the spring of 1941 to the spring of 1946 to write 335 letters on his trusty Underwood to the service men and women of his congregation. Madson ... hunted and pecked his way through single-spaced letters to the young men and

³² Ibid.

³³ Juul and Clarice Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, June 28, 2007.

³⁴ Ibid.

women he had helped guide through their younger years.”³⁵ Without a single form letter in the bunch, this comprehensive correspondence was carried on amidst the business of his already demanding schedule. The topics broached through his letter writing were plentiful. Having been a soldier himself in years gone by he knew well the social challenges that would face his own sheep: “I trust that you have by now found some boys with whom you feel free to speak. You will find in the army as in civilian life that there are men whose closer acquaintance doesn’t exactly appeal to you, and you will naturally have to choose your associates with discretion.”³⁶ Neither was Norman bashful about emphasizing the relationship between the Lutheran two kingdoms, not mincing words as he shared his feelings regarding such things:

What does it mean that we are fighting for the principle of religious liberty (the most precious part of our Constitution), if we do not intend to make worthwhile use of the liberty for which we contend? Then we might just as well be goose-stepping under Hitler’s cursed Swastika. No, let us hold to our precious Confession, and make it clear to all the world that we are indeed earnest in contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.³⁷

While Norman himself surely enjoyed receiving any sort of response from these young men and women to whom he so faithfully wrote, he pleaded that their efforts at correspondence be first of all to their families, in particular their fathers and mothers: “Whether you have time to write me or other friends as often as you would like (I shall be satisfied if you write me say, once a month), see to it that you do not let a week pass by in which you do not write your folks at home ... they are no doubt remembering you (as I also do) in daily prayers.”³⁸

Norman daily yearned together with the families of the soldiers for their safe and swift return home. As their pastor, however, his ultimate aim in all this writing was none other than to direct these brave young souls toward that which grasps certainty beyond any doubt:

Even the coming back home is not the chief thing. What is that? That you cling to your childhood faith in a Saviour who died for you. It is that very Saviour who has taught us: “Fear not them which

³⁵ Luther Dorr, “A Pastor Who Tended His Flock in WWII,” *Princeton Weekly*, August 30, 2007.

³⁶ N. A. Madson to serviceman, July 13, 1941.

³⁷ N. A. Madson to serviceman, July 15, 1942.

³⁸ N. A. Madson to serviceman, April 17, 1942.

kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” Matt. 10:28. Where I shall die or how I shall die makes little difference, as long as I die believing in God’s word of forgiveness.³⁹

Throughout Norman’s twenty-one year ministry, letters proved an instrumental means by which he exercised his role as shepherd. His dedication and devotion to souls knew few bounds as is manifest through his service to those far away and those next door, those amongst his Sunday worshippers and even those not known at all.

“Let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11)

In the office of pastor, one’s ability to teach or lack thereof, may often be overlooked by his flock. As a minister of the Word, one’s gifts as a shepherd and spiritual care-giver can, with relative ease, be passed over in spite of the many hours consumed by that very task. One role of the office which is not often under-assessed, however, is the role of preacher. Strong as a shepherd may be in all other areas, a deficiency as a preacher undoubtedly receives magnification. Conversely, weaknesses in various other pastoral functions can be, and often are, swept under the rug in light of a perceived or real prowess for preaching.

While Madson certainly had his own inadequacies in his role as a minister of the Word, a tough task it would be to find even one who heard him preach who would mention *that* as one of them. “Once you heard him (preach),” recalls his daughter-in-law, Clarice, “you did not forget. He was outstanding.”⁴⁰

With a great deal of practice in his background, especially from his college days at Luther, speaking publicly was something of a second nature to Norman. “It just came so natural for him to be a preacher, always having liked public speaking,” said his son Paul.⁴¹ His very demeanor served to convey the privilege and joy he found in these opportunities. To this, his son and fellow minister of the Word added, “You could tell he was impassioned and yet very honest and natural in his delivery about what he was preaching and teaching.”⁴² But his passion for preaching did not simply rest in the activity. He retained a clear-eyed handle of what was personally at stake. “He recognized his need for the Savior as much as any person he ministered to and

³⁹ N. A. Madson to serviceman, May 11, 1942.

⁴⁰ Juul and Clarice Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, June 28, 2007.

⁴¹ Paul Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, July 6, 2007.

⁴² Ibid.

he would approach *preaching* that way,” stated his eldest daughter Vivian.⁴³ Regarding her father’s understanding of the necessity of this privilege, sharing the message of sin and grace, daughter Naomi likewise remarked, “*You* could tell from his sermons his concern for their (parishioners) souls, to the point of his being teary-eyed.”⁴⁴

Of those having heard him preach, more than a few have unreservedly called him the finest they have ever heard. One son recalls growing up in Princeton thinking to himself, “This must be the best preacher in the world.”⁴⁵ Some years later in his experiences at both Bethany Lutheran Academy and College, he would come to see the impressed faces of his peers and hear the ceaseless compliments of his father’s preaching, validating for him even the biased formulations of a young, biased son. This captivating and convincing nature did not, however, simply reside in his own personal being, but stemmed very directly from the implements given by God for just such a message, namely the Holy Law and the life-giving Gospel. “We grew up knowing what the Law and the Gospel were,” observed his son Paul, “with an emphasis on the Gospel.”⁴⁶ A former Bethany student, and keen admirer of Norman Madson had the following to say in the same regard: “You left his chapel talks more sure of your salvation than when you walked in, every time ... He put you in hell while you were there, but he also put you in heaven before you left. He was blessed with the ability to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel.”⁴⁷

Valuing the task of preaching as a great privilege, Norman devoted much time and effort to it. In spite of the natural gift bestowed upon him in this regard, many hours each week went into sermon composition and commitment to memory. Without an office in the church building at Princeton, pastor Madson’s study in the parsonage most often doubled as a bedroom for one or two of his boys. One of them recalls, “that old type-writer working hard,” at times even as they were falling asleep.⁴⁸

A lofty devotion to the craft of preaching and of rightly dividing Law and Gospel even led Madson to compose and deliver *in verse* the Christian funeral address of a fellow clergyman and a mutual lover of

⁴³ Vivian Daschund, interview by Kyle Madson, June 20, 2007.

⁴⁴ Naomi Petersen, interview by Kyle Madson, July 25, 2007.

⁴⁵ Paul Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, July 6, 2007.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bruno Wilinski, interview by Kyle Madson, July 16, 2007.

⁴⁸ Paul Madson, interview by Kyle Madson, July 6, 2007.

poetry. The address began with the famed Shakespearian words of Mark Antony as he interred his beloved Caesar:

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar.⁴⁹

Yet Antony contradicts the very purpose stated in his opening line, the intentions for his friend in death; “to bury ... not to praise.” It is this very common but vain and comfortless practice upon burial which Madson, in verse, so carefully and comfortingly evades in favor of the Gospel:

So when we say of him who now is gone:
“We have no words of praise with which
“To magnify his name,” ’tis not because we want
That name to be besmirched on memory’s hallowed wall,
But rather this: We want it to be placed
Among poor sinners lost, repentant of their sin,
Whose only hope it was, whose glory it shall be,
That which had learned to know God’s wondrous grace
Which pardons every sin.⁵⁰

For understandable reasons, Madson’s preaching proved a highly sought-after commodity. Though his inability to turn down such frequent requests was a bone of contention with his faithful wife, Madson did keep a busy schedule as a visiting festival and special occasion preacher. At the service for his eldest son’s seminary graduation in December of 1945, Madson became the first outsider to the Wisconsin Synod ever to preach at seminary graduation. It came to be that Pastor Madson would be the only minister availed the opportunity to preach at all four Synodical Conference seminary commencements in a lifetime. The same humble Norwegian was even asked, and graciously consented, to speak at the Missouri Synod’s own centennial celebration of its 1838 Perry County founding.⁵¹

⁴⁹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (London: Clarendon Press, 1878), 47 (Act III, Scene II).

⁵⁰ N. A. Madson sermon at the Christian burial of Rev. O. M. Gullerud, July 17, 1937, Norseland, Minnesota.

⁵¹ Norman Madson, Sr., *Preaching to Preachers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1952), 187.

Norman Madson, Sr. was a gifted man, especially in the pulpit. An accomplished orator and possessor of a rolodex of hymns upon which he would call quickly and pertinently by memory, he maintained a passion for and poise in public speaking rarely rivaled. While all these are desirous and admirable traits, none proved the capstone to his preaching prowess. His greatest ally in that was his faithful and diligent reliance upon Scripture, God's Holy Word, for all that could and, indeed, should be proclaimed. A favorite verse of his when speaking to or especially installing other pastors was the succinct directive of St. Peter, "If a man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Of this unwavering benchmark he says in conclusion: "There is the divine standard set up for all times, for all men, in all places, who want to bear the name of the blessed Christ. For what is His purpose in revealing His truth? Can there be any other than to magnify the grace of God?"⁵²

The Call to Prepare Shepherds

For the first twenty-eight years of its existence, the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church relied upon sister synods for the training of its pastors. Thoughts of establishing their own seminary had been the hope of the little synod from its earliest days. When much patience had been expended and much planning employed, World War II postponed this beginning as well.

Finally, in 1946, the war had subsided and the synod's Board of Regents now had a working plan in order. In the form of a fourteen-point proposal, the Board of Regents first resolved to establish a full theological seminary in conjunction with Bethany Lutheran College to begin already in the fall of 1946. Secondly, the proposal called for one man to be called as professor of theology and Dean of the Seminary. The final of the fourteen points simply stated, "The synod authorizes and instructs the Board of Regents to issue a call to the Reverend Norman A. Madson ... as Dean of the Theological Seminary."⁵³ The dedicatory service was held September 24, 1946.

So it was in this capacity that Norman A. Madson would serve out the remaining thirteen years of his ministry, teaching and instructing the future under-shepherds of his humble synod. While others were installed as seminary faculty, they continued to maintain full-time positions as college professors as well. Madson was the primary instructor

⁵² Ibid., 127-128.

⁵³ Herbert J. Larson, ed., *Built on The Rock* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), 123.

of a majority of the original curriculum. Among the courses he taught were Dogmatics, Church History, Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, Hymnology, and others as the need arose.

Those especially gifted and proficient at a particular expertise do not always make the best instructors of their particular proficiency. This obstacle proved not so troublesome with Madson in his teaching of homiletics. Among the tenets he aimed to establish within the students was first and foremost the purpose in preaching, the very reason for which Christ bestowed such a task upon men. Madson emphasized the purpose which the apostle Paul shared with the Ephesian Christians, namely, “the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”⁵⁴ Upon this he expounded by citing such goals as unity of the faith, a well-grounded knowledge of the Son of God, and the edification of the whole body of the Christian Church.

While this was the aim of preaching in general, he also testified to the importance of preaching being “aimed at the special needs of your hearers,” calling for “pastoral complexion,” and a need to impress upon the sheep of the fold that you “understand them and that you are mindful of their needs.”⁵⁵ As an assurance that the height of these needs would be met by spiritual care, he likewise emphasized the use of the pericopes. “If you use them faithfully,” stated Madson, “you will not become a rider of hobbies.”⁵⁶

Sermons, in addition to addressing parishioners in a personal way, were to possess an earnest and affectionate nature. “Let your hearers be given the inescapable conviction that what you are saying is a matter of life and death with you—that you are preaching as a dying man to dying men.... This does not only apply to your manner of delivery, but to the contents ... as well—yes, especially the contents.”⁵⁷

Even while serving as chief classroom instructor, Norman Sr. still had many an opportunity to exercise this craft from the pulpit himself. As seminary dean over thirteen years, he had occasion to preach at quite a number of installation services. In addition, he was in high demand at seminary graduations and other festival services throughout the Synodical Conference as well. These forums afforded him opportunity to speak of the demanding task, but also the high privilege that rested in preaching. To these audiences, which consisted of the

⁵⁴ N. A. Madson, “General Characteristics of a Sermon” (classroom lecture notes, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN, 1948).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

succeeding generations of truth-wielding shepherds, Madson's message was commonly based upon a single passage from Paul's words to the Ephesian elders, "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

So his parting words of encouragement and exhortation by letter to a young minister still ring true: "Remember, there is nothing which this sin-sick, confused, disilluminated world so much needs as that comfort which the God of all comfort expects each one of you to proclaim—and that unconditionally."⁵⁸

In his parish ministry, Norman had taken great pleasure in providing pastoral care for the various peoples within his congregations. The care and pleasure he took in teaching this aspect of ministry to the seminarians would reflect just that. Regarding this task he offers the following: "Perhaps the most difficult task a pastor has in all his ministry is properly to be a shepherd for those who are in the age of adolescence ... being near them in a time when they are hard to get near."⁵⁹ But to this admittedly difficult task, he offered conditional assurance: "If you have done your duty as a faithful pastor in the years of catechetical instruction, showing the young boys and girls that you are interested in them, and that your one concern is to be a true Seelsorger, not an unreasonable taskmaster, you will have won their confidence."⁶⁰

Still another focal point of study in pastoral care was pastoral visits, in particular, their close connection with effective preaching. "Unless you visit your people," stated Madson, "you will not be able to preach to them as you ought. You must learn to know them first-hand."⁶¹ Corresponding to these home visits would be those visits that would become necessary at the sick-bed. "Though not an easy task," Norman remarks of such bedside visits, "it is one of the most fruit-bearing tasks. You learn to preach better because of it. When people are sick, perhaps unto death, they want something more than saving of face, which is all too common at times even among members of Christian congregations. It will, of course, require knowledge of human nature ... but remember, there is no better text-book on human psychology than the Bible itself."⁶²

Even in recognizing this as one of the more difficult tasks of a parish pastor, Madson had a deep love for this particular aspect of

⁵⁸ Madson, *Preaching to Preachers*, 64.

⁵⁹ Madson, "General Characteristics of a Sermon," 37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 10.

the ministry, particularly because of the hyper-receptive spiritual state that so often accompanied it. Regarding such opportune moments, he states, "Scripture texts should be quoted verbatim. And O, how necessary that you have a quiver full of them."⁶³ Careful instruction was given his pupils regarding both the need for and the care necessary in the communing of the sick. And if and when a minister should find himself at the dying bed of one of God's dear sheep, "Be sure," Norman pleaded, "that you quote quietly and distinctly both the Law and the Gospel."⁶⁴

Synod and Synodical Conference Activities

Taking an active role in spiritual dealings at a synodical level, was of utmost import to the small Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. Dean Madson, like all the clergy and not a few laymen too, was necessarily enlisted in these efforts promptly upon his entry into the synod. As early as the June 1925 convention, still weeks before his installation into the synod, Norman presented a paper to the convention on Christian Schools.⁶⁵ For several years following his first convention in 1925, Norman served as the chairman of the synod's Board for Education, writing several powerful convention papers, exhorting that the synod "must remain champions of the Christian day school."⁶⁶

As early as 1929, Norman A., together with the Reverend Christian Anderson, was charged with the synodical task of pursuing a new hymnary. In later years, what was initially a one-year task bloomed into a full-blown Synodical Conference undertaking. Beginning in earnest in 1934, Madson along with Reverends Anderson and Adolph Harstad, served as representatives of the Norwegian Synod to the Inter-synodical Committee on Hymnology and Liturgics for the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Made up of four distinct church bodies, the Synodical Conference, and in particular this hymnal sub-committee, aimed to assemble a new Synodical Conference hymn book. While a common Synodical Conference hymnal would prove beneficial in many ways, it did produce some frustrations in that it simply could not come to contain all the content each respective synod desired. The Norwegian Synod as the smallest body of the four, yet

⁶³ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁵ *Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church Convention Report* (1925), 60-64.

⁶⁶ *Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church Convention Report* (1928), 82.

possessing a rich hymn tradition of its own, faced a decided disadvantage in this respect. After the book was published by Concordia Publishing House in 1941 under the name *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Madson's discontent showed itself in his occasional reference to the completed edition as "the Missouri hymnal."⁶⁷

Among the strengths noted by Madson of the Synodical Conference hymnal were the arrangement of hymns by subject matter and the prayers included in it.⁶⁸ He certainly retained some dissatisfaction with the Synodical Conference hymnal of 1941. He also had some proclivities for the Norwegian hymnary of 1913. Still Madson's final appeal for the Synodical Conference hymnal was made as a confessional stand. He asked, "Why use a hymnbook that was an instrument of a false union when we can have one that was prepared by those who are officially united?"⁶⁹

In the year following the publishing of the Synodical Conference hymnal, Norman Madson was elected by the convention floor as the synod president, replacing Reverend Ingebritson upon his completion of five years of service in that office.⁷⁰ He served in this capacity for the final four years of his ministry at Our Savior's, Princeton. The position increased the already heavy load of correspondence conducted by the parish pastor.⁷¹ In addition, a certain amount of travel was necessitated by this position in order to be present at both intra-synodical functions as well as Synodical Conference gatherings.

Upon accepting the call to serve as dean of the Bethany Seminary in 1946, Madson resigned his position as synod president. In the years immediately following his newly acquired office at the seminary, he was appointed to a standing synodical committee comparable to the present-day Doctrine Committee, then called the "Union Committee." Flanked in the early years of the committee by Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker as well as others who would come and go, Norman served faithfully in this capacity through the 1956 synod convention.

⁶⁷ N. A. Madson, "Hymnology" (classroom lectures, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN, n.d.). An example of such frustrations included the omission of the hymn, "The Kingdom Satan Founded" by Danish hymnwriter Thomas Kingo. According to Madson, "it was ruled out by the chairman of the hymnal committee because it had a reference to *Satan's Kingdom* in the very first line."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church Convention Report* (1942), 78.

⁷¹ His years as synod president very closely mirror those years during which he carried out the thorough ministry-by-letter to the soldiers during WWII.

Norman Madson gained a comprehensive view of the complexities existing within the Synodical Conference, some certainly personal but especially doctrinal because of his involvement on the hymnal committee (advanced during his years as synod president) and his extended presence on the synod's Union Committee. While the conference itself was most readily viewed through the printed publications of the respective synods, the depth of these complications were not as evident in those more public forums. Madson, and perhaps only a handful of others privy to his same experience, perceived the full width and depth of these diverging interests. Knowing this, Madson was adamant that these pressing issues not be reserved, tempered or, worst of all kept completely from the laity and even some of the clergy. Regarding the laity's need for awareness of these issues, he wrote: "Our people have a right to know what is separating us. And if they have the facts, then we may leave it to the truly enlightened laity to decide what is right and wrong. Wishful thinking is not going to get us anywhere in these matters."⁷²

In a meeting which occurred in January of 1945, the Norwegian Synod's Union Committee agenda included serious questions regarding: 1) the assertion by a theological faculty member that Missouri *had* taught *Intuitu Fidei* at some point in their history even under the likes of Walther and Pieper; 2) the unionistic assertion by the same faculty member and perhaps other synodical players that there was "convincing evidence of a conservative trend in all Lutheran bodies" at that time; 3) the advocating of a "selective fellowship"; 4) the growing tendency of Missouri's *Lutheran Witness* to suppress and ignore those views not in favor of a union between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church; 5) the same previously mentioned faculty member pursuing colloquiums with an ALC seminary faculty member who was known to openly propose "historical and scientific inaccuracies" within Scripture.⁷³

With these issues already evident in 1945, the prospects for the future appeared foreboding to Madson. For him, one who had a relatively detailed history with these dangerous unionistic persuasions and false teachings, the potential repercussions were clear. He knew,

⁷² N. A. Madson to LCMS President Behnken, Ph.D., March 24, 1944. Madson wrote an essay for the *Lutheran Sentinel* 26, no. 22 (1943), entitled "Can the Laity be Trusted?" A question he answers in the affirmative in the article.

⁷³ N. A. Madson wrote to the Synodical Conference editorial committee: "Questions We Want Dr. Graebner to Answer at Meeting of Editors" (Dec. 13, 1944). Norman wrote a brief essay speaking to the first question on the agenda in the *Lutheran Sentinel* 26, no. 23 (1943).

however, the greatest struggle would be making these scriptural side-steps apparent to the laity, placing the truth clearly before them.

Something is wrong somewhere when facts of this nature are not brought to the attention of our people by those who have the facts.... If that leaven of higher criticism which has run rampant in the ULC is to be stealthily smuggled into our Synodical Conference circles by men who say one thing and all too often mean the very opposite, our fight for purity of doctrine is a lost cause.⁷⁴

The very struggle which Dean Madson foresaw by the words above came to fruition in the next twenty years as the Synodical Conference staggered its way through suspensions of fellowship, significant fallouts even within the respective synods, and finally to the dissolving of the conference all together in 1967. For Norman personally, what began as disgruntled feelings toward the Missourians advancing the union efforts with the ALC in the forties, over time became disenchantment with those in his own synod failing to decisively conclude that Missouri's track was not one they themselves could reverse.

While the 1955 Norwegian Synod convention's suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod was a move in the proper direction, in the minds of some, it was only the first step in properly disassociating with those "no longer *walking* in the old ways."⁷⁵ Two scenarios were particularly conscience-binding to Madson at this point. First and foremost was his own synod's insistence on continued meetings with the LCMS in spite of their reaffirmation of the *Common Confession* of 1951, a settlement of past differences between themselves and the ALC. This concern he articulated in a letter to a fellow pastor as early as the fall of the suspending convention of 1955: "Can we go on meeting with errorists without endangering our own convictions?"⁷⁶

Especially exhausting and offensive to Madson was the use by the Missouri camp of "expressions which may be understood in different ways." Here he was speaking specifically of the *Common Confession* document of 1950. Such a document undoubtedly resurrected in his mind the disturbing *Opgjør* pitfall which brought down the Norwegian

⁷⁴ Brief essay composed by Norman A. Madson entitled "Dr. Mattes on Inspiration," n.d.

⁷⁵ *Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church Convention Report* (1955). The quote is from the report of the Union Committee regarding the Missouri Synod matters.

⁷⁶ N. A. Madson to "Brother Harstad," Mankato, Minnesota, October 1955.

Lutherans fifty some years earlier.⁷⁷ Madson felt some of the language being employed in these matters was of such a vague nature that he called it in one letter “a scandalous game which has been played all too long.”⁷⁸ An additional but secondary concern for Madson were the other associations remaining in joint ventures such as foreign missions and the Bethesda Home which were unaddressed even after the 1955 suspension.

Finally, these two issues in particular proved to be irreconcilable with Madson’s conscience. This truth became plain at the 1959 convention when the long-revered synod pastor and sitting dean of the seminary made his final convention-floor statement by simply walking away. In spite of the council of several of his sons and the pleas of numerous other synod members to reconsider his intentions, Norman A. Madson tendered his resignation as dean of the theological faculty by letter to the synod president in the late days of the summer of 1959.

Though this departure from his post came with a significant weight, Madson’s actions were not unprecedented. In fact, his former counterpart at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and close friend, Professor Edmund Reim, had taken the very same step only two years earlier. Likewise, numerous other pastors, both of the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods respectively, as well as faculty even at Bethany Lutheran College, found themselves compelled to take the same course during the latter years of the 1950s.

Norman’s self-removal from his post at the seminary and his corresponding synodical duties within the Norwegian Synod ultimately led him to pursue association with what was at the time the Church of the Lutheran Confession in its organizing stages. Norman and Elsie’s church membership was ultimately transferred to Salem Lutheran Church, Eagle Lake, Minnesota for the remaining months of his life. His funeral and Christian burial were conducted by Reverend Martin Galstad at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato in December of 1962.

In all the years of struggle over these long and arduous contentions, Norman’s aim had been and ever remained nothing more or less than scriptural truth. In this regard he would often refer to the words of the Apostle Paul, “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:8). As he was wont to do, he also in a letter to a friend regarding the same quoted a favorite poet, saying, “Truth,

⁷⁷ N. A. Madson to “dear Nils,” Mankato, MN, June 1960.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

crushed to earth, shall rise again, The eternal years of God's are hers."⁷⁹ Even after his seminary resignation in the fall of 1959, he carried on in earnest a stunning amount of correspondence to this very testimony both within his beloved Norwegian Synod and outside its pales as well.

It is clear that Norman's own personal history, especially in such trying matters, played a significant role in his conscience-driven actions during those final years. In a Reformation sermon he had written years earlier, Norman acknowledged what he estimated must have been one of the greatest burdens Luther faced during the great reformation:

To break with father and mother, relatives and friends, is not an easy task. But to bid farewell, to the faith in which you have been fostered and to which you have dedicated your first love, is even a still greater burden—a burden which proves too great for the vast majority of men. But both of these crosses were placed on Luther at a very young age.⁸⁰

Norman Madson, as he penned this sermon in 1933, had already done both in his young life. He knew well both the inner struggle and toil that existed in being separated in faith from family as well as the turmoil that surrounded leaving a church body in which one had been baptized, reared, and even theologically trained. In spite of the grave difficulty that existed in such a circumstance, Madson knew that true spiritual rest was found only *through* that tumultuous experience. He said as much even to a relative stranger by letter: "I was myself laboring under the curse of being in a church body which had compromised its confession in the infamous Opgjør, and could not come to rest in my soul until I had come out from its midst."⁸¹ Calling on that history in which he, perhaps over-optimistically, had remained with what he would later term the "wretched merger," Norman certainly found himself compelled, even obligated to act in an entirely different way, faced with a similar situation once again in the Synodical Conference of the late 1950s. Though his tone throughout this serious ordeal became pointed and even abrasive at times, his true spirit was born out perhaps most accurately when he stated to a long time friend, "There are times when the greatest service we can do our true brothers in faith is to tell them honestly we will not go one step farther."⁸² In his stepping away, even from those whom he

⁷⁹ N. A. Madson letter quoting James Russel Lowell's *The Present Crisis*.

⁸⁰ N. A. Madson Reformation Sermon, 1933, based on Matthew 12:46–50.

⁸¹ N. A. Madson letter to Rev. H. R. Gregorson of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 1957.

⁸² N. A. Madson to a friend in untitled correspondence, 1960.

considered “true brothers in faith,” the heart of his concern remained just that, brotherly service.

Norman A Madson, Sr. in Print

Though not an author of books, Madson’s office as public minister of the Word gave occasion for him to become very well “published.” Well over one thousand of his sermons are held by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod archives. He contributed frequently as essayist for synod publications, including the *Lutheran Sentinel* and the *Evangelisk Lutheran Tidende*. As an officianado of poetry he was known to exercise his hand in that realm. The greatest concentration of his writings, however, appeared in four published compilations of his sermons and chapel addresses.

The first of them was entitled *Ved Betlehems-krybben*. A compilation of six Christmas sermons, it is the only one of his four publications to remain printed in his native Norwegian. This publication is long out of print and all but sold out of its original printing in 1935.

The second of Norman’s printed and bound publications was the first of what became a two-volume work under the name *Evening Bells At Bethany* and *Evening Bells at Bethany II*. Both volumes were comprised of Madson’s chapel addresses from Bethany Lutheran College. The first, published in 1948, had its origins in a request made by the student body itself. It was welcomed with resounding success, selling out of print within that same year.⁸³ A review of the book by Rev. Justin A. Petersen would go on to note the especially hearty reception by the parents whose children were most directly benefited by such scriptural teaching and comfort.

These devotionals struck a responsive chord in many hearts—students, alumni, faithful friend and well-wishers of our college—but especially in the hearts of the fathers and mothers who have sons and daughters at Bethany. What comfort it must afford them to know their young hopefuls ... are constantly listening to the voice of their Good Shepherd in our chapel exercises.⁸⁴

The second volume was printed in 1952 after insistent requests for additional material in the likeness of the first. The author, however,

⁸³ The first volume of *Evening Bells at Bethany* is among the stacks of the Library of Congress under the call number BV4316.T5 M32.

⁸⁴ Norman A. Madson, *Evening Bells at Bethany* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Co, 1948). The dust jacket review is by Rev. J. Petersen.

mentions in the foreword an additional reason for the printing of these devotionals: "The many pious fathers and mothers who have committed to our charge their dearest earthly possessions, their sons and daughters, have a right to know what is being taught their children as the one thing needful at this seat of Christian learning."⁸⁵

The final publication of Madson's writing, *Preaching to Preachers*, came to fruition over a period of time and was also published in 1952. Its printing was especially prompted by Madson's many opportunities to preach in unique occasions, in particular seminary gradations, ordination services, Synodical Conference meetings, and other forums where clergymen and those pursuing the same calling were in great number. The funding for the project was fronted by a former parishioner, Ingolf O. Teigen, in the amount of \$1,200. It was paid back by the author largely from sales in something under two years' time.

The book was reviewed by a good number of publishing catalogues and clergy themselves. The book's reviews contained manifold compliments such as the following: "They are sermons for preachers ... read with profit particularly by theological students and young ministers.... The entire series is a consistent plea for preaching the Word, with its center in the Cross and justification by grace through faith."⁸⁶ Also, with regard to audience and content, one reviewer writes:

While his sermons will be enjoyed also by members of the laity, they ... offer comfort, courage, and strength particularly to clergy.... It is heartening to read sermons which come straight from the shoulder, which make no attempts to be ambiguous or sugar coated, but which at the same time radiate evangelical warmth and clerical integrity.⁸⁷

Finally, an individual recipient, clergyman, and distant admirer of Dean Madson said of the tone of these sermons, "*They* strike a familiar ring to me ... like meeting and old friend."⁸⁸ The same gentlemen had never seen Norman Madson before his address at the Synodical Conference Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Service. "You endeared yourself

⁸⁵ N. A. Madson, *Evening Bells at Bethany II* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Co, 1952), foreword.

⁸⁶ Review of *Preaching to Preachers* by N. A. Madson, *Book News Letter of Augsburg Publishing House* 187 (September 1953).

⁸⁷ Rev. Walter Buszin, review of *Preaching to Preachers* (Norman Madson personal correspondence).

⁸⁸ Rev. Conrad J. Engelder to Dean Norman Madson, (August 1953).

to me by that address,” said the young clergyman. “I had never seen you before. But now I will never forget you.”⁸⁹

A Blessed End

Though remaining very alive through the saving waters of his baptism, still sin and its attendant, death, would do their work on Madson’s body too. Having experienced periods of illness and recovery in his younger years, he began to endure what would be his final decline in the later summer months of 1962. Cancer found in the bone was the cause at this point. The late summer and fall of this year found Madson confined to his home where a hospital bed had been installed for his care. His bones deteriorated quickly, at one point breaking an arm just lifting himself from a seated position. In spite of his illness, this “dying man” continued with his untiring correspondence with “dying men.” Though his physical body was failing him, his family was not. In addition to his loving and faithful spouse and her continuing care, his children and grandchildren were frequent visitors during his waning days. They often stayed for days or even weeks to assist with his care and to be of support to Elsie. Norman’s younger sister, Jennie, as well as daughter, Naomi, both trained nurses, were present for extended stays providing significant hospice help in this trying time.

And when his final hour came, the Lord did indeed grant Norman Madson, Sr. a blessed end. Surrounded by children and grandchildren on his dying bed, favorite Lutheran hymns were sung as cool wash clothes were placed upon his head to soothe the fever. Madson fell asleep in Jesus on December 10, 1962. His body, along with wife Elsie, now lays awaiting the Last Day’s final glorification at Pilgrim’s Rest Cemetery outside of Mankato, Minnesota.

Thanks to Thee, O Christ victorious!

Thanks to Thee, O Lord of life!

Death hath now no power o’er us,

Thou hast conquered in the strife.

Thanks because Thou didst arise

And hast opened paradise

None can fully sing the glory

Of the resurrection story.

T. H. Kingo | ELH 354:2

LSQ

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The First Two Seminary Presidents, Ylvisaker and Teigen

*Erling T. Teigen
Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

IN 1977 BETHANY CELEBRATED THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the synod's ownership of the college and the thirtieth anniversary of the seminary. In his sermon for the occasion, President emeritus Bjarne W. Teigen said about Sigurd Ylvisaker that he was "sensitive to beauty, art, literature, which was revealed not only in his life but also in his writings." He also wrote that both Ylvisaker and Norman Madson, the first seminary dean, "came out of the same background of a liberal arts education, but they had learned to take it in its proper perspective. Both stood solidly grounded in the Scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ."¹

This essay will describe the context in which Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was established and the contributions made by its first two presidents, both in collaboration with Seminary Dean Norman A. Madson.

Until 1955 Bethany Lutheran College and the seminary were both part of Norwegian Synod/ELS corporation. Since 1927 when the synod acquired the college, the college president was elected by the synod for a four-year term. B. W. Teigen was elected by the synod to a second four-year term in 1955. Ylvisaker, between 1930 and 1950, underwent that process five times. It was probably a nerve-wracking time for the president. The Board of Regents nominated one person, but on the

¹ Bjarne W. Teigen, "Sermon Delivered at the 50th and 30th Anniversaries of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 17, no. 5 (Fall 1977): 52.

convention floor other nominations could be offered. By 1959, that rule was changed and the duty of electing the college president was given to the Board of Regents and the president then served at the pleasure of the board.

After the synod had acquired Bethany, two departments were under the direction of the president—the high school, with a principal at its head, and the junior college with the president being its administrator. When the synod established Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, it too was deemed a department of the college, with the president of the college having the ultimate responsibility for the three departments.

In 1959, a separate corporation for the high school, college and seminary was established, and the bylaws of the new corporation spelled out the organization of the college already in place: “The president of the College and Seminary shall be the chief administrative officer of the school and of all its departments.... The Dean of the Seminary shall be responsible directly to the President. He [the Dean] shall supervise the Seminary department, etc.”

This arrangement was in effect until 1974. Five years after the high school was closed (1969), the synod resolved to separate the college and the seminary as institutions, each with its own president, with both elected by the Board of Regents. The regents were also to study creating two separate corporations, though nothing ever came to the synod on that matter.

“Doc Y”

Sigurd Ylvisaker’s background contained much that prepared him to understand the nature of theological education. His father, Johannes Thorbjørnsen Ylvisaker, was the third faculty member called to the synod’s seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. In the 1880s, Johannes was given a year off to visit the Church of Norway’s theological faculty in Oslo, and the university at Leipzig. In 1904, he was given honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees from the seminaries in St. Louis and Wauwatosa and taught chiefly in the area of New Testament. He is best known for his book on the gospels, still in use.

Sigurd grew up in a home that revolved around the Norwegian Synod seminary, first in Madison, then in Robbinsdale, Minnesota, and finally in the Hamline district of St. Paul. Of seven brothers, six attended the seminary, and two became doctors, though one of them first took the theological course. Two became college presidents and one a college professor. Of three sisters, two married pastors. The other sister,

Gudrun, was a longtime church organist and piano and organ teacher. The girls attended the old synod's Red Wing Ladies Seminary and the brothers all went to Luther College for their undergraduate education.

The parents instilled a love of music in their children. Juul Madson reported that all of the children had piano lessons. Sigurd played piano and organ well enough to play for church services at the Saxon Free Church congregation he attended while in Leipzig. He played the clarinet as well. The Ylvisaker family had enough musicians to form a chamber orchestra to play at home and at their church. The music for the Bethany song, "High Amid the Trees You Stand," was his composition.

The family spoke Norwegian at home, and Sigurd also was fluent in German, making it possible to navigate the German university system. Ylvisaker seems to have been one of those especially gifted with languages; he was fluent in English, Norwegian, and German, and probably Latin as well. He mastered the biblical languages, and to produce the *Babylonian-Assyrian grammar*, he had to have mastered that language as well.

Sigurd was ambidextrous. According to some, he was left handed, but being forced to use his right hand from a young age, he was equally facile with both. An unverified legend is that in a Hebrew or Greek class, with a piece of chalk in each hand, and at the board with each arm outstretched he wrote in Hebrew with his right hand and Greek with his left, working at the same time toward the middle. Whether true or not, it testifies to his linguistic skills. According to Juul Madson, however, Ylvisaker did on occasion entertain his classes by taking chalk in each hand and writing on the board with both at the same time.

After graduating from the seminary, his father sent him to Leipzig where he got a thorough view of the European system of theological education, not all of which was worth emulating. He remained at Leipzig, studying the ancient languages much longer than planned. Each year he and his father had an earnest mail debate about remaining another year. He did stay and came home with a Ph.D. and a dissertation under the title *Babylonian and Assyrian Grammar—An Investigation on the Basis of the Letters from the Time of the Sargonids*. The thesis was that Babylonian and Assyrian were two distinct dialects of the same language.

It was probably because he brought the first doctorate into the reorganized Norwegian Synod that his colleagues and students commonly referred to Ylvisaker as "Doc" or "Doc Y." To his face, however, it was

“Dr. Ylvisaker.” The term “Doc” was affectionate and respectful, and called attention to his dignity and decency.

Though he was ordained and served a parish in Minot, North Dakota for a brief time from 1910 to 1911, he was soon called to Luther College, where he remained on the faculty until 1919 when his conscience would not permit him to remain in the merged Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (later, ELC), and he cast his lot with the reorganized Norwegian Synod.

The idea of having its own schools (high school, college, and seminary) was on the agenda of the reorganized synod from the beginning, and for the first decade, it remained out of reach. The 1918 Constitution of the synod (translated in 1946) said in Chapter IV:

The Synod shall watch over the purity and unity of doctrine (Eph. 4:3–16; 1 Cor. 1:10) as well as over the development of Christian life, and shall therefore: ...d) establish and manage institutions of learning for the education of orthodox pastors and teachers and promote home and foreign missions;

A thought voiced often in convention discussions and *Luthersk Tidende* articles was that they had lost what they called “our school”—Luther College. The acquisition of Bethany College in 1927 answered part of that urge, but the depression put the brakes on anything more than *wishing* for a seminary.

By the time the seminary opened in 1946 with Ylvisaker as president of the college and Norman A. Madson as the first seminary dean, the two had a thirty-five-year history of working closely together. While Ylvisaker joined the synod in 1919 and Madson in 1925, they had been colleagues at Luther College when Madson taught and solicited funds for the college from 1911 to 1912 and again from 1916 to 1918. Both had a keen sense of what the synod had lost in the merger, high on the list being Luther College and Luther Seminary.

In 1926, when the Bethany College Association was formed to take over the failing Bethany Ladies College and hold it until the synod could see its way clear to take up the challenge, Sigurd Ylvisaker and Norman A. Madson enthusiastically joined the effort, and were elected officers of the Board of Directors of the Bethany Association—Ylvisaker as chairman and Madson as secretary. The association raised the necessary down payment and bought the college and held it until the following year when the synod, somewhat reluctantly, saw its way clear to taking over the ownership, management and support of the

school. The Bethany Association's Board of Directors guided the school from 1927 to 1928 as a joint committee with a Board of Regents elected by the synod.

Ylvisaker was especially key to persuading the synod to take over the school. In a speech to the delegates at the 1927 convention, he spoke earnestly: "The Synod needs just such a school to gather itself around. Without its own school, the Synod simply cannot hope to continue as the Norwegian Synod."

The first explicit charge to the Board of Regents to consider adding a theological seminary had come in 1935. There had been no mention of a seminary in the regents' report, but the convention adopted the following instruction to the regents: "To consider carefully the problem of training our own ministerial candidates by establishing a theological seminary course in connection with Bethany Lutheran College, and then report their findings to the 1936 Convention of the Synod." However, nothing was said on the matter in the 1936 and 1937 regents' reports. In 1938, there was again no mention of a seminary in the regents' report, but the synod adopted the floor committee's recommendation: "The Board of Regents is encouraged to continue considering the matter of training our own ministerial candidates and also of adding a Normal [teacher training] Department to Bethany College."

In 1942 Madson was elected president of the synod, and it is certain that there was considerable discussion between the synod president and the college president about what the synod's seminary should look like. In 1943, the board's report included a recommendation "that a theological course be established at Bethany College as soon as possible." The 1944 report, however, brought some disappointment. In a three-page discussion of the seminary matter, the board reported that the Selective Service Agency informed them that the 1939 draft law said that no students at a seminary established after September 16, 1939 would be eligible for deferment from the draft, so they could not establish the seminary that fall.

By 1938, the importance of having its own seminary had become more urgent for the synod. Toward the end of the 1930s, fellowship with the Missouri Synod was deteriorating because of Missouri's negotiations with the American Lutheran Church and the acceptance of compromising doctrinal statements. In 1945, the Norwegian Synod was moving away from its use of the St. Louis seminary, leading the convention to adopt a resolution declaring that its theological students should henceforth attend the Wisconsin Synod's Thiensville seminary.

However, that resolution was not carried out. In the spring of 1946, the Selective Service Agency informed the synod that the seminary department would be recognized for draft deferments. The synod delegates then voted to start the seminary that fall. Madson's second two-year term as synodical president expired and Adolph Harstad was elected to succeed him. The regents nominated Norman Madson to be dean of the seminary and the convention directed the Board of Regents to call him.

As the plans for the seminary were taking shape, two of the synod's clergy were especially familiar with the workings of the old Norwegian Synod's college and seminary—Ylvisaker already skilled as an administrator and academic theologian, and Madson as a dedicated parish pastor, preacher, and theologian. Both had watched the deterioration of the theology of the old Norwegian Synod on its way to the merger, and were deeply committed to saving the best of the old synod's confessional church life.

Another collaborative project in which Madson and Ylvisaker were both involved was in the production of a statement on church fellowship entitled *Unity, Union, and Unionism*. In 1934, the synod president appointed a committee of four to study the matter of church fellowship. With H. M. Tjernagel as chairman, the committee consisted of Christian Anderson, S. C. Ylvisaker, and N. A. Madson. The committee presented its findings and the draft of a set of theses on *Unity, Union and Unionism* (i.e., church fellowship) which came to be known as "Triple U." It was presented to the synod along with an explanatory essay for each of the six theses, adopted and finally sent to the Synodical Conference and to the Missouri. It is still considered an important statement of the synod to such an extent that it is posted on the synod's webpage.² The four men on the committee had all lived through the perils of the 1917 merger and in the theses they applied the bitter lessons of their experience, especially that church unity cannot be achieved through parallel statements or doctrinal compromise.

Three of the four (Tjernagel died in 1940) also played active roles in the synod during the Synodical Conference disputes of the 1940s and 1950s. The leadership of Madson and Ylvisaker at Bethany College and Seminary was especially important for the direction the college and seminary took during that period.

Ylvisaker was president of the college only until 1950 when he retired. He stayed on teaching in the seminary for a year before moving to Texas. Since Norman Madson was called by the synod convention

² <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>.

in 1946, there was precious little time to organize the institution. Ylvisaker as president of the college had to take part in making the physical arrangements and establishing policies, but the end of the war and the return of veterans as well as the years of the Korean conflict had provided plenty of headaches for the college president with the booming enrollment of returning service men and women.

Ylvisaker's contribution to the formation of the seminary was significant. He was certainly a factor in keeping the idea of the synod's own seminary alive. Ylvisaker was well connected at St. Louis and that played a part in developing the college faculty so that it was able to provide at least some breadth when the seminary opened. He was able to get recommendations for bright and talented candidates of theology from St. Louis who already had academic aptitude in areas needed at the college. As early as 1929, St. Louis graduate Walter Buszin was called and remained for several years. He was acting president in 1929, and founded the Bethany Choir. Later Carl S. Meyer, who became an important church historian was added. Oswald Hoffman, later Lutheran Hour speaker, directed the choir and taught for a few years. Paul Zimmerman, who went on to serve as president of two of the Missouri Synod's Concordias (Seward and Ann Arbor) became a valuable asset to the college. Robert Hoerber and Alfred Fremder were also very helpful additions to the faculty, Hoerber as a Greek professor and Fremder as an organist and choir director. All of these men moved on after a few years, but they all contributed to a faculty that could support the seminary.

Those who were to be assistant professors in the seminary in 1946 were the theologically trained men on the faculty. In addition to Madson, they were S. C. Ylvisaker, C. A. Moldstad, Martin Galstad, B. W. Teigen, and Paul Zimmerman.

Ylvisaker's contributions in establishing the seminary may be summarized in these points:

1. He had kept alive the long-time dream for the synod to have its own seminary.
2. He developed the college faculty to the point that the college was able to support the seminary with a competent academic community and a good library—the Synod Memorial Library consisted of the libraries of old Synod pastors including M. F. Wiese and J. A. Ottesen.
3. He kept the faculty and the synod focused on the ideal of a Liberal Arts education, an ideal which also was applied to theological

education. By the 1950s, students headed for the seminary were encouraged to acquire a baccalaureate degree at the state colleges and universities.

In an article entitled “Preparing for a Job?” in *The Bethany Bulletin* January 1934, Ylvisaker argued for a liberal arts education without using the term. While he granted that there is a need for job and professional training, he wrote:

However, a job is not life, and being ready for a job is not the same as being ready for life.... And yet, how narrow the interests of him who has been educated for one certain thing and no other! What a drudgery life becomes to him who has not learned that a job is secondary to life and assumes its true significance only when made to be subservient to life.... How can he live a life that is full, drinking deeply of the fountain of knowledge and the wisdom of God and giving as freely to his fellowmen? What of his influence in the community, his wise counsel in the affairs of the church? What of his need for a wider outlook, a firmer footing, a deeper understanding when his children require the sane and sober guidance of mature thought and well-grounded judgment?

“B. W.”

Bjarne W. Teigen was of the same mind. He also came from a Norwegian Synod clergy family. His father, Martin Olsen Teigen, was ordained at the 1900 synod convention in Willmar, Minnesota. He was sent by the mission board of the synod to an area north of Minot, North Dakota stretching to the Canadian border. His commission was to gather the Norwegian immigrants in that area into congregations. After several years, he resigned from the ministry for health reasons and returned to his boyhood occupation—farming. He was also active in politics and served a term in the Minnesota legislature. When the Norwegian Synod merged with two other groups, he and his family joined a Missouri Synod congregation in North Dakota. Later they moved to Princeton, Minnesota where Norman Madson was their pastor.

After graduating from high school, Bjarne and his brother Erling enrolled in Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, and subsequently Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After his ordination he served congregations of the ELS in Story City, Iowa; Fertile, Minnesota; and Chicago, Illinois until 1945 when he was called to Bethany Lutheran College. He

did graduate work at the University of Minnesota and received an MA in English and was doing further graduate work, which ended ABD (all but dissertation) when he was elected president of the college. In 1979, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Concordia Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

For the two decades he was college president, Bjarne certainly had an influence on the seminary, as well as the decade following when he served as adjunct faculty. He shared with Ylvisaker especially an understanding of the necessity for a broad education. In his 1977 anniversary sermon cited at the beginning of this article, he commented on Madson's preaching. One is hard put to remember a sermon or chapel homily by Madson in which he did not quote at least one hymn verse (this applies also to the published sermons in *Evening Bells at Bethany* and *Preaching to Preachers*). B. W. contrasted that with Ylvisaker who almost never quoted hymn verses. But in both cases, B. W. asserted, what was equally true of both of them was that one could tell quite a bit about their theology by keeping an eye on the hymn board, a point he never failed to make when he taught liturgics and hymnody in the seminary.

By the same token it was quite obvious that the three, Ylvisaker, Madson, and Teigen, were widely read, well beyond the newspapers. President Teigen was well known for having read widely and left good evidence of that in the books he read. At the faculty coffee table, he was once asked where he found the time to read all those books. His reply was "insomnia." But equally well known was what he did to books—he was an inveterate underliner and the margins were full of question marks, "NBs," and occasionally a "no," or "really?" His sermons also demonstrated that he had a deep knowledge of literature, with frequent mentions of books, poems, and literary allusions, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan poets especially.

All of this is to make the point that through his exposure to seminary students, both in the junior college classroom and the seminary classroom, President Teigen pushed students to think, and to read closely and analytically, whether it was a poem or the biblical text.

Even though it came after his presidential years, a 1973 article published in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, "The Pastor and Research," sums up his ideal. After commenting on the value of a pastor having a creative hobby—"painting, woodworking, gardening, cooking etc. in which they exercise their creative proclivities," he goes on to observe:

In a very real sense, a pastor's chief work is creative, because he is creating something whenever he enters the pulpit, or delivers a lecture or a Bible study. But this means that to fill his mind, which being so constantly drained in his profession, he must always be genuinely engaged in research.³

It probably came as a surprise to some to read "research' is something one lives by in being a pastor." Not only writing a paper for pastoral conference, but the act of preparing a sermon is research, he said. The material the pastor has gathered is put into a new order "and given a unified and coherent expression." Over the years, around the faculty coffee table and in the classroom, as well as in discussing sermons and preaching, that emphasis on "unified and coherent expression" emerged as an ideal Bjarne Teigen had for himself, his students and his faculty colleagues.

A longer essay published in the *Clergy Bulletin* in 1951, in three installments, was, "Semantics as it Applies to Theology." It came just at the time when some of the most liberal theology imported from Europe was exploring new ways of speaking about reality, knowledge, faith, and revelation. A dozen years later, seminary students had the course in modern theology, and question of semantics came up frequently, and some of the fallacies seen in the modern theologians came down to a matter of reading carefully and closely, understanding how language works.

The paper presented in 1951 was essentially a primer on semantics, especially as popularly adopted by many. One of the applications was that "By profession, a pastor is a user of languages. It would seem reasonable to assume that he would be constantly studying how it works." Along the way he pointed to some of the semantic errors found in various theological documents of the day. But there was also this plea: "Let us climb down the abstraction ladder and apply the truth to the individual sinner and saint."

President Teigen enjoyed his years of retirement doing some of the things he had been urging his students and his ministerial colleagues to do—researching, thinking, and writing. He left something of himself behind for students and others who would find a book in the library Bjarne had once owned or checked out. A student once told me that a

³ Bjarne W. Teigen, "The Pastor and Research," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 45–46.

book with B.W.'s name in it looked like he had underlined "all of the important stuff—everything."

Like many favored teachers, he did leave behind some carefully worked out misappropriations of phrases—a commonly repeated one described Minnesota as a place where "many are cold, but few are frozen," which usually was uttered in connection with a discussion of the doctrine of election.

In their own ways B. W. Teigen and S. C. Ylvisaker made important contributions to the development of the seminary. Of highest importance was that they both urged and modeled a close, analytic reading of texts, especially Scripture, Luther, and the Book of Concord. That careful reading was of no lesser purpose than a clear application of the Scripture, the proclamation of God's grace in Christ, and the careful distinction between law and gospel. [LSQ](#)

A note on sources.

In this essay, the following sources have been used: *The Bethany Bulletin* is located in the college archives; *Synod Reports* of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are located in the college and seminary libraries at Bethany. Other sources used are *The Lutheran Sentinel* and *Evangelisk Luthersk Tidende*. In 1984, a volume on the hundredth anniversary of S. C. Ylvisaker's birth, *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker 1884–1959*, was published by Bethany Lutheran College, edited by Peter T. Harstad and contained chapters by Juul B. Madson, Erling T. Teigen and Norman S. Holte on Ylvisaker's life, theology, and ideas on education respectively. The story of Ylvisaker's time in Leipzig is told in *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker's Letters from Leipzig*, trans. Erling T. Teigen (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 2000). The *Clergy Bulletin* was published by the pastoral conference of the synod in mimeograph form and was the predecessor of *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, and can be found on the Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary website.

Later Life of Milton H. Otto

Craig A. Ferkenstad
Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mankato, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

Note: The “Early Life of M. H. Otto” by Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson is printed in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014): 345–62.

Eleven years ago this very day and date your pastor delivered his farewell sermon to a small congregation in Minnesota so that he might take up his work in this parish. Today, eleven years later, he is for the last time speaking to you as your pastor, since he is to take a position at our Seminary assisting in the training of our future pastors.

IT WAS WITH THOSE WORDS THAT MILTON H. OTTO began his 1957 farewell sermon to the members of the Jerico and Saude Lutheran congregations in northeast Iowa. Having previously served the members of English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, Minnesota, he now accepted the call to serve as a professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. He continued:

When we review this period of a little over a decade one might be inclined to say that a lot of history has been made, but we shall not so speak lest anyone feel the pastor is congratulating himself. However, we will say this—we are not sorry we came to live and labor in your midst. Rather, we thank you for having given us that opportunity and privilege.¹

¹ M. H. Otto, “Farewell Sermon, No. 998,” (June 21, 1957) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).7.h.

These words typify the attitude of this humble man who had service to the Savior uppermost in his mind. The June 1957 farewell sermon was based upon 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” The sermon was preached under the theme, “May the Lord’s Mercies To Us In the Past Serve To Inspire Us for the Future.” We, here, will let the two-part division of that sermon serve as the outline to look at the later life of Milton H. Otto as the synod’s president and professor at the seminary.

I. The Lord’s Mercies Should Inspire Us Always to Abound in the Work of the Lord.

A Church cannot just mark time—either it forges ahead and prospers, or stands still in the attempt to maintain an even pace and in so doing falls behind. No, we are not only to continue but even abound in this work, yes, increase in it. Always trying to do even more in our using the Word and Sacrament and in our giving for this work of the church locally and at large. The Lord is always holding up a challenge before us, so that we cannot become weary—there is always something new. . . . [A]nd may all be moved to abound in this attitude, abound in this use of and work with and for the Means of Grace in the future, too. “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable” says Paul—keep at it. Unmoveable—don’t step back; steadfast—be firm in your intention to go forward.

On June 24, 1954, Milton Otto was elected as the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) when an entire evening session of the seven-day synod convention was devoted to the election of officers and board members. This thirty-nine year old man was serving as the Circuit Visitor for the “Iowa District” and as the Field Secretary of the Home Mission Board. At this convention he reported that thirteen of the synod’s seventy-three congregations were receiving subsidy to make it possible for them to have a pastor proclaim the glad tidings of salvation in their midst. During the previous year, two congregations, Mount Olive (Mankato, Minnesota) and Salem (Eagle Lake, Minnesota), became self-supporting and no longer required synod subsidy. Two new mission congregations also were established. On Wednesday evening, he represented the Mission Board by giving an oral report on the mission work in Cornwall, England, pointing the hearers to the words of Jesus, “Ye shall be witnesses of me.”

Unlike today, Otto's presidency began at the conclusion of the convention which was three days after his election to this office. It was an extremely busy time, as the unity of the Synodical Conference was unraveling quickly. In his personal daybook, he records that during the next six months he conducted one ordination and attended meetings of the ELS Union Committee, Christian Day School Board, and Committee of Committees. In addition, he attended two meetings of the Board of Trustees and three meetings of the Board of Regents. There were also three days where he attended pastoral conferences. From October 10 to November 2, he made a trip to the West Coast where he conducted two visitations, dedicated a parsonage, dedicated a church building, and viewed potential mission fields in Washington and California. In addition to these synodical functions, he was gone from home for seven days to attend the meeting of the Synodical Conference in East Detroit, Michigan and four days at the re-convened Synodical Conference convention in Chicago, Illinois. He also records the interesting note that on November 23 he wrote a letter to Hans Theiste "authorizing dedication of Edgumbe Hills church & installation of David Dale by the 3 Mpls pastors."² All-in-all, in addition to the correspondence and telephone calls conducted from the parsonage at Saude, Iowa, he was absent from the parish for fifty days. This was in addition to serving the third-largest parish in the synod that operated two Christian Day Schools, and having a family with five children at home. After these exhausting six months, it appears that he was too busy to maintain his daily diary. During the three years as synod president, the work in the busy parish was assisted by Paul Madson (assistant pastor and teacher), Keith Olmanson (assistant pastor and teacher), LaVonne Boderius (teacher), and Irma Speerschneider (teacher).

Milton Otto become president during difficult days when the Lord was holding up a challenge within both the synod and the Synodical Conference. His attendance as an advisory member to the Synodical Conference Convention in East Detroit on August 10–13, 1954 was during a contentious meeting when the main topic of discussion was the *Common Confession* which had been written by the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). Having come to no conclusion about rescinding the use of this flawed document for doctrinal unity, the convention recessed until November 16. Earlier that summer, the ELS had said that if there was

² M. H. Otto, "Daybook as President," (1954) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).58.a.

no improvement in the situation, the synod's Union Committee was to have no further dealings with the LCMS Unity Committee. Yet Milton Otto's evangelical character can be seen because even though there was no resolution to the issues, promising signs were seen. At the first synod convention over which he presided as president in 1955, he reported that "for the sake of orderly procedure" he had appointed ten men to the committees established by the Synodical Conference but only until the next ELS convention when the synod would decide the course of action. At that time, he also said:

It is necessary that we keep the Means of Grace pure in order that we and those with whom we share them may have a certain and saving hope for our life here and hereafter. The moment we begin tampering with the Word, to circumscribe it so as to make it say less than it actually does, or, to generalize it so that it will come to say more than God intended, we have already shirked our first and foremost duty.³

Having been called home to conduct a funeral service, President Otto was absent from the 1955 ELS convention on Tuesday and Wednesday when doctrinal matters dominated the discussions.⁴ On Friday afternoon, June 24, a unanimous vote was taken to suspend the fellowship relations, which had been in existence for ninety-eight years, with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

This action was not only theoretical for Milton Otto but was also very personal. Eighteen years earlier, Prof. Theodore Graebner was one of Otto's professors at Concordia Seminary where he taught an exegetical course on St. Paul's letter to the Romans. In 1945, Graebner was one of forty-four men who signed what came to be known as "The Statement of the 44." The following May, Otto wrote to this respected professor with the query of how Graebner could harmonize the exegesis of Romans 16:17 with this recent statement and the publication of "Prayer Fellowship." Two days later, Graebner replied:

I can see no difference between the exegesis contained in your notes of 1936 and my present position. ... You place an intolerable demand on the church if you expect every traditional interpretation to be upheld. In this case I am all for the traditional exegesis, but if

³ "President's Report," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1954, 5.

⁴ Ironically, the funeral service was for the wife of a LCMS pastor: Eileen (Mrs. Glenn) Reichwald.

I were not, it would be a most un-Lutheran procedure to insist on exegetical uniformity. We are not even pledged to subscribe to the exegesis of the confessions. It seems that we do not read enough Walther.⁵

This reply only could have been received with sadness and influenced Otto's future teaching career at the seminary where he joined professors Norman A. Madson, George Lillegard, and Christopher Faye, all of whom had taken a stand during the disturbing days of the merger of Norwegian synods in 1917. Otto would bring a similar experience and first-person knowledge of the heart-wrenching days of fellowship suspension.

The personal impact of the suspension of fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod also included Milton Otto's family. His extended family, descending from his great-grandparents included many relatives who became pastors or married pastors. Some of the descendants had the Otto surname, and most were serving in the Missouri Synod.⁶ This makes the annual message to the Jerico and Saude congregations even more touching:

Whether the position our Synod has taken will help bring about a settlement of the issues that have divided the Synodical Conference we cannot say. However, that is the Lord's responsibility, not ours. ... May the Lord in His grace make it possible for brotherly relations to be restored again and soon! To that end let us not forget our Church in our prayers.⁷

All of his children recall a strong memory of visiting their grandparents and attending their Missouri Synod church one Sunday morning. Although a child on each side of him offered to share a hymnbook, their father who loved to sing sat still as a stone, refusing to take the hymnbook that was offered, lips pressed tightly together and arms crossed. What a dilemma for him—to honor his Lord, or to honor his parents,

⁵ Letter from Theodore Graeber to Rev. Milton J. [sic] Otto, (May 24, 1946) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BC-S.23.r.2.

⁶ Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, "Early Life of M. H. Otto," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014): 361.

⁷ Milton H. Otto, "Annual Message," (1956) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS.C (2).6.a.26, 3.

his teachers and his background.⁸ Even at this juncture, Milton Otto expressed an evangelical concern for the gospel. Several years later he explained:

It was an evangelical procedure, for it indicated to the Missouri Synod that we were seriously disturbed by the conditions that had provoked our suspension, but it at the same time indicated also that there could and would be a restoration of fellowship relations as soon as she returned to the old paths.⁹

There were a number of repercussions which followed the synod's 1955 action. Such is to be an expected result of being steadfast and unmoveable in doctrine and faith. Among these consequences were communications with LCMS President J. W. Behnken and the distribution of the ELS pamphlet, "Our Relations With the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," to the pastors and teachers of that synod. In this regard, he wrote:

Possibly the real issue between us is a different attitude towards the understanding of the Scriptures. This is what disturbs me the most.

If our Synod has been wrong in its use of Scripture and in the judgments it has passed in view of that use, you would be doing us and the whole Synodical Conference a real service by showing us where we have erred.

If it will be of any comfort to you, Dr. Behnken, let me assure you that we are not rejoicing over the fact that our two synods have become so divided. In fact, we in our Resolutions clearly stated that we would like to be in fellowship again with the Missouri Synod, and that we would lift the suspension if the matters referred to in the Preamble would be properly adjusted by your body. We have not closed the door on Missouri.¹⁰

Then, as always, he concluded his correspondence with the valediction, "Yours, with cordial greetings."

⁸ Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, with input from siblings, correspondence to the author, December 10, 2020.

⁹ "When Is the Charge of Unionism to be Applied to Brethren," (1959) in *ELS General Pastoral Conference* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), S.1034, 6.

¹⁰ Letter from M. H. Otto to Dr. J. W. Behnken, (October 25, 1955) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BC-S.23.n.28.

The synod's president also was aware of the repercussions that the synod's actions had upon Bethany Lutheran College where a large number of Missouri Synod students were in attendance. Questions and concerns arose in people's minds. How would these students be received on the campus? Where would they worship on Sunday mornings? Would there be a reduced attendance that would cause grave financial difficulties? But the fears, although well based, did not immediately materialize as the enrollment statistics reveal that the college had 193 students in the high school, junior college, and seminary divisions during the 1954–55 school year and 199 students during the 1956–57 school year.

Milton Otto continued to be involved in these developments after he was called to the seminary in 1957. These were to become the most turbulent years in the history of the seminary. At that time there were twenty-four faculty members at Bethany. His acceptance of the call to the seminary necessitated that he relinquish the office of the synod's president but he immediately was elected to the Doctrine Committee in a position which he served for the next twenty-seven years. During these years, the committee dealt with the matter of continued membership in the Synodical Conference. By 1959, there were those within the ELS who were accusing their own synod of unionism by retaining membership in the conference. In that year, Milton Otto was called upon to deliver a General Pastoral Conference paper, "When is the Charge of Unionism to be applied to brethren?" He said the synod was carrying on the procedure agreed upon three years earlier and reminded the brethren that, while the synod was seriously disturbed by the situation within the LCMS, the synod had not *terminated* fellowship relations with that synod but *suspended* them. Such a *suspension* implies that the synod would continue to investigate the matter to determine if the suspension should be lifted or made permanent. He also said that the joint doctrinal discussions being carried on by the Synodical Conference are a means of doing such investigating. After explaining that the conditions within the LCMS had not deteriorated as anticipated after 1955, but rather had seemed to improve somewhat and also that there was some hope that the breach of relations could be healed, he said:

If our Synod had approved a compromising or erroneous doctrinal statement, if she were meeting with others to discuss doctrine on premises that did not sufficiently protect and adequately safeguard her position, if some of her pastors and teachers were teaching

falsely or engaged in unionistic and unscriptural practice and were not being disciplined, then the charge of Unionism could well, and should be applied to her. As matters today stand, however, we have not been convinced that the charge of Unionism is valid.

He then went on to say in an uncharacteristic sharp tone:

The cause for which we as a body have for years been contending is being hindered, our contending for sound Lutheranism is being hampered, by over-zealousness or a lack of patience on the part of some of our brethren. Ours was a telling testimony when we stood shoulder to shoulder; that same testimony is now being weakened by the knowledge, or at least suspicion, that not all in our Synod feel the same way on this.¹¹

Nonetheless, prior to the next convention, the synod experienced the withdrawal of ten pastors and two congregations who joined their counterparts from the Wisconsin Synod in forming the Church of the Lutheran Confession. One of Milton Otto's former assistant pastors was included in this number.

These years also had grave effects on the seminary where Prof. Otto taught. The 1958–59 school year had an enrollment of eight students. During that year, there was considerable dissension among the seminarians who naturally are idealistic and drawn to controversies. At one point, two students even walked out of a class while Professor Otto was lecturing.¹² When classes resumed the following autumn, there was an enrollment of three students as two students had been graduated and only one of the other students returned. Some students left to join a new church body, others became discouraged by the conflict and quit studying for the ministry or went into teaching.¹³ Professor Norman A. Madson agreed that at issue were matters of judgment rather than matters of doctrine.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Madson's August 27,

¹¹ Milton Otto, "When is the Charge of Unionism to be applied to brethren?" (1959) in *ELS General Pastoral Conference* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), S.1034 / 1958–61, 5–6.

¹² "Dr. Norman Madson's Charge Against the Board of Regents," (March 6, 1961) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS.C(2).23.hh.2.

¹³ David Lillegard, "The Troubled Years 1950s–1960s," *Lutheran Sentinel* 91, no. 5 (June 2008): 8.

¹⁴ "Dr. Norman Madson's Charge Against the Board of Regents," (March 6, 1961) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS.C.23.hh.2.

1960 resignation was most devastating. Professor Madson currently served as the dean of the seminary but also had been Otto's supervising pastor twenty years earlier in Princeton, Minnesota while Seminarian Milton Otto lived with the Madson family.

II. The Lord's Mercies Should Serve To Show Us that such Labor Is Not in Vain in the Lord.

To be sure the Church needs pastors, but it needs the man in the pew, too. They as a team are workers together with God. The one thing we ought always keep in mind in this connection is this—and then we shall not be concerned whether the pastor or the people get the credit—the only thing we shall take along with us to heaven when we are through here is what we have done here to help others get there as well as ourselves, and that is the reason the Lord lets His people remain in the world, to recruit other followers for Him to “catch men” as Jesus tells Peter in today’s Gospel, to be “fishers of men.” That is our work.

Milton Otto's acceptance of the call to be a seminary professor did not mean an end to his service to the church at large. His heart yet remained with the congregations of the synod. There was yet an intent to go forward.

Milton Otto accepted a call to the Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1957. This was not the first time he had received a call to Bethany. In 1953, he received a call to teach at the college. The duties would have included work “particularly in the fields of German, English, and Religion in both the High School and Junior College Departments. It would also be possible that there might be some teaching in the Theological Seminary.”¹⁵ In the deliberations, a special concern was the matter of physical health. The pastor was afflicted with asthma and doubted that his health could stand up under a schedule over which he had little control. He also questioned his academic qualifications, suspecting that what he could do and what “they think he could do are two different things.”¹⁶ In proper fashion, he met with both congregations seeking their advice and both congregations advised him to decline the call. But four years later, the call came again. This time the call was to teach classes in the seminary. In addition to the concerns of four years

¹⁵ M. H. Otto, “Pastor Receives Call,” (1953) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).6.e.14.

¹⁶ M. H. Otto, “Call Meeting,” (July 2–3, 1953) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).6.e.7.

earlier, additional matters likely came into consideration. He was a man with pastoral experience, understood the finances of the synod having served on the Finance Board (1945–51), and also was familiar with the Missouri Synod. He did not desire this call nor wanted to accept it, yet his fellow pastors counseled him by saying that he needed to accept the call for the well-being of the synod. His acceptance of the call meant a corresponding reduction in salary, as often was the case for those who served the Lord at Bethany Lutheran College.

Although Professor Otto was now a teacher at the seminary, his empathy always remained with the synod's congregations and the souls which the future pastors would serve. He considered himself to be servant of others, first, last, and always, and did not choose to wear a clerical collar thinking that it would call undue attention to himself, which he never wanted.¹⁷ The professor did not seek an advanced education degree, but had something just as valuable, which was an old Bible that was thumb worn and soiled from continuous use. He also brought to the seminary students the vital practical experience of a parish pastor. While being respected as a teacher, he did not become an academician but remained a seelsorger both to the students and their future parishioners in the pew.

Having a command of the German language, Milton Otto could preach in German, but he also was capable in the Norwegian language as demonstrated by the Christmas Day sermon preached in that language during his vicarage year at Princeton, Minnesota which, following the festival exordium, was based upon Luke 2:1–14.¹⁸ He also was one of the translators of C. F. W. Walther's sermons in the 1978 ELS publication, *The Word of His Grace*.

For Milton Otto, the work of the seminary was not disassociated from the work of the synod. He understood that an expectation of synodical membership is a congregation allowing its pastor to serve on synod boards and committees. The professor not only taught this responsibility to his students but also put it into practice. Having the experience of interacting with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, he served on the Doctrine Committee for twenty-seven years (1957–74) being elected as its chairman in 1959. In 1977, Otto made a presentation to the ELS Circuit Visitors. In a ten-page paper, which remains as

¹⁷ Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, with input from siblings, correspondence to the author, December 15, 2020.

¹⁸ M. H. Otto, "Sermons," (1937), in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).2.q.

the definitive description of “The Office of the Visitor in the ELS,” he wrote:

In a way, the Visitor might be regarded as an extension of the Theological Seminary, striving as he does to help especially the younger pastors to carry on a ministry upon which they can look with some degree of satisfaction. On the other hand, the Visitors can perhaps offer suggestions to the seminary with respect to some fact of the ministerial training that could be introduced or improved. One thing is certain, that is only by a whole-hearted working together that we can help fashion a ministry that meets the needs of our congregations today and for which we will have to make no apologies.¹⁹

Following the resignation of Prof. Madson in 1960, the Rev. Bjarne W. Teigen, who served as the president of the college, also assumed more direct leadership of the seminary for several years. Effective March 1, 1968, Milton Otto was appointed Dean of the Seminary. For all practical purposes he directed the operations of the seminary, devoting more of his time to administrative matters than in previous years. He was in charge of the seminary library as the seminary moved to a combination classroom and library on the first floor of Old Main. Ten years later, the seminary moved to a new building constructed on Division Street.

While serving as both a professor and the dean, Milton Otto continued to serve the church-at-large as a member of the Doctrine Committee and, from 1962–69, as the editor of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.²⁰ He also served on two catechism review committees. The Final Catechism Review Committee presented its work for publication in 1966. However, it was understood that a further revision might be feasible, and Otto continued to receive correspondence in this regard. In 1971 a new Catechism Revision Committee was appointed which ten years later published *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*.

Although his years at Bethany were busy ones, Otto never lost his love for the parish ministry. He often took vacancy calls to nearby places such as Princeton, Minnesota or Lake Mills, Iowa. That meant

¹⁹ M. H. Otto, “The Office of Visitor in the ELS,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 2000): 138.

²⁰ The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* was a publication of the General Pastoral Conference until 1965 when it was placed under the synod's Board for Publications.

teaching all week, then heading off to the parish he was temporarily serving. Confirmation classes and congregational meetings were held on Saturdays and regular services on Sundays. Then it was back to Mankato for another week of teaching. This busy man was also active in the community, working with Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF) which fought for and won free bussing for parochial students, and also with the local Epilepsy Foundation.

In 1961, a student enrolled in the seminary from Hong Kong. Peter Chang attended classes for one school year before being ordained and returning to serve congregations in Hong Kong. Before entering the seminary, Prof. Otto provided him with private tutoring. It appeared as if a potential mission door was being opened when Pastor Chang requested financial support from the synod. Knowing that the Lord has placed us in this world to be “fishers of men,” and having developed a relationship with the young pastor, Prof. Otto, along with the Field Secretary of the Board for Missions, Pastor Stuart Dorr, traveled to Hong Kong for two weeks in February 1963, making a significant survey of the potential mission field.²¹ This meant making an arduous journey via airplane: from Minneapolis to Los Angeles, to Anchorage to refuel, to Tokyo, then finally, after flying against the time zones in eighteen hours of darkness, to Hong Kong. On the first Sunday of their visit, Dorr preached, and on the second Sunday, Otto preached. Letters were sent home on thin, blue, foldable “Aerogramme” stationery which also served as the envelope, telling of the plane rides, visits with this or that person, and admonishing his children to “be good and help your mother.” He came back laden with gifts: a rich red, silk robe, a highly embroidered pillow sham, and a lace tablecloth among other things. While visiting a new culture, the two men were busy gathering information for their final report by meeting with different groups and different men involved in the Chinese mission, men from the Missouri Synod and the Lutheran World Federation. Otto wrote home saying, “Whatever the net results of our trip gets to be, it is clear to me that not much could have been accomplished by correspondence alone. There are so many angles to consider that one has to be on the spot to appreciate all that is involved.”²² The investigation trip cost \$2,984 and despite their diligence, it appears these men were presented with a less than honest picture of what could be expected. Upon their return,

²¹ A summary of this visit is found in Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, “Let’s move,” *Oak Leaves* 19, no. 1 (May 2015): 8–11.

²² Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, with input from siblings, correspondence to the author, December 18, 2020.

the Board of Missions recommended that the synod provide a pastor to work with Pastor Chang in the mission field. The two ELS men acted in good faith, but prior to the 1963 convention, it was a great disappointment, and most likely a personal embarrassment to Prof. Otto and Pastor Dorr, when Peter Chang announced that he could not accept the arrangement that had been agreed upon; despite the work of these men and the hopes of the synod, the dream of a mission field was dashed.

Over the years, Prof. Otto taught a broad gamut of subjects which resulted in many people regarding him as the main instructor in the seminary. He taught church history, dogmatics, practical theology, and homiletics while also teaching classes in the college. While seminary enrollment was meager, classes in the college were much larger. He writes in 1965,

Most of my work at Bethany is with the young men studying to be pastors. Right now we have 7 young men; three of them will be through with the schooling in June; I have been one of their teachers for three years. Then, I have a religion class in the college. One class is so big that I have to have two classes; 36 in one and 49 in the other class, and I enjoy trying to teach them.²³

In teaching the history of the New Testament church, no single book served his purpose. He provided students with his own outline.

How often can we not point out and point to the hand of God in the affairs of men! How many examples may we not find for the Biblical principle that “righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14,23)! How frequently do we not find proof for the very Scriptural adage that “man proposes but God disposes.” Equally pertinent—how often do we not see those succeed and prosper “whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 33,12)!²⁴

Professor Otto was a dogmatician who faithfully used the three volumes of *Christian Dogmatics* by Franz Pieper as a textbook. During these times, the Doctrine of the Church was under special discussion within the ELS. Here, as in all matters, he stressed a clear distinction between the proper and improper use of terminology in any doctrinal discussions. Following the dissolution of the Synodical Conference, the

²³ M. H. Otto, “Letter to Michael Chan,” (February 10, 1965) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).23.b.38.

²⁴ M. H. Otto, “Faculty Workshop,” (August 29, 1963) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).43.a.5, 4.

ELS called for the conducting of free conferences among conservative Lutherans. An example of Otto's doctrinal prowess is evidenced at the third Lutheran Free Conference which was held in 1966 at Columbus, Ohio, where he presented a paper on "The Creation of the Church." By drawing an analogy with the creation of the universe through God's powerful spoken word, the essayist speaks about God's second creation of the Holy Christian Church which His word also brought into being. People do not receive credit for the creation of the Church but that this is God's doing:

The Church is not the product of men, not even Christian men, nor the result of a gradual development. If the Church consists of those who have been quickened, converted, justified and sanctified by the Holy Ghost—and it does—it can hardly be said to have been brought into being by men ... Yet, the notion is spread abroad that the Church has gone through a long period of development, that the primitive Church was a very simple institution with only an elementary conception of some of its doctrines and with little appreciation for the part it should play in the affairs of men. During the course of the centuries the Church as well as its doctrines is said to have been developed and refined to such a degree that it is one of our foremost institutions today, at least in the United States. The Church is thus regarded as a development at the hands of men and parallels the evolutionary idea of the coming into being of our physical world.

Of course, such a viewpoint tends to leave out of the picture entirely the fact that the Church has always been and still is an invisible spiritual body and that God alone created it, just as He daily adds to it "such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). ... By not detecting its spiritual genesis and its spiritual commitment, the world can see the Church in only one light—as the work of men's hands, something for which they are responsible, for which they can take credit, and something that can be molded and designed to fit their concept of what it ought to be.²⁵

²⁵ Milton H. Otto, "The Creation of the Church" (paper presented at The Third Lutheran Free Conference, The Holy Christian Church and True Ecumenicity, 1966) in *Lutheran Free Conferences* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), S.620 (box A), 5.

The Church is created by God for the salvation of sinners and, as a result, is to serve others out of gratitude to Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. Otto continues:

The Church is created through men as well as for them. When the Lord Jesus commissioned His first disciples to be His representatives throughout the world, to carry on His work after He left the earth with His visible presence, (Acts 1:8), He committed to them the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. With these keys they were to open heaven for as many people as possible, and only if men refused to accept the Gospel of the kingdom was heaven to be closed to them. As kings and priests, all Christians are given this commission and authority ... To insure that the Church would be served by the Word and would also proclaim that Word to those outside its pale, for both its inner and outer growth, the Lord Jesus has instituted a special office, the office of the Ministry. The incumbents of this office have been elected to their office by their fellow-believers in the Church. They are, on behalf of and to those who chose them, to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments.

... In summary, the Church uses the Keys in two principal ways—the individual members teach, admonish and exhort one another by means of the Word and they, because of God’s command as well as for the sake of decency and order, delegate the public administration of the keys in a given area to qualified men. The doctrine of the Ministry is a necessary concomitant of the doctrine of the Church. Our Confessions therefore say, “Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church, just as also for this reason the Church has principally the right of calling.”²⁶

Yet, even in the midst of doctrinal discussions—be it in the classroom or with the issues that plagued the Synodical Conference, the discussion of the Church or the Ministry, or relations with other church bodies—he knew such discussions were not for the sake of doctrine alone. He understood that it was not enough to have true doctrine but the gospel also must be proclaimed to lost sinners. The only reason the Lord lets His people remain in the world is to be “fishers of men.” In

²⁶ Milton H. Otto, “The Creation of the Church” (paper presented at The Third Lutheran Free Conference, The Holy Christian Church and True Ecumenicity, 1966) in *Lutheran Free Conferences* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), S.620 (box A), 9–10.

the synod's fiftieth anniversary convention essay, "The Trumpet with a Certain Sound," he wrote,

In this connection a word should be said about the part the layman has in all this. On first thought one might be inclined to say that his role is mostly only a passive one; after all, it is the pastors who do the preaching and who are to preach the word faithfully. Yes, our pastors do carry a heavy responsibility here, but no pastor would dare teach anything not countenanced by the Scriptures if his hearers formed an impenetrable phalanx before him, insisting on and demanding a trumpet tone that is crystal clear and 100% pure. They who call the pastor not only have the right but also the duty to insist that their pastor be a faithful Scriptural-loyal messenger of the Lord to them.

... Nor is this concern about pure doctrine optional for the layman. The Lord makes it the hearer's responsibility to *test* the doctrine being proclaimed to him when He says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits of the world" (I John 4:1). The Lord gives us no choice in the matter. And since it concerns our salvation and that of all others whom we through our synodical endeavors reach, we ought to be alert wide-awake and most conscientious watchmen on the walls of Zion.²⁷

Even though he was providing instruction in the practical work of the future shepherds of Christ's Church, Milton Otto never abandoned his prime concern for the "man in the pew" whom his students would eventually serve. The professor explained how on Christmas Day and Easter Morning these men will be with the congregations they serve, not with their extended families. Yet, he also said that they will be one of the few fathers who can be with his children and attend a 10:00 a.m. weekday school program or a 4:00 p.m. softball game. He would never dodge a serious pastoral query or a sensitive topic. On more than one occasion, the professor asked that the transom be closed between the classroom and the public hallway lest a straightforward answer and discussion accidentally be overheard by a college student's casual passing in the hallway. He is remembered for the many adages which were to guide a pastor's ministry.²⁸ One such example of the lighter side of his personality along with the personal knowledge of his parishioners is

²⁷ "M. H. Otto, "The Trumpet with a Certain Sound," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1968, 39.

²⁸ See "Milton Otto Tribute," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014), pages 363–65.

seen in a quaint story from his ministry in Iowa when an older couple questioned if it was proper for them to sit together in church. After inquiring if they slept together in bed, the response was that he thought they also could sit together in a church pew.

The reminder was given to the students that we cannot assist the work of the Holy Spirit but we can hinder that work by how we act or what we do. In speaking to the Bethany Lutheran College faculty, he also said:

Therefore, we shall not fail to be regular in church and chapel attendance. It will be next to impossible to try to impress our students with the importance of the “one thing needful” in their lives and to neglect it in our own. Our language cannot be any different outside the classroom than within it. The type and place of recreation we seek cannot be of a questionable nature. Here we must remember that we have very young high school students as well as older college students observing us, and while some pursuits and actions may be lawful they are not always expedient.²⁹

This seminary professor is likely best remembered for teaching of homiletics, or sermon preparation, which he considered to be the most important work of a minister of the gospel. He wanted future pastors to be expository preachers where the theme and parts are drawn directly from the text. The reading of a text is a promise to preach on the entire text and if the preacher does not intend to preach on that entire assigned text, the reading should be shortened appropriately. His theory for homiletics was summarized at the 1980 vicarage workshop:

1. Start with the text in the development of the sermon.*
2. Expound it—bring out what it says before proceeding to apply and re-enforce it with proof passages.
3. Be careful of generalizations in sermons, so that you don't make the Christian all sinner or all saint, when he is always both.
4. Don't talk too glibly in your sermon—think and write it out, carefully.
5. Write theme and parts—they are handles for you when writing and for the hearers when listening to the sermon,
6. Don't get too long—NOR too short. ca. 18–22 [minutes] reg.

²⁹ M. H. Otto, Faculty Workshop, (August 29, 1963) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).43.a.5, 7–8.

7. Continue to make sermonizing your #1 priority, all through your ministry (which, pray God, may be a long and fruitful one); if you do, you will find the dividends spilling over into all the other aspects of your ministry, too.
8. So, go preach as if people's lives, your own included, depend on it, for they do.
9. Continue to write your sermons all through your ministry, for the sake of a preaching record, and more for the sake of exactness in speaking and the avoidance of cliches, etc.
10. AND with it all, do not forget to study the Word, to compare it with itself, and to read standard and reliable commentaries. (That means studying on the basis of the original language).
 - * Do not put in Introd. what belongs in body of sermon—text is not expounded in INTRO.³⁰

Unlike his predecessor, who stressed the importance of hymn verses, stress was laid upon the classical theme and parts division of a sermon with a strong emphasis that the theme and parts should be clearly stated at the start of the sermon. Considerable emphasis was placed upon the theme which was regarded as the "germ" of the sermon. It is the discourse of the sermon reduced to a single proposition which the preacher wants the hearers to believe or do. This experienced homiletician was very insistent that a sermon theme include the action of a verb—or at a minimum, to imply an action. As such, a sermon theme is never to be just a title. It is to be the handle with which the listener carries the sermon home. The theme, in turn, should easily be divisible into two—or at a rare time, three—parts that also are drawn from the text.

Prof. Otto's many adages also pertained to homiletics and the Divine Service. For example, sermon preparation and preaching should never be easy and the preacher always should be nervous before preaching because he is speaking God's Word and if the preacher is not nervous, then something is wrong! Always call a sermon a sermon—never a meditation, because we are concentrating on God's words not our own thoughts; never a devotion, because it does not have the exposition of a specific text; never a homily, because that is incongruent with expository preaching. The Festival Exordium is not an introduction *to the sermon* but rather an introduction *to the day*. During the Divine Service,

³⁰ Milton Otto, "Vicarage Sermon Comments," (Vicar Workshop, May 15, 1980) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS-C(2).3.e.1.

announce the Absolution with a fervor as if it was the first time spoken. When selecting hymns to correspond with the sermon and Christian Church Year (with rare exception) only the hymns in the hymnbook and their tunes are to be used. Always record the hymn numbers used with the sermon. The purpose for a funeral sermon is to prepare the family to go to the cemetery. And always expect to have a casket beneath the Christmas tree!

In the days before computers, it was expected that a pastor would type the sermon four times before preaching it. By that time, the sermon would be well-in-hand and in the preacher's memory. The pastor should write every word of the sermon in one sitting from a detailed outline. While never prohibiting the use of a sermon manuscript, the use of notes was encouraged for the pulpit. When he conducted his farewell sermon to the members of the Jerico and Saude congregations in 1957, his single page of sermon notes began:

11 - vry - frw; - smll -thk -prsh. Tdy, 11 1tr, 1st tim spkg - US sinc tk pstrn -SEM assist n traing - fut pstrs.

Whn rvw ths perd -lttl decade, mght - lot hstry md, nt so spk - anyone - pstr congratulg. HWVR, will sy - nt srly cam liv& lbr mdst; Rthr thnk - gvg oppr& prvlg. Be sur mnt expndg no lttl effrt - M hr. smtms almst. Bt tht vry wrk, & yr cnfdnc s, counsl & hlp - provd pstr - exprnc (& blv a mtryy) stnd - gd std -nw field lbr dys cm.

In this 1st srvc tgthr, quit ntrl wndr - hppn us dys cm. Fr mutl enrg -prmt drw attentn ths thot:

MY LRD'S MRCS TO US N PST SERV IN SPIR US FR
FUT

Throughout these years of teaching at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, until his retirement in 1981, Milton Otto's heart never left the parish as he always remembered the "man in the pew." Even at the family table, he never shared personal highs or lows; the dinner table was a place for lively conversation. His family also remembers that he loved to do crossword puzzles and that he always did the puzzles in ink. He didn't make mistakes!

Concern was given as to whom deserves the credit for the work in God's kingdom. At the time of his death, ELS President George Orvick wrote,

His example of quiet service and humility contains a message for us all. His faithfulness to the word of God as a pastor, as president of the synod, and as professor in our seminary for 25 years is a legacy that will not be soon forgotten. At the present time about two-thirds of the pastors of our synod received much of their theological training from him or under his direction. . . . Prof. Otto would not be pleased if we were to heap inordinate praise upon him. He would be the first to say with the Apostle Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am" I Cor. 15:10 KJV. His confession would be that of the same apostle who also wrote, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14 KJV).³¹

Throughout these years, Milton Otto suffered with emphysema which ultimately claimed his earthly life on August 20, 1982 at the age of sixty-seven years. His empathy to Gerhard Weseloh, in a 1966 letter, expressed the hope of eternal life through faith in Christ.³²

In a way, I am moved to say that I am sorry to hear what the state of your health is. I would be prompted to say that because of my concern for a fellow-man's (here especially a fellow-believer's) well-being, and because of the present supply of full-time church workers in our synod. It just does not seem to make sense that one who could fill such an important need should be removed from the scene. And, I suppose we should be so concerned about the welfare of the church—but not to the point of saying that the Lord of the Church no longer knows what He is doing.

So, in another way, I am also happy for you. For one thing, you will in the Lord's good time be delivered from all further sin and sorrow. Revelation 21, 4 shall be a reality for you—and what a reality it will be! But most important, you have been given the grace to resign yourself to what our Father has ordained, —and surely that will have to be called a blessing, too. If you at all believe what you have been preaching, you certainly have something to look forward to, as we say. The rest of us know that we may be called out of this world at any time, but we do not always give that as much thought as we might; you know that such is to be the case and therefore are really going to be giving the whole matter more thought than the

³¹ George M. Orvick, "From the President," *The Lutheran Sentinel* (September 1982): 2.

³² Gerhard Weseloh died on January 21, 1967.

rest of us might. So just keep on saying with Paul, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better!" (Phil. 1).

... I think that we shall also have to say that the Lord is giving us another lesson in humility—we do not deserve any blessing from Him; we do not deserve to keep any pastor. Perhaps we have not always been keeping that in mind, so He must teach us again. May we by His grace learn the needed lessons He has for us.

It is not my intention to preach to you—just to do a little thinking out loud with you nearby to hear it. One thing I would like to suggest, and it comes out of an experience with having to tell a man about ten years ago that he would not be recovering from his illness. You know that it is, all things so indicating, only a matter of months before your work on earth is done. They can be some very happy months for you and your family and your parish. There may be the tendency to think of, "this is the last time for this," etc. to think and say, "Who knows how long, whether, etc." No one will fault anyone if it is said or thought. At the same time, with your eyes set on that home above you can be a most effective pastor and preacher and father and husband; you can treasure all the happy days and hours the Lord gives you (which so many of us do not always remember to do); you can interpret every special favor and blessing as an extra dividend from on high, each instance underscoring the fact that we do have a gracious Father in heaven. As the Lord has given you the strength and courage to look upwards, so He can and will do that for your family too—He certainly is not going to give you that blessing of all blessings and then forget the family members who are just as dear to Him; He will not bless one at the expense of the others!

I also recall a lady who once said, "Isn't it good that the Lord lets us get sick first?" How very true, for then one is not in danger of being taken unawares, then one is given ample time for reflection, and what more can one ask?

... As the days pass there may come some times when you may feel somewhat blue and disheartened, even a little resentful. I have a suggestion for such an eventuality—sit down and write a letter to anyone of your brethren in whom you have some confidence. You will not want to take it out on your family or any parishioner, so pick anyone of your fellow-pastors as an outlet for your feelings. You'll feel better for it and your fellow-pastor may be able to direct you to a Scriptural thought or two which will be just the medicine

you need. We are in this world to help one another; don't hesitate to let others help you.

Now—may the Lord make your closing days in this world truly happy ones; may He grant you the strength to be of service to His people for quite some time to come; may He graciously spare you from a long and painful ordeal; may He richly bless and keep you and your loved ones, so that you even in these last days may be a blessing. May He simply be gracious to you for our blessed Savior's sake, through whom alone we can hope to receive any blessing but through whom we do have an open door to every blessing!

With kindest greetings & our prayers.³³

At the conclusion of the final Services at Saude and Jerico in 1957, Pastor Otto selected the closing hymn as number 57 from the *Lutheran Hymnary*. It is also a fitting conclusion to his life and memory:

Abide in grace, Lord Jesus, Among us constantly,
Lest Satan's art deceive us And gain the victory.

Abide, Lord with the story Of Thy redeeming love;
May we the gospel's glory And saving virtue prove.

Abide among us ever, Lord, with Thy faithfulness;
Jesus, forsake us never, Help us in all distress!

LSQ

³³ M. H. Otto to Gerhard Weseloh, (November 16, 1966) in *Milton Otto files* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives), BS.C(2).23.b.39.

Professor George Oliver Lillegard

*Joseph C. Abrahamson
Faith Lutheran Church
Clara City, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

Author's Note: I am submitting this biography in sections. The first deals with George's life from his youth until he returned from his second Chinese Mission in 1928. There are several parts of this paper that I was unable to research in the time allotted due to the exigencies of COVID-19. I had to cancel several planned trips to the synod archives. I hope to revise these parts in the near future. The second section will deal with George's history as a parish pastor, his work with and for the synod, and his role at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary until his retirement and death. I am working on an annotated list of George's published works, biographies of his family members, and a finding aid. In this biography, I have several awkward inclusions that relate to contemporary events. Though they are a bit awkward, I think it is helpful for us to understand the context in which George lived and worked through his life. When I first attended Bethany Lutheran College in the fall of 1985 George's granddaughter, Naomi Lillegard (now married to Mike Marzinske) and I were classmates and became friends. Her aunt, Laura Lillegard, one of George's daughters, invited us over to help her sort through George's papers before she had to move out of her house on Edgewood Road. These were all to go to the synod archives. I was captivated by the aged translucent onionskin letters from Kuiling and Kwangchow, China. I am afraid that I was not the quickest helper. We brought the treasure trove over to Walther Gullixson and Norman Holte at the archives. And now, thirty-five years later, I have the joy of reading some of these papers for the anniversary of our seminary.

Youth and Mission Work

George Oliver Lillegard was professor of Old Testament at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary from the fall of 1952 until 1962 when Parkinson's disease prevented him from being able to work. The Lord brought His servant home June 14, 1965. Before he was called to the seminary, George had served as an English teacher for a high school, a missionary in China, and a parish pastor.¹

Youth and Education

Papa is teaching Norwegian school in town and has sixty or seventy scholars. ... Sarah and I are studying German yet; Christopher Halenger is teaching Joseph Hanson, Otis Monson, two of my school mates, and me Latin. Both of them are about my age. Papa sent for some Latin Norwegian books to Luther Publishing House, but they did not have any so he sent to New York after some Latin English books. We are on the second Declension. *P.S. Schreibe bald. Galba filiis bonae reginae rosas multas dat.*²—Eleven year old George to his Uncle Lawrence, May 24, 1899.

George Lillegard was born in Calmar, Iowa, on April 23, 1888, the third child of eight, to Lars Olson Lillegard and Ansoph (née Kaasa).³ He was baptized at Calmar by Pr. Andreas Kittelsen Sagen.⁴ When he was only a year old his family moved to Bode, Iowa where he grew up. His father was a school teacher.⁵ George was confirmed by Pr. Jakob Edvard Jørgensen on June 14, 1903.⁶ George attended both public and private schools in Bode.⁷ He flourished as the son of an educator.

George entered Luther College, Decorah, Iowa at the age of fifteen in 1903, graduating in the spring of 1904 from the preparatory

¹ Brief biographical sketches are available in volume 28, number 2 of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, June 1988, pages i-ii; Sigurd Lee's 1998 article in the *Oak Leaves* offers a brief popular sketch of George's life. The *Oak Leaves* of Spring 2004 p. 7-8 has a short vita. Marguerite Ylvisaker's 2012 notes on the ELS Historical Society presentation by Debbie Blumer and Rev. David Lillegard provides a nice summary.

² Blumer, p 7, German: "Write soon." Latin: "Galba gives many roses to the children of the good Queen."

³ A more detailed look at George's family is presented as an appendix.

⁴ George's Vita from his Bachelor's Thesis: see note 19; Norlie 1914, 173.

⁵ SR-ELKA 1916, p. 27.

⁶ George's vita in his Bachelor's Thesis: see note 19; Norlie 1914, p. 237.

⁷ Blumer, p 5. This reference also includes photos of St. Olaf Lutheran and the Lars Lillegard family.

department. He completed his bachelor's degree in 1908 at the age of twenty.⁸ While at Luther College he took part of the Amphie Debating Team, the Amphie Glee Club,⁹ and was part of a group called "The Glenwood Gang."¹⁰ For the 1906–07 academic year, he was an associate on the editorial staff for the student newspaper called *College Chips*. He became editor-in-chief for the 1907–08 school year.¹¹ In February of 1907, George published an article critical of modern novels titled, "The Influence of Novel Reading."¹² In that same issue, George was elected as secretary to the Inter-Collegiate Debating Association.¹³ In April 1907, he won first place in the Luther College Annual Oratorical Contest speaking on "College Education and Success."¹⁴ That same year, he participated in student government.¹⁵ During his senior year, George participated in an athletic club called "Turning Club"—something akin to gymnastics.¹⁶ He would put his experience in this club to use in his first professional position.¹⁷ George's thesis for his bachelor's degree is titled, "The Bible as Literature." The thesis is in a composition book in a strong flowing cursive hand. There are very few corrections through the forty-eight pages. The last two pages consist of George's self-written vita.¹⁸

⁸ The *Luther College Catalogue* for George's Senior year is available online <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofluthe0713luth/page/n5/mode/2up>.

⁹ *Amphi* is short for *Amphictyonic*, a term describing a group of neighbors getting together from ancient Greece. Students at Luther College used the term for student literary organizations from 1889 through the 1920s.

¹⁰ There are a variety of photos from George's time at Luther College in Blumer, 8–10.

¹¹ Norlie 1922, p. 323.

¹² *College Chips*, Volume 24, Issue 2, pages 28–31. <https://digital.luther.edu/islandora/object/LUTHERrepository%3A5398#page/8/mode/1up>.

¹³ *idem.*, 43.

¹⁴ Norlie 1922, p. 327. *College Chips*, Volume 24, Issue 4, 72. <https://digital.luther.edu/islandora/object/LUTHERrepository%3A5486#page/2/mode/1up>.

¹⁵ *College Chips*, Volume 23, Issue 10, page 231. <https://digital.luther.edu/islandora/object/LUTHERrepository%3A5001#page/3/mode/1up>.

¹⁶ *College Chips*, Volume 24, Issue 10, page 237. <https://digital.luther.edu/islandora/object/LUTHERrepository%3A5288#page/22/mode/1up>. A report on the Turning Club's March 25, 1908 performance is found in *College Chips*, Volume 25, Issue 5, page 112. <https://digital.luther.edu/islandora/object/LUTHERrepository%3A5621#page/16/mode/1up>.

¹⁷ I would like to thank Hayley Jackson, archivist of the Luther College Archives, for her help. Personal correspondence October 13, 2020.

¹⁸ Student Theses, RG15 Manuscripts, Box 1, Folder 21. Luther College Archives, Decorah, Iowa.

Willmar Seminary

In 1882 the Norwegian Synod established Willmar Seminary¹⁹ in Willmar, Minnesota as one of its many academically focused institutions of higher education—including the latest in information technology. In 1908 the seminary had an instructor of shorthand and another of telegraphy.²⁰ Technology was rapidly changing. It was also in 1908 that Henry Ford introduced the Model T, the first assembly line mass-produced automobile.

Upon his graduation from Luther College in Decorah, George was assigned to Willmar Seminary. Though he taught there for only one year (1908–1909), he was extremely active and involved. At least thirteen different news items in the *Willmar Tribune* during that year referred to George.

On September 30, 1908 the Board of Trustees for Willmar Seminary announced that George O. Lillegard was placed as faculty teaching English literature, history, and Latin. He directed the seminary band, a group consisting of two percussionists, two brass, two woodwinds, and three violins besides himself on violin. George was involved in the music community, particularly for the Young People's Society meetings at the Synod church. He played violin in a duet with Mr. Granger who played coronet in October. In January 1909 he sang a vocal duet with Ludvig Dale. The following March, he performed a violin solo. At the beginning of that April, George directed a cantata at the Synod church, titled *Ruth*, by Edward Oxenford and Alfred R. Gaul. There was an admission charge of 25 cents per adult and 15 cents per child. The members of the chorus honored and thanked George later that month with a pair of gold cufflinks. At the end of April, the group gave a second performance at the request of the community.

George's activity at Willmar Seminary was not merely academic and musical. In December 1908, the seminary announced that George would be coaching high school basketball. In the new year, George

¹⁹ I wish to extend my thanks to Bob Larson, the Deputy Director of the *Kandiyohi County Historical Society* for his and his staff's work to locate resources pertinent to George's tenure at the Willmar Seminary. I have listed these resources under Larson's name in the bibliography. I have annotated the references to articles from the *Willmar Tribune*.

²⁰ Wireless telegraphy was a recent invention and only practical since 1899, less than ten years old. And though wireless telephony (radio) had just been invented the first radio factory wouldn't be built until 1912. "History of radio" From *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_radio.

established an athletic club, called a "Turning Club" on which, the *Willmar Tribune* reported:

The entertainment given by the Willmar Seminary Athletic club last Wednesday evening was a most enjoyable one. The pyramid building was the feature of the evening, the boys doing the work with snap and precision. A good deal of credit for their successful appearance is due to Prof. Lillegard, who, besides acting as coach, also took a most active and prominent part in the various numbers on the program. It is to be hoped the club will give another entertainment before school is out, and that more Willmar people will avail themselves of such an opportunity should it come, to see what the boys can do.²¹

George concluded his tenure at the Willmar Seminary in the spring of 1909 in order to attend Luther Seminary at Hamline.

In the summer of 1909, George went on a bit of a long tour before going to Luther Seminary. His itinerary included Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. In Colorado there was Pikes Peak, the Garden of the Gods, and the region of Manitou. He stayed in Santa Fe, New Mexico and then down to the southern side of the Grand Canyon where he went on the Bright Angel Trail. After the Grand Canyon, he continued west to the Pacific Ocean then up the west coast to Canada, through the Rockies and then ending with two weeks on a lake in Minnesota.²² George came back to Willmar in August of 1909 with his sister, Louise, to stay with the J. B. Boyd family at Eagle Lake for a couple weeks.²³ The next year, in May and September 1910 George stayed with the Boyds for a few days on his way to and from Hamline for Seminary.²⁴

Luther Seminary

George attended Luther Seminary on Hamline Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota from 1909 to 1912. The ELS archives have several of his notebooks from various classes at seminary. Unfortunately, the Luther Seminary archives for this period are reportedly fairly scant.²⁵ The

²¹ *Willmar Tribune* March 31, 1909, "An Enjoyable Entertainment."

²² "George Writes a Travel Journal in 1909." Blumer, p. 11-13.

²³ *Willmar Tribune* 1909i. It is unclear if his sister met him there or if she had been part of the company on the trip.

²⁴ *Willmar Tribune* 1910a and 1910b.

²⁵ Personal correspondence and phone conversations with Paul Daniels Library Archivist Luther Seminary and Heather Nicoletti, Assistant Director of Development for Luther Seminary.

changes that took place in the world while George was in seminary were hugely significant. In 1909 Teddy Roosevelt was president until March 4 when Taft was sworn in. Shackleton discovered the magnetic South Pole. The U.S. purchased its first ever military aircraft.²⁶ Sigmund Freud gave his first and only lecture in the United States.²⁷ In 1910 Lee de Forset made the first public radio broadcast.²⁸ The eyes of the world turned to China for the 1910 World's Fair, the Nanyang industrial exposition, held in Nanking, Qing China on June 5.²⁹ There were race riots all across the U.S. when African-American boxer Jack Johnson defeated white American boxer James J. Jeffries. The Boy Scouts were founded.³⁰ A ten-year revolution began in Mexico. Pancho Villa would figure prominently in U.S. popular culture. It was in October 1911 that the Wuchang Uprising started the Xinhai Revolution. This led to the founding of the Republic of China, enabling the kind of mission work and travel George would be called to do. Glacier Park was established. Slavery was finally made illegal in China.³¹ In February 1912, the Manchu Qing dynasty of China ended after two hundred and sixty-eight years. Woodrow Wilson won the election as U.S. President that November.³²

George was ordained in June 1912 in Glenwood, Iowa by Rev. O. P. Vangness.³³ After his ordination he served as assistant pastor in Holmen, Wisconsin. I could not find which congregation George served in that time. There were two Norwegian Synod Congregations in that area organized by H. A. Stubb. They are the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Lewis Valley and the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Halfway Creek. The Halfway Creek

²⁶ https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/1909-wright-military-flyer/nasm_A19120001000.

²⁷ 1909 in the U.S. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1909_in_the_United_States. World in 1909 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1909>.

²⁸ Birth of public radio broadcasting https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_of_public_radio_broadcasting.

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1910_Nanyang_industrial_exposition.

³⁰ This group played a significant part in events in the Fehner Case in the late 1940s and early 1950s. See Meitner, p. 151–172.

³¹ 1911 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911>.

³² 1912 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1912>.

³³ I believe this was probably at the Synod Church. Olaf Norlie, *Norsk lutherske menigheter i Amerika, 1843–1916*, (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1918), 324. <https://archive.org/details/norsklutherskemevol1norl/page/244/mode/2up>. Sigurd Lee, "George O. Lillegard: Foreign Missionary in China." *Oak Leaves*, (Special Issue, 1998), 6–11, has the pastor's name but no named source.

church building burnt down on April 13, 1912.³⁴ But the congregation was active and working to rebuild their church.³⁵ George served in Holmen from June to September. So, it would appear probable that he served one or both of these congregations. But a large change was in store for him.

First Chinese Mission: 1912–1915

At the end of that summer, the Norwegian Synod extended a call to George to be a missionary in China. He was twenty-four years old. George accepted. His hometown paper published a note on September 6, saying: “Rev. George Lillegard will occupy the pulpit at St. Olaf’s church next Sunday morning and preach in English. This is his last Sunday here before going to China to take up his work as missionary....”³⁶ He left in October from Chicago for China—traveling through Europe, Egypt, Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong, and then to Shanghai.

Norwegian Lutherans first started mission work in China in the mid-1800s. The first Norwegian Lutheran missionaries from America came from the Hauge Synod in 1890. They called their group the *Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran China Mission Society*. The missionaries were sent out from Jackson, Minnesota. The Norwegian Synod became involved in 1892. But George was the first ordained missionary sent by the Synod.³⁷

Sad news came to him as he arrived in Shanghai on December 2, 1912. Back home in Bode, Iowa, his twenty-two year-old brother Lawrence had died in a farm accident, falling from a silo. George’s granddaughter commented: “With Lawrence dead and George overseas, Lars [George’s father] felt as if he had lost both of his sons. He pleaded with George to come back right away, but the mission wouldn’t allow it.”³⁸

Given the conveniences of transportation and communication in the twenty-first century, it may seem harsh that the mission prohibited

³⁴ This was just two days before the Titanic sank!

³⁵ Lillegard is not listed as serving any of the Holmen area congregations in Norlie 1918a, pp. 183ff <https://archive.org/details/norsklutherskemevol1norl/page/182/mode/2up?q=holmen>. April 13 was on a Saturday in 1912. See also the Halfway Creek history page <http://www.halfwaycreek.org/resources/hclc-history/>.

³⁶ *Bode Bugel*, September 6th, 1912. The October 25th paper noted that Lars Lillegard had received two postcards from George while George was in Norway.

³⁷ Ferkenstad 2012, p. 396.

³⁸ Blumer, p. 15.

George's return. Arranging and paying for someone to travel to and from China was prohibitively expensive and difficult. The synod report for 1913 outlined the expenses for George's trip to China. The Norwegian Synod had spent \$10,480.08 in 1913 dollars. Using an inflation calculator to determine this value in 2020 dollars, this would be the equivalent of \$275,147.62.³⁹ Calculated a different way, in 1913 gold was \$20 per ounce. That would be equal to 524 ounces of gold. In today's value at \$1,721.39 per ounce, that is the equivalent of \$902,008.36. When consideration is made for the situation in China at the time, it is not difficult to see why the Foreign Mission Committee made this decision. Similar factors would arise again in 1915 when George did return home for the sake of his dying father.

China was an exciting and rather dangerous place. The 1911 Revolution (Xinhai Revolution) resulted in the February 1912 abdication of the new and final Qing Monarch, who was six years old at the time. The new government, the Republic of China, established itself January 1, 1912. The new Republic was filled with political turmoil.

George wrote frequent letters throughout this first mission to China.⁴⁰ He gave his hometown family and friends a front seat to his voyage over to China in the pages of the *Bode Bugle*.⁴¹ He wrote in the pages of the *Lutheran Herald* for the members of the church which supported him.

In the rest of the world, the first month of 1913 saw Adolf Hitler, Josip Broz Tito, and Bolshevik activist Josef Dzhugashvili all living in Vienna. In this year they were all unknown to the world. Dzhugashvili published his first article under the name Josef Stalin. In this article Stalin raised the issue of cultural identity and its association with national identity in Marxist theory.⁴² This particular article sowed the seeds of the Marxist heresy that grew in China, and which would later force George's return from his second missionary journey to China. But in March of 1913, Yuan Shikai used the military to dissolve China's

³⁹ *SR-NELKA* 1913, page 246. "Synodens hedningemission (Kinamissionen.)" [<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>].

⁴⁰ The best accessible collection of George's China mission correspondence and that of his wife, Bernice, is found in Deborah Blumer's 2008 *Called According to His Purpose: Missionary Letters From China*.

⁴¹ I would like to thank Orlys Maassen the Bode, Iowa Library Director and Melissa Hundertmark of Bode, Iowa for their help and photos of the *Bode Bugle* articles. Personal phone calls October 13, 2020–December 2, 2020 and personal correspondence. Life got in the way for all of us, especially under this COVID-19 plague.

⁴² J. V. Stalin 1913 "Marxism and the National Question" pp 300–381 in Stalin 1953. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm>.

parliament so he could rule as a dictator after the previous ruler, Song Jiaoren, had been assassinated. Back home in the United States, Woodrow Wilson was sworn in as president, ushering in a great many significant changes to the constitutional republic.⁴³ Women's suffrage was gaining steam in the West. In China that August, the province of Chongqing declared independence, a move that was crushed in a bloody response by Republican Chinese forces within a matter of a couple weeks. In October the Republic of China would elect its first president, Yuan Shikai.

George had been studying Chinese at Nanking University from the end of 1912 through the beginning of 1913.⁴⁴ George noted the main problem in learning from native Chinese teachers is that they "are so polite that they hardly can be made to correct the mistakes which you notice yourself. Instead they, perhaps, will flatter you on your good 'djon-gweh sheng-yin' (Chinese accent), and leave you to correct yourself by what you hear them say when they are off their guard."⁴⁵

After language studies he was stationed at Kwangchow, which is now called Huangchuan County (潢川县) or Guangshan County (光山) in southeastern Henan Province.⁴⁶ About four hundred and forty miles straight east of Shanghai, this particular region had initially been served by the China Inland Mission some twenty-five years prior by a Rev. Mr. Argento. Argento died a martyr's death in 1917. Dr. J. R. Birkelund of the Norwegian Synod of America surveyed this area and decided upon it for George's work.⁴⁷ Throughout the year, he kept readers of the *Lutheran Herald* up to date with occasional letters. In December he stated that he had "not been in one place for more than a week at a time for over two months. I will just so barely be settled down here when I have to go to Kioshan to the wedding and the meeting there."⁴⁸

China was in upheaval and a dangerous place. The changes in government meant that there were different groups of soldiers suddenly

⁴³ One of the most significant was the adoption of the 17th Amendment which placed the election of Senators under the rule of popular vote rather than as being chosen by state governments. Thus changing the original intent of state representation. He also presided over military conscription in 1917 and the seizing of the railroads for the federal government under the Federal Possession and Control Act of 1917.

⁴⁴ See also Larsen 1919a, p. 46.

⁴⁵ George's Letter from Nanking, Jan 15, 1913, in Blumer, p. 25

⁴⁶ Compare the map in Blumer, p. 30 with https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huangchuan_County and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangshan_County

⁴⁷ Larsen 1919b, p. 87-88.

⁴⁸ Letter from George to Rev. Larson Dec. 15, 1913, in Blumer, p. 32.

left without a lord. These tended to form roving gangs who would extort cities and rob travelers. Meanwhile the new military force authorized by the republic was forming and trying to either incorporate these old units or put them out of operation.⁴⁹

As 1914 opened across the world, a geophysicist named Alfred Wegener was proposing a hypothesis about Continental Drift in Germany and the African National Congress was established in South Africa. In China, George was robbed and stabbed. His ears caught a skirmish with gunfire nearby. Robbers were attacking their group. Having protected those in his care, George was confronted by the robbers who demanded silver. They stabbed him in the left arm when he tried to show them there was no money or silver. The robber stabbed him repeatedly in both arms. The other held a gun to George's face and demanded silver. The gunman pulled the trigger but the gun was not loaded. This turned into a bit of an evangelism opportunity. In the following days, George learned that the police in the city had joined in with the robbers and left the city vulnerable. Many people had been injured or killed by beatings, by blade and by gunshot.⁵⁰

The same month that Charlie Chaplin made his debut on the silver screen, the residents of Bode, Iowa, read the *Bode Bugle* headline story "Rev. George Lillegaard Shot." George's father, Lars, had received a State Department letter informing him that George had received wounds from robbers in Kwangchow, Honan, China, but that the wounds were not serious.⁵¹ Though George was not shot, he did receive more serious protection from the American Consul General in China after this episode.

Through the first months of the year, a famine developed in China. George sought some kind of relief for the victims of this famine from the church back home. That May Norway celebrated its centennial of independence from Denmark. In June the Archduke of Austria was assassinated, beginning the First World War. The Balkans had been at war for years. At this point Germany was already on a war footing. Its alliance with Austria escalated the tensions. That July, while Bostonians were being introduced to Babe Ruth, Europe was descending into open military conflict. Through August, more countries were brought into the conflict. When Russia entered the fray, the conflict weakened the position of the House of Romanov among her people. The Marxist

⁴⁹ Larsen 1919a discusses the famine and the outlaw chief called *White Wolf*, p. 50. George notes *White Wolf* in a letter dated June 28, 1915, in Blumer, p. 66.

⁵⁰ The date of the robbery and stabbing was January 14, 1914.

⁵¹ Photo of the State Department letter in Blumer, p. 39.

heresy gained significant ground in Russia by means of this. China had declared neutrality in the Great War. The fledgling republic had enough internal struggles to deal with. The United States remained neutral also.

In October George sent a letter to the *Lutheran Herald* describing daily life and “A Winter in a Chinese House.” With letters like this, George would introduce western readers to the culture, daily life, and traditions of the Chinese. In Germany, that same month, liberal Lutheran theologian Adolf von Harnack, his close friend and physicist Max Planck, and other prominent German scientists, artists, and academics signed the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” which argued the legitimacy of the German Kaiser to wage war.⁵²

In late spring of 1915, George’s father took ill, and George requested leave from the mission to visit his father. The Board of Foreign Missions declined this leave. As we noted above, such leave was, indeed prohibitively expensive. The chairman of the board wrote to George’s father apologizing that they could not permit George to come home and expanded on some of the reasons why this was the case.⁵³

There were also some internal tensions in the mission. There was a strong tendency toward unionism among many of the missionaries in China. George differed strongly with Rev. N. Astrup Larson, who arrived in January 1915.

In a letter of June 28, 1915, possibly to Rev. Birkelund, George wrote:

Now as to our discussion with regard to unionism: Since Larsen did not answer my letter to him with regard to the matter, I had simply to think it out for myself. It was not long before I found out how radical he and Thorsen were. When the Free Church attacked the clause with regard to unionism, both the *Lutheran Herald* and (the Norwegian language church paper) contained editorials with regard to the question. T.&L. expressed dissent with the expressions there use in such a way that I wondered why in the world they did not go and join the Free Church. I said little about the subject, though I did have a few arguments with T. both with regard to that and to election. ... Once at a meeting of all us missionaries, too, the rest of them agreed that they would not write home about the unionistic practices in which they were indulging lest they should cause remark. I told them, then, that I did not believe in sneaking

⁵² “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto_of_the_Ninety-Three.

⁵³ Blumer p. 60–62.

behind the bushes to do things that I did not dare to do openly, and that I would indulge only in such “unionism” as I could with a good conscience defend before the whole synodical conference. However the matter ended there then.⁵⁴

Personal and internal stresses in mission work can be isolating, but there is also a danger in wanting to join with others from the homeland while blurring confessional differences. George was keenly aware of the doctrinal and political machinations taking place among the members of his own Norwegian Synod in those years and of the potential of an up-coming split. He was quite frank with his discussion of unionism both at home and in the mission. He wrote to his friend, Gynt:

And thus have led up to what I wanted to say: it looks to me as though there is pretty sure to be a split in our church. I believe that the minority will grow with the years, according as some of this unreasoning enthusiasm for union that has possessed so many of the lay people subsides. Now it depends much, of course, upon what turn matters take at home. But I should think it would be possible for the minority to keep at least some of the property belonging to our synod. [Geo. discusses some properties then continues] Personally I believe it would be much better for our mission work here if the Synod did not join with the U.C. Also I should be glad to see Larsen and Thorsen join the U.C. That is where they both belong.⁵⁵

After he had returned he remarked to the China Mission board in a letter:

I should like to say finally just a word concerning the mission work that I was given the honor of beginning and to which I should gladly have given my life. There is on the mission fields and also in work for missions at home a marked tendency to emphasize the first part of Christ’s command: “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations,” and to lay little stress upon the last part, “teaching

⁵⁴ Letter of June 28, 1915 possibly to Birkelund, in Blumer, pl. 67.

⁵⁵ June 28, 1915 Geo writes of the upcoming split in synod, in Blumer, p. 63ff. June 28, 1915 letter mentioning Faye, George’s former Luther College classmate who would also go to be at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1952. This letter highlights his differences with Rev. N. Astrup Larsen, and it gives an example of the soap-opera melodrama that can take place in the mission field with the mix of personal selfish attitudes and doctrinal justifications (Blumer, p. 66-70). See also Larsen’s 1919 chapters where this unionism was celebrated as a good thing.

them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” ... There we have our orders. Then let obedience to that divine command mean what it will, disobedience is sure as God’s eternal word itself to mean—death.⁵⁶

While at the mission in 1915, the Great War grew worse. Japan made economic demands upon China. The newly invented vacuum tube amplifier made the first long distance phone call possible. The United States rejected women’s suffrage. Germany was the first country to make large-scale use of poison gas as a weapon. Typhoid Mary was identified and quarantined. While the Ottoman Empire had been quietly rounding up Christians for the previous year, it is in 1915 that the Armenian Genocide began in earnest.⁵⁷ At the mission George became the focus of a young woman who had seemingly enlisted the missionary families to facilitate a relationship. George declined. Gossip did not.⁵⁸

There were numerous reasons that George might find the mission field less than hospitable. Few had to do with the actual work of preaching the Gospel to the Chinese. But in November George did travel back to the United States. He had received word that his father was near death. He left from Yokohama, Japan on November 20, 1915. George arrived home in time to see his father who died on January 19, 1916.⁵⁹ In February he received word that the mission committee at home was receiving prejudiced reports about him from the field. It was George’s understanding that the missionaries had encouraged him to go home to see his father before his death. His plan was to return to China. But the news he was receiving was not encouraging.⁶⁰ On March 8 George received a letter from the Norwegian Synod’s Board of Foreign Missions notifying him that he was released from mission work, that he has “severed his connection with the synod’s China Mission.” This was a painful situation that occupied George’s attention and correspondence for some years following.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Letter to the mission board, circa December 1916, in Blumer, p. 84.

⁵⁷ Overview of 1915 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1915>.

⁵⁸ Blumer, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ SR-ELKA 1916, p. 27, 143.

⁶⁰ Blumer, p. 72–3.

⁶¹ Blumer, p. 75–84.

Two Mergers: 1916–1920

Upon his return from China he gave a lecture titled “China and Mission Work Among the Chinese” at Luther College in Decorah.⁶² During the summer of 1916, George aligned himself with the minority opposed to a merger document among Norwegian Lutherans called “The Madison Settlement,” or, in Norwegian, “Opgjør.”⁶³ He attended the first session of the Mission Committee Meeting on the China Mission. In his report on the China mission, Larson stated, “Lillegard suddenly abandoned us and went home” (*Lillegaard pludselig forlod os og reiste hjem*). Larsen’s report relays the complications in the mission due to George’s return home.⁶⁴

While back in the United States, George attended the Divinity School of Chicago from October 1916 to the spring of 1918. He played on the inter-seminary basketball team which captured the championship for that season.⁶⁵ He finished with a Master of Arts.⁶⁶ He desired to go back to China and made the best use of the time in the United States to remedy whatever weaknesses he felt he had which might prevent him from being effective as a Chinese missionary. The degree was one part of his effort at self-improvement.

With regard to what was going on around the world, the British Army made the first blood transfusion using stored refrigerated blood in 1916. In China Yuan Shikai stepped down from the throne which he had re-established the previous December. Poncho Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico and President Wilson responded with a large-scale manhunt of twelve thousand soldiers invading Mexico. The Battle of the Somme raged from July 1 to November 18. In September, Piggly Wiggly introduced the first self-serve grocery store—while over in Europe at the Battle of Flers–Courcellette, France, the motorized tank made its first appearance in the history of warfare.⁶⁷ In October, Margaret Sanger opened the first U.S. birth control clinic which would later become Planned Parenthood. In November, Republican Jeannette

⁶² SR-ELKA 1916, p. 185, 190.

⁶³ SR-ELKA 1916, p. 48-49.

⁶⁴ SR-ELKA 1916. p. 129-131, 262-4, 271.

⁶⁵ Photo of the team, with George and the championship pennant in Blumer, p. 86.

⁶⁶ Blumer, p. 85, fn 39.

⁶⁷ The Battle of Flers–Courcellette, France was part of the Battle of Somme. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1916>.

Rankin of Montana became the first woman elected to federal office in the United States.⁶⁸

At home George worked on overcoming his weaknesses. Pastoral experience was a second part George sought to strengthen. During the summer of 1917, George expected to fill in at “Gullixson’s congregation in Minot.”⁶⁹ Thaddaeus Frank Gullixson was pastor at The First Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minot and of Immanuel’s menighet about 9 miles southeast of Minot.⁷⁰ Pastor Gullixson was a student of Bode Lutheran Academy from 1894 to 1895 (when George was six years old) and would have had George’s father, Lars Lillegard, as an instructor.⁷¹

America entered 1917 in a pose of what was called “watchful waiting” regarding the Great War. President Wilson called for a “peace without victory” in Germany. On the other side of the country, the police in San Francisco closed down nearly two hundred houses of prostitution. Wilson ended the search for Poncho Villa, severed diplomatic ties with Germany, and was sworn in for a second term. Mata Hari was arrested in Paris. The February Revolution began in Russia.⁷² China severed diplomatic ties with Germany. Since both China and the United States were opposed to Germany, the Chinese missionaries still in place were able to continue their work. George corresponded with the mission board continually to keep his name active in the discussions for redeployment to China. Nicholas II of Russia abdicated, a provisional government was set up. Wilson asked for and received a declaration of war against Germany. Later in the year, the Republic of China declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. The bloody October Revolution started the Russian Civil War, with the Bolsheviks gaining supremacy and placing Vladimir Lenin at the head of the new Committee (Soviet).⁷³

⁶⁸ It would not be until 1920 that the 19th Amendment would be passed granting her the right to vote.

⁶⁹ Blumer, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Gullixson’s churches in Minot in Norlie 1918b, p. 147.

⁷¹ Gullixson’s entry in Norlie 1914, p. 459. Bode Lutheran Academy in Halvorsen 1903, p. 190.

⁷² Russia was on the Julian calendar which made the date March 8 in the U.S., but February 23 in Russia.

⁷³ Events in 1917 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1917>. Each of these annual lists should be read. It is common in our day to forget how horrible the past was. We do not remember the bombings, the Halifax Explosion, the suffering of the Silent Sentinels in Occoquan Workhouse on the Night of Terror. All this formed the social milieu in which George and the other fathers of the ELS had to guide their churches and members. I

The First Merger: The United Church 1917

The long anticipated Quadricentennial of the Lutheran Reformation arrived in 1917. Lutheran churches in the United States since 1888 had been increasing liturgical uniformity by adopting the *Common Service*. This increasing uniformity in worship practice was joined with two other “catalysts” for the Merger of Lutherans in the United States. This included the celebration of the Quadricentennial and a desire to galvanize as *American* Lutherans upon the entry of the United States into the Great War.

The joint observance of the former [the Quadricentennial of the Reformation] was well-planned and the planning process itself led straight to the merger. The latter [the United States’ entry into the Great War] was a sudden national emergency and the urgency of it all prompted fast and effective cooperation by Lutherans in their joint response.⁷⁴

Lutherans were to unite based on a common historical heritage. An urgent nationalist attitude of “we’re all in this together” in time of war formed a persuasive and patriotic reason for *American* Lutherans to be united.

For members of the Norwegian Synod the summer of 1917 was indeed momentous. After years of discussing the Madison Agreement (*Oppgjør*), the majority of the Norwegian Synod went forward with the largest church body merger known to that time. Known in conservative Lutheran circles simply as “The Merger,” this uniting of church bodies neglected important doctrinal differences. George had been writing on and addressing the problem of unionism already for years, particularly as it was practiced in the Chinese mission field.

The merger was finalized in [June 6-8,] 1917 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to a great deal of popular public acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and to the heartbreaking dismay of the Minority. Its members knew that if they were going to continue their service to God and be faithful to the heritage given them by

will reduce the number of contemporary contextual references from here on. I need to keep the paper shorter. But doing so, I believe, may lead to a gilded view of the past. It was not gilded. I think it must remain an account of Church Militant in a world captive to Satan, sin, and death.

⁷⁴ Bachmann 72.

the Lord, they would have to dissociate themselves from the merger and begin over again.⁷⁵

The history of the Merger and the beginnings of the reorganized synod are available in many other sources, there is no need to recite the story here.⁷⁶ We should note what we can about George's particular involvement.

For instance, George does not appear in the photo of the synod ministers at Lime Creek, Iowa the next year, 1918. There are twelve men in that photo. William Bukowski reproduced the photo in a beautiful painting which now resides in the ELS seminary and synodical offices. But of the twelve men in the photo, one is a Missouri Synod observer, and not in the photo are Pastors Emil Hanson and George Lillegard.⁷⁷

George had been tending T. E. Gullixson's congregation in Minot. Pastor Gullixson and his congregations went with the Merger. George did not go with the Merger. He chose doctrinal purity. This likely meant that he no longer would be preaching in Minot, nor could he be considered as a possible missionary to China by the foreign mission committee which was now absorbed into the Merger. George stayed at Chicago Divinity School anyway, to finish his M.A. on April 13, 1918.⁷⁸

The old Norwegian Synod, pre-Merger, had been in fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference since that organization was formed in 1872. When the Merger of 1917 took place, that fellowship was severed. The minority that met in Lime Creek in 1918, known as the reorganized Norwegian Synod, immediately began its application for formal membership in the Synodical Conference.

As early as April 1918, George had received positive communication with the Board of Foreign Missions of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. The war remained the main

⁷⁵ Larson and Madson, p. 59.

⁷⁶ See, for example: the June–July 2018 issue of *The Lutheran Sentinel*. https://els.org/wp-content/download/lutheran_sentinel/TLS_JulyAug18.pdf The first two chapters of Ferkenstad 2017. *GFG* chapter 12 “The Norwegian Synod 1903-1917” p. 92-110 and chapter 13 “The Reorganized Norwegian Synod,” p. 111-134. The first five chapters of Aaberg's *A City Set on a Hill*. Larson and Madson p. 1-84, and Orvick 1968. See also Gernander 2004 for a good overview of the doctrinal discussions over the *Madison Statement*. Compare with the historical treatments of Fevold 1980 and Meuser 1980 for views outside the Reorganized Synod. See also Bachmann p 72-76.

⁷⁷ Ferkenstad includes an article from a Norwegian newspaper from Madison, Wisconsin, called *Amerika*, dated Friday June 28, 1918 which stated there were 16 pastors present with a total attendance of 175 persons at this meeting. (Ferkenstad, p. 27).

⁷⁸ Norlie 1922, p. 425; and Blumer, p. 85, fn. 39.

obstacle to sending a missionary to China or conducting an inspection tour of the mission in China.⁷⁹

The Second Merger: "An Help Meet" 1918–1920

The love which man and woman feel for each other is, in consequence, one of the strongest forces in the world. It governs the home, the foundation of society. It dictates the destiny of nations. By it men climb to the highest peaks of earthly joy and bliss. By it they also sink to the lowest depths of degradation and crime and shame, when its laws are broken and set aside. There is nothing in which God's love for man shows itself more clearly than in the manner in which He made them male and female to serve one another in mutual affection and honor. —George Lillegard, *From Eden to Egypt* (1956), 31.

The year 1918 is most known for two major events: The Spanish Flu and the end of the Great War. The flu apparently broke out in January in Haskell County, Kansas. From June to August 1918, it would become a pandemic and kill over fifty million people before it burned out. The Great War would not end until November.

George met his future bride, Agnes Bernice Onstad, in 1917.⁸⁰ She was known by her middle name. George's parents and Bernice's parents had known each other in Calmar, Iowa. The Lillegards had moved to Bode, Iowa in 1889. Bernice's folks had moved to Manitowoc, Wisconsin by 1897. Her father was principal at Wittenberg Academy in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. She graduated college preparatory classes from Bruflat Academy in Portland, North Dakota in 1915. Her granddaughter records that Bernice taught in Hampden, North Dakota, and then at the Winnebago Indian mission school, before moving to

⁷⁹ Letter from R. Kretzschmar for the Board of Foreign Missions, April 17, 1918, in Blumer, p. 87.

⁸⁰ Blumer in Personal Correspondence. "Regarding the courtship of George and Bernice: they met in 1917. Their first official date was on August 21, 1918, after which they wrote each other letters. George proposed to Bernice on July 31st, 1919, the third time they saw each other. This info is based on the letters they wrote to each other, which I was not given until after my Lillegard book was published." Facebook Messenger, December 21, 2020.

Madison, Wisconsin.⁸¹ Their courtship took place through correspondence.⁸²

On June 13, 1918, George wrote to Mrs. O. E. Brandt in St. Paul that he had received and decided to accept a call to Lake View Lutheran Church in Chicago. He served from May 1918 until April 1921.⁸³ He started shortly after earning his M.A. at Chicago Divinity School. Thus he would continue to serve. However, Lakeview was not part of the reorganized Norwegian Synod. Rather, it was, by default, still part of the Merger church body. The congregation viewed itself as a neutral party. The congregation had submitted a request to the body in 1916 to make a clearer definition of doctrinal issues than was contained in the *Opgjør*. Since the new Merger church had not done so, the Lake View congregation voted to withdraw in November 1918.⁸⁴

So it was after the completion of his master's work and after he had accepted a full time permanent call that George proposed to Bernice. Thus, he was also working to remedy two perceived deficiencies in his previous work as a missionary. Now he would have pastoral experience. And soon he might have a wife.

This is not intended to make it sound like George's choice to get married to Bernice was a purely utilitarian decision for the purpose of gaining the mission field. If that were the case, George had one, possibly two previous opportunities for such a union during his first mission trip.⁸⁵ But it is clear from George's letters and activities that he still desired to return to China and that this was a serious part of his consideration. After his return from China, he kept in active contact with the Synodical Conference Board of Foreign Missions and made himself available to speak on his mission work in China. His correspondence indicated that he was concerned about his deficiencies, both real and

⁸¹ This is also an interesting overlap. This would likely place Bernice at the Indian Mission in Wittenberg from 1916–17. George's sister, Olga, worked at the Indian Mission in Gresham, Wisconsin (about 20 miles from Wittenberg) from at least 1918–19 (*ELT&LS* June 9, 1919, 3:2, page 31).

⁸² For courtship and wedding documents, see Blumer, p. 95-104.

⁸³ Letter in Blumer, p. 88.

⁸⁴ Documents in Blumer, p. 89. *ELT&LS* January 21, 1919, 2:24, page 192. The congregation would in 1922 vote to rejoin the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

⁸⁵ In a letter to Rev. Thorsen November 4, 1914 George discussed the unlikely prospects of a certain girl as a wife, in Blumer, p. 58. In another letter dated June 28, 1915, George mentions this girl in contrast to another girl from the American Lutheran Mission with whom he was being clumsily set up, and a third with whom he had been corresponding, in Blumer, p. 68–70.

perceived. In a letter from George to his friend Gynt going back to May 25, 1917, George wrote:

In another year, things ought to have cleared up sufficiently on the political horizon—as well as the ecclesiastical heavens—to make it possible for me to continue the work I have learned to love. As long as we are in this beastly war, and as high prices and poor exchange prevail in China, I suppose our church will be forced to retrench rather than to increase its work on the foreign fields, and under the circumstances I shall be satisfied to stay at home and continue my studies. That will also give the people a chance to forget the “kjaerringsladder” [Old woman gossip] that has passed current concerning me, and afford me the opportunity to acquire the added “alder og forstand” [maturity and understanding] and pastoral experience in this country that Larsen [the head of the NELC China Mission] at least seems to think so necessary to successful foreign mission work. If I am to work along side of him and his ilk, I suppose it will be necessary to conform somewhat to his ideas of what a missionary should be and to come up to his standards.⁸⁶

George’s academic work can certainly be understood as part of his desire to fulfill these conditions. His pastoral work is part of this, but the work was also to be done for its own sake. While getting married was, perhaps, the best way to avoid becoming the focus of *kjaerringsladder*, George’s love for Bernice became more and more apparent through his writing, affecting even how he wrote on marriage in sermons and books.⁸⁷

The summer of 1918 saw a dramatic increase in the Spanish Flu pandemic where “292,000 deaths were reported between September–December 1918,”⁸⁸ the execution of the Romanov family by order of the Bolsheviks at the hand of the Cheka, The Red Terror, and the Cloquet Fire in Minnesota which killed four hundred and fifty-three people. At the beginning of November, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated, and the Great War ended on the November 11, 1918 armistice. Although the Great War was over, the world had not become more peaceful. The Russian Revolution raged terribly, on and on.

⁸⁶ Letter to Gynt May 25, 1917, in Blumer, p. 85.

⁸⁷ Thus, the reason for the citation of *From Eden to Egypt* opening this section.

⁸⁸ The Spanish Flu https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu#Deadly_second_wave_of_late_1918.

While there were some notable good advances in 1919, that year saw a frightening resurgence of the Spanish Flu. The Eighteenth Amendment was passed enforcing Prohibition. Communist parties were formed throughout the world, including in the U.S. Riots, bombings, strikes, and killings, pro- and anti-communism, proliferated across the United States. Anarchists send mail bombs in the United States. In the middle of all this, the Nineteenth Amendment, granting suffrage to women, was sent to the states for ratification. The bloody Marxist Revolution in Germany (November Revolution) ended and the Weimar Republic was established. 1919 was and remains the worst year of race riots in the history of United States, including a large Chicago riot that July.⁸⁹ Babe Ruth was traded to the Yankees. Germany began its rapid descent into uncontrolled inflation.⁹⁰

As George settled into his pastoral work in Chicago, he began writing prolifically. Aside from his weekly sermons and Bible Studies, from 1918 to 1920 he produced more than sixteen articles for the *Evangelisk Luthersk Tidende and Lutheran Sentinel (ELT&LS)* on a wide variety of topics.

Though they did not have the constant barrage of news which deluges our Internet age, their newspapers did report how horrible it was all around them. People made it an intentional focus to do things to cheer each other and celebrate. Music was part of this. George continued to perform and organize chorales and other musical performances both locally, regionally, and at synod meetings.⁹¹

On Monday, June 9, 1919, George and the Men's Club of his congregation held a homecoming party for soldiers returning from war. This was intended to be a male only meeting, but the *ELT&LS* reported: "The ladies, who were not invited, also came and surprised the Men's Club, so it turned out to be a really big party night."⁹²

⁸⁹ This particular set of Race Riots is called *Red Summer* see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Summer. For the Chicago race riot of 1919 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_race_riot_of_1919.

⁹⁰ Events of 1919 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1919>.

⁹¹ Many of his articles are listed in the appendix. For musical events see, e.g., *ELT&LS* 2:44, June 10, 1919, p. 350; *ELT&LS* 3:1, July 1, 1919, p. 14; *ELT&LS* 3:15, October 8, 1919, p. 229; *ELT&LS* 3:24, December 10, 1919, p. 383; *ELT&LS* 3:28, January 7, 1920, p. 447; *ELT&LS* 3:41, April 7, 1920, p. 671.

⁹² "Kirkenyt" *ELT&LS* 3:1, July 1, 1919, p. 14.

Through those years George was active in his local, regional, and synodical pastoral conferences, on occasion presenting papers at those conferences.⁹³

He was active at building his congregation's youth group, Sunday School, and even property improvement.⁹⁴ He was invited on many occasions to speak about China and the work he had done there, and he involved himself in the mission work of the Synodical Conference.⁹⁵

The Chicago Race Riots started July 27, 1919 and continued to August 12. These took place about nine miles south of Lake View Lutheran Church.⁹⁶ George proposed to Bernice on their third date, July 30, 1919.⁹⁷

In December 1919, George received a call to serve as a missionary in India.⁹⁸ He declined this call, but he kept up his focus on returning to China. One month before their marriage the *ELT&LS* reported in "Church News": "Rev. G. O. Lillegard was in conference with the

⁹³ At Western Koshkonong (*ELT&LS* 2:5, September 10, 1918, p. 39); synod convention both preaching and performing music (*ELT&LS* 2:44, June 10, 1919, p. 350); at Rev. Chr. Andersons in Minneapolis (*ELT&LS* 3:6, August 6, 1919, p. 95); at Scarville (*ELT&LS* 3:19, November 5, 1919, p. 298); General pastoral conference at which he presented a paper on "Kiliasmen" [Millennialism] (*ELT&LS* 3:19, November 5, 1919, p.298f).

⁹⁴ "Kirkenyt" *ELT&LS* 3:13, September 24, 1919, p. 206.

⁹⁵ Chinese mission work speaking and involvement: at Gresham, Wisconsin Indian Mission for its annual mission festival July 27 (*ELT&LS* 3:6, August 6, 1919, p. 95); article "Missourisyndens hedningemission." (*ELT&LS* 3:21, November 19, 1919, p. 331-333); at Western Koshkonong's 75th Anniversary (*ELT&LS* 3:15, October 8, 1919, p. 228); two mentions of his attending a Missouri Synod Mission board meeting (*ELT&LS* 3:17 and 18, October 22 and 29, 1919, pages 271, 288); Preaching at Mission Festival in Madison at Our Saviors (*ELT&LS* 3:24, December 10, 1919, p. 383) where he spoke on "The present Outlook for Christian Missions in the Orient." (*ELT&LS* 3:28, January 7, 1920, p.446).

⁹⁶ Pastor G. Gullixson wrote about the riots in the August 6, 1919 *ELT&LS* 3:6, pages 90-91 where he included the statement of the Chicago Church Federation on the riots.

⁹⁷ This date is from Blumer, p. 98. It is difficult to figure out if this is reliable. Bernice wrote a letter on July 29, 1921 to her mother from Kuling, China. In the closing of the letter she remarked "It is two years ago today since George first came to see me. Remember how it rained? And he stayed over & we had our boat ride the next night" (Blumer, p. 172). This would place their first "date" on July 29, 1919. Perhaps they squeezed three dates into this two-day period. In any consideration it appears to have been a very brief in-person courtship with most depending on correspondence (Blumer, p. 97).

⁹⁸ "Church News," *ELT&LS* 3:26 December 24, 1919, p. 414.

committee on foreign missions of the Missouri Synod at St. Louis, Mo., Monday, April 26th.⁹⁹

On Wednesday, May 26, 1920, George and Bernice were united in holy matrimony in Madison, Wisconsin. The synod heard about it through the "Church News" which timed the announcement of the wedding to be delivered the same day:

Rev. G.O. Lillegard of Chicago, Ill., and Miss Bernice Onstad of Madison, Wis., were united in marriage at Madison Wis., Wednesday, May 26th. The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E.J. Onstad. The wedding ceremony was held in Our Saviour's [sic] Church, Rev. Holden M. Olsen officiating. The brides-maids were Miss Alice Jacobson of Wittenberg, Wis., Miss Valborg Lillegard and Miss Elsa Onstad. The grooms-men were Rev. H.A. Preus of Chicago, Mr. A. Nordgaard, Madison, Wis., and Mr. Ragnar Onstad, Madison. The wedding supper was served in the parlors of the church. We are happy to extend congratulations and best wishes for their future happiness.¹⁰⁰

The next month, June 28, the Lake View Congregation held a reception:

Lake View congregation, Chicago, hosted a beautiful welcome party on Monday evening, June 28, for Pastor Geo. O. Lillegard and his bride. Flowers adorned the tables, and for few hours they enjoyed a variety of orchestral music, song, and speeches while they served coffee and cakes and ice cream. Several members of the congregation gave welcome speeches and also presented the bride and groom with ready-made gifts. Speeches were also given by Synod Pastors in Chicago. The reception closed with the Pastor and his wife giving thanks for all the love shown to them.¹⁰¹

George had found a wife who was willing to share his dream and the labor that dream would mean: both as a pastor, and potentially, as a missionary in China. To the members of the synod it appeared that they

⁹⁹ *ELT&LS* 3:44, April 28, 1920, p. 719.

¹⁰⁰ *ELT&LS* 3:48, May 26, 1920, p. 783.


¹⁰¹ "Kirkenyt" *ELT&LS* 3:53, June 30, 1920, p. 863. A photograph of the invitation to the wedding is in Blumer, p. 99. There is an image of the invitation to this reception, a description of the wedding from an unidentified Madison, Wisconsin newspaper, and a congratulatory telegram from G.A. Gullixson in Blumer, p. 100–101. A wedding photo is on Blumer, p. 102, followed by what appears to be a honeymoon photo of Bernice at Wisconsin Dells on p. 103.

did not have long to wait. It was quite sudden: less than two months after their wedding! The July 21, 1920 issue of the *ELT&LS* announced:

Rev. Geo. O. Lillegard, Lake View Church, Chicago, has been called by the Missouri Synod to the mission field in China. The Norwegian Synod decided at its last Annual Meeting to cooperate with the Missouri Synod in the foreign mission fields. Lake View congregation will take action on the call at a special meeting to be held in September.¹⁰²

In point of fact, however, George's acceptance letter to the Board of Foreign Missions on October 6, 1920 states that the call was issued on May 20, 1920. That is six days before George and Bernice got married. The couple took their vows knowing that it was a high probability that their new life together would begin in China. The public news of the call waited until two months after the wedding.¹⁰³

The *ELT&LS* in the following months ran a handful of articles on China and mission work in China. With the announcement in Norwegian in the October 6 issue, the Lake View congregation granted Pastor Lillegard his desire to accept the call. The English edition of October 13 announced that George had accepted the call, and the Norwegian Synod would work to cooperate with the Missouri Synod mission board. Doctor S. Ylvisaker was the Norwegian Synod's representative on that board.¹⁰⁴

George and Bernice would not sail until the following May. There were preparations to be made. 

To be continued

¹⁰² *ELT&LS* 4:3, July 21, 1919, p. 47. Correspondence from the Missouri Synod Board of Foreign Missions is in Blumer, p. 104-105. George's resignation as pastor of Lake View in Blumer, p. 106, George's letter of October 6, 1920 accepting the call to China is in Blumer, p. 107, and his letter to the Board of Foreign Missions of the same date in Blumer, pl. 108. Kretzchmar's response for the Board is in Blumer, p. 109. Blumer has an undated letter, designated Fall, 1920, regarding departure and salary.

¹⁰³ The letter is in Blumer, p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ Articles and notes during this short period from George and others, especially regarding China: *ELT&LS* 4:7 August 18, 1920, p. 100-102, 104-105; *ELT&LS* 4:9 September 1, 1920, p. 136-137; *ELT&LS* 4:11 September 15, 1920, p. 171-172, 172-173; Lake View's release is in *ELT&LS* 4:14, October 6, 1920, p. 224; George's acceptance and synodical coordination is found in *ELT&LS* 4:15, October 13, 1920, p. 240.

Abbreviations

CHI = Concordia Historical Institute

ELT&LS = *Evangelisk Luthersk Tidende* and *Lutheran Sentinel*

FOF = *Faith of Our Fathers*.

GFG = *Grace For Grace*.

LCArch = Luther College Archives, Decorah, Iowa.

KMT = “The Kuomintang (KMT) (Chinese: 中國國民黨; pinyin: Zhōngguó Guómíndǎng; lit. ‘China Nationals’ Party’), often referred to in English as the Nationalist Party of China or Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP), is a major political party in Taiwan, based in Taipei. Formed in 1919, the KMT was the sole ruling party of the Republic of China from 1928 to 2000 under the Dang Guo system, and is currently an opposition political party in the Legislative Yuan. The Kuomintang is one of the two historical contemporary parties in China, the other being the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuomintang>

SR = *Synod Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* or *Beretning om Den norske Synode af den Amerikanske Evangelisk Lutherske Kirke*.

SR-ELKA = *Beretning om det Synoden for den norsk=evangelisk=lutherske kirke i Amerika*

Rudolph E. Honsey

*Peter J. Faugstad
Jerico, Saude, and Redeemer Lutheran Churches
New Hampton and Lawler, Iowa*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

IT WAS THE SPRING OF 1945, AND PASTOR NEELAK Tjernagel was searching for a teacher. He and a handful of parishioners had organized a Lutheran school two years before, but teachers were hard to come by. In May he reported this to the members of the parish:

We are to have the services of Mr. Rudolph Honsey, who is being graduated in July from the Seminary at St. Louis. He is a member of the congregations of Rev. H. Ingebritson at Lime Creek, Iowa. We are extremely fortunate in securing him as teacher. He is personally known to me, and I have every reason to believe that he will be an excellent teacher.¹

Pastor Tjernagel was not the only one to recognize Rudy's potential as a teacher. S. C. Ylvisaker, the president of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, saw it too. With many young men returning from their service in World War II, Bethany needed teachers for its growing student population.² Wouldn't Rudy be able to help for just one year? He agreed, while humbly declining the parish schoolteacher

¹ "Saude Lutheran School," *The Assistant Pastor: Parish Newsletter for the Jerico and Saude Lutheran Churches* (May 1945): 2, <https://saudejerico.com/history/>.

² Lance Schwartz, "A Humble Honor," *Bethany Report* (Fall 2008): 12, <https://blc.edu/about/news/bethany-magazine/>.

call. This was the start of a long and fruitful career at Bethany Lutheran College.

Rudy the Student

Rudy knew Bethany well. One might say that Rudy and Bethany “grew up together.” Rudy was a member of the Lime Creek congregation, a country church about five miles north of Lake Mills, Iowa, and a mile south of the Iowa–Minnesota border. It was here that the Norwegian Synod was reorganized in 1918. Rudy was present at this historic synod meeting, but he was blissfully unaware of the moment. He was born a couple of months later on September 9. The Lime Creek church was the hub of Honsey family life. Rudy was baptized there as an infant, attended its day school (graduating in 1933), and was confirmed there on February 25, 1934. He loved to learn. He later said that he could milk cows faster than anyone because after that, he could go read.³ His pastor, Henry Ingebritson, could see what a gifted student he was. After Rudy completed studies at Lake Mills High School (1937), Pastor Ingebritson urged his parents to let him enroll at Bethany. Bethany was a young school at this time. It had opened as a ladies college in 1911, but it had not become the synod’s college until 1927. When Rudy started at Bethany in 1938 at age twenty, the college was barely a decade old.

At Bethany, Rudy took a particular interest in language study. This no doubt raised him in the estimation of President Ylvisaker, whose academic specialty was in languages. Rudy stayed an extra year at Bethany, so he could take more language courses.⁴ After his third year there, he decided to study for the ministry. Since Bethany did not have its own seminary, he enrolled at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, and studied there from 1941 to 1944. For his final year of pastoral preparation, he was assigned to vicar under Pastor Justin A. Petersen at the Scarville/Center Lutheran parish. This put him only a few miles from his home farm and home parish. In Scarville, Rudy witnessed one of the most difficult and one of the most joyful times in the Petersen family. One day in the summer of 1944, a Western Union telegram arrived with the news that Justin and Nettie’s son Paul was missing in action in Europe. His bomber had been shot down, and the status of the crew was unknown. Then seven weeks later, Rudy was with

³ Judi Haaland, phone conversation, October 13, 2020.

⁴ Josiah Willitz, “Oral History: Rudolph Honsey,” *Oak Leaves: Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society* 14, no. 3 (2010): 9, <https://www.els-history.org/oak-leaves.html>.

the Petersens again when they received word that Paul and the rest of the crew had been found safe in France. He said he never forgot the look on Nettie's face on both occasions.⁵ Rudy later wrote of his vicarage that Pastor Petersen "gave him many valuable suggestions which he will never forget. Among the most lasting impressions were his preaching of the Gospel and his sympathetic understanding of human beings."⁶

Rudy the Family Man

Rudy expected to take a call to a synod church after his vicarage ended in 1945, but God had other plans for him. He returned to teach at his alma mater for the 1945–1946 school year. The next year, he was called to teach at Bethany permanently. But there were still more unexpected changes and blessings in store. The local synod congregation, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, had just started a school, and Elizabeth (Betty) Lillegard was its first teacher. Betty was born in 1923 in Ichang, China, where her father served as a missionary. She attended Bethany Lutheran College and Boston University but left college early to start teaching. She was well-suited for the task. She was very capable and outgoing and was not afraid of hard work.⁷ This gifted young lady did not escape Rudy's notice, or perhaps it was Betty who first noticed the shy Bethany professor. They found that they shared an appreciation for good music. Their first date was attending a concert by the great twentieth century pianist, Rudolf Serkin.⁸ But more than music, they were drawn together by a common faith. The two became engaged and were married in 1950.

God blessed this union with five children: Judith (1951), Carole (1952), Philip (1954), Ellen (1956), and Ralph (1960).⁹ Carole arrived on her dad's thirty-fourth birthday—his "best birthday present," he said.¹⁰ The children grew up in a warm home. Betty managed the household while Rudy carried out his Bethany responsibilities. The children remember their mom as providing "tremendous backbone and support for Dad and the family," and as "the cement that held the family

⁵ John Petersen, email correspondence, October 9, 2020; Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020.

⁶ Rudolph E. Honsey, "In Remembrance," *Lutheran Sentinel* 47, no. 9 (May 1964): 140.

⁷ Haaland, email, October 13, 2020; Phil Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

⁸ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

⁹ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

¹⁰ Carole Falconer, email, October 14, 2020.

together.”¹¹ Their dad was busy, but he made sure to lead them in daily devotions and hymn singing.¹² He also shared his hobbies with them. When the family lived in Arlington, Massachusetts, from 1962 to 1966, he took the kids to historical sites and sporting events. His son Phil remembers their many excursions:

Dad went out of his way to take us to Fenway Park to watch Killebrew and Allison homer over our heads as we sat above the Green Monster wall in left field.... We went to the Garden to see the Celtics. He loved Bill Russell. Years later, it was Bird and Magic. We rode on the Swan Boats on Boston Commons, and visited the war and literary historic sites, such as the Old North Church, Bunker Hill, Lexington, Concord, Walden Pond, Louisa May Alcott’s home, etc. We went to the glass flower exhibits at Harvard, the first King Tut exhibit in this country, and many other works of arts in Boston area museums. We went to see natural wonders in the mountains and in the Maine lake country.¹³

Each year, the family would travel from Massachusetts to Mankato for synod convention and to visit relatives. According to daughter Judi, this was another opportunity for sightseeing:

One year, we went into Canada and came down through northern MN, visiting mines and other points of interest. We also stopped at the Sudbury, Ont. nickel mine. Another return trip took us to the Washington DC area where we stayed with our Aunt Alice and family. We saw all of the free memorials, but because Dad was so interested in history, we spent much of 3 days at the Smithsonian.¹⁴

Rudy and Betty also passed on their love of music to their children. Betty was a proficient pianist and organist, and she often provided accompaniment for church services in Mankato and Massachusetts. She got her children started in music at a young age:

¹¹ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020; Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020.

¹² Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020. Rudy had been raised the same way as he shared in his 2009 homily at the ELS Historical Society Meeting: “We who had Christian parents can truly be grateful to God for that. What a blessing to have been taught prayers, Bible passages, and hymn stanzas from our mothers as they tucked us into bed at night! I can still remember some of them. And what a blessing to have had Christian fathers!” *Oak Leaves* 13, no. 2 (2009): 2.

¹³ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

¹⁴ Haaland, email, October 14, 2020.

I still remember her sitting down at the piano when I was little; she would put us to bed and then play piano until we fell asleep. She also taught us the basics of piano when we were young. One of her favorite non-church activities was her “Friends of Music” group in Mankato. If I recall correctly, the members would take turns hosting an evening where they would listen to and discuss classical works. She had a pretty extensive library of church music.¹⁵

Rudy did not excel at music performance, but he loved to listen to classical music by Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven, along with more modern music by Gilbert and Sullivan and Burl Ives. Phil describes how his parents’ musical hobbies met in the family living room:

The living room at 110 Echo St. in Mankato was dominated by Mom’s 1872 Knabe baby grand piano, which my sisters used a lot. But almost as imposing as that piano was Dad’s enormous mono speaker, with something like a 14" woofer. It not only did great credit to the classical works, but also was a perfect means for me to introduce Led Zeppelin to the family and neighborhood. Dad was open-minded enough to come to appreciate The Beatles’ Abbey Road. He liked “Something” and got a chuckle out of “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer.” But Led Zeppelin—not so much.¹⁶

Besides her parents’ love for classical music, daughter Carole notes that “they were also avid readers. We did not have a TV for quite a while after we moved to Massachusetts so if we were bored, Mom would tell us to get a book from Dad’s library. So I ended up reading Homer’s *Odyssey* in junior high, among other classic books he had.”¹⁷

Rudy and Betty deeply loved their children. Judi recounts how hard it was for them when their youngest son Ralph became ill with meningitis. He was in a coma for eight days and was hospitalized for sixteen days. Until the end of their lives, they often commented, “We almost lost Ralph.”¹⁸ The family was very close and remained so even as the kids grew up and left the home. In his *People’s Bible* commentary on the book of Job, Rudy wrote about the relationship between parents and their adult children:

¹⁵ Haaland, email, December 4, 2020.

¹⁶ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

¹⁷ Falconer, email, October 14, 2020.

¹⁸ Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020.

Job is an excellent example of how parents should conduct themselves with regard to their adult children. The context strongly suggests that Job's sons were adults, since they had their own homes. His daughters also had very likely passed childhood. Job did not meddle. He neither planned their parties nor did he interfere with them, but he did have a true fatherly concern for their spiritual welfare. True Christian parents will also show such concern.

The relationship between parents and children changes when the children reach adulthood. Parents ought to avoid meddling and interfering with the plans and activities of their grown children. But they should never forget that as parents they should have a true concern for the welfare of their children, keep in touch with them, and continue to pray for them. Although our society is different from that in which Job lived, the parent-child relationship is still there. Even when children move away and establish their own households, that relationship can continue as a beautiful and enduring one.¹⁹

By the grace of God, Rudy and Betty's relationship with their children was a "beautiful and enduring one." Several times in his *Job* commentary, Rudy emphasized the blessing of children.²⁰ He pointed to Psalms 127 and 128, which read in part:

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.... Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.... Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.²¹

Rudy the Teacher, 1945–1962

By the time Rudy and Betty were married in 1950, they had no illusions about the demands of Rudy's teaching at Bethany. Much was asked of the college faculty, and their compensation did not exactly fit

¹⁹ Rudolph E. Honsey, *The People's Bible: Job*, 2nd ed. (Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 121, 144, 363.

²¹ *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, © 2001, 2007 by Crossway Bibles.

their responsibilities. Norman Holte, who began teaching the same year as Rudy, marveled at the resilience of the faculty and its president:

Considering the salaries, the heavy teaching loads (twenty hours a week and more was not uncommon), and the added burden of extra-curricular duties, it is surprising that able teachers remained. This stands as a testimony to the high regard that faculty members had for [President] Ylvisaker as well as to his persuasiveness in articulating the importance of the work being done at Bethany. It often became a matter of conscience to remain at Bethany.²²

When asked later about the workload, Rudy replied with a smile, "I really enjoyed it, for some stupid reason."²³ He taught a variety of subjects, especially in the areas of foreign language and social studies. Milton Otto highlighted his willingness to do whatever was needed for Bethany: "Because of his interest in Christian Education and his always being ready to expend himself for its promotion, he usually had a heavier teaching load than any other instructor."²⁴

Rudy was a lively classroom teacher. Erling Teigen remembers one of Rudy's illustrations from humanities class in 1959. He was explaining Zeno's paradox that "you could never get from point A to B, because you always have to traverse half the distance and always have something left over, and then he announced that he was going to disprove that theory and took off his glasses and walked into the black board."²⁵ Teigen also noted Rudy's efficient use of paper. Soon after he started teaching, the college purchased a "spirit duplicator," more commonly called a "ditto machine." According to Teigen, "Prof. Rudolph Honsey is still remembered for being able to squeeze more information on a dittoed handout than anyone else."²⁶ Former student David Meyer recalls the same thing:

Many of his handouts had been around since the time of hand operated mimeograph machines. That was a very time consuming process, back in the day, and Prof. Honsey made certain it was not a wasted effort. He used almost no margins top, bottom or sides and he quite often would run out of space and would complete his thoughts by writing long hand in what ever white space was left on

²² Norman S. Holte, "Guide of Youth," in *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, 1884–1959*, ed. Peter T. Harstad (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1984), 119.

²³ Schwartz, 13.

²⁴ M. H. Otto, "From Bethany to Boston," *Lutheran Sentinel* (March 1962): 76.

²⁵ Erling Teigen, email, October 16, 2020.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the page. In order to finish reading his handouts you would often have to turn them around in a complete circle by the time you were finished.²⁷

As a theological professor, Rudy was expected to preach regularly for chapel, and his sermons made a strong impression on the students. Amanda Madson, a student in the early 1950s, recalled these sermons: “He knew the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and from him I learned Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth, life and death of Jesus. I learned how the Gospel could be found in seemingly obscure passages, and how important it was to study every part of the Bible, even the ‘begats.’”²⁸ Jim Olsen also remembers these encouraging addresses: “There was no doubt left in the students’ minds about his understanding of Law and Gospel. And I came to understand in time that his understanding of the Law was what made the Gospel glow with the warm application intended by God. Our faith was fed in Hebrew exegesis and later the same day at morning chapel.”²⁹

Rudy endeared himself to his students with more than just his teaching and preaching. Teigen recounts that “Rudy was also famous for technological INcompetency. He never mastered starting a record smoothly on the phonograph. The starts and stops were always accompanied by some dreadful sounds.”³⁰ Each spring and fall when the faculty and students spent a day cleaning up the campus, Rudy came in his usual uniform: “red baseball cap, blue bib-overalls, and an old brown suit coat.”³¹ One of his extracurricular efforts that many students enjoyed was the “Norse Club.” Amanda Madson recalled two Norse Club events which occurred on the same day:

We met in the classroom where Norwegian was taught, and sang Norwegian hymns and songs. That was not easy! Even though we were learning the language, singing the hymns was hard because there were too many words we did not know. This singing was only the prelude to the real important event which followed. We prepared a lutefisk supper for the student body! That first year, I was a bystander, doing what I was told, and serving the food.... My second year, Mr. Honsey put me in charge of preparing the

²⁷ David Meyer, email, October 18, 2020.

²⁸ Amanda Madson, “Christmas at Bethany, 1951–1956,” *Oak Leaves* 1, no. 3 (1997): 3.

²⁹ Jim Olsen, email, October 7, 2020.

³⁰ E. Teigen, email, October 16, 2020.

³¹ *Ibid.*

lutefisk.... Somehow it cooked satisfactorily, and we served our 75 lutefisk-loving people. I was amazed at how many students, even Germans, honestly liked the Norwegian delicacy.³²

During these years of teaching, Rudy also pursued further studies. Bethany encouraged the faculty members to do this, so the college would retain state accreditation. Rudy took courses on teaching methodology at Mankato State University and archeology and Egyptian history at the University of Chicago.³³ He also enrolled in some courses at the University of Wisconsin over several summers, and earned a Master of Arts in Scandinavian Studies in 1955 from the University of Minnesota.³⁴ Bethany urged him to keep working toward a Ph.D. An opportunity presented itself when the synod congregation in Cambridge, Massachusetts had a pastoral vacancy. B. W. Teigen, who had become Bethany's president in 1950, traveled to Cambridge in 1961 to conduct services during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons.³⁵ By his encouragement, the congregation soon called Rudy to serve as its pastor. Bethany was not eager to lose him but thought that he might pursue doctoral work at Harvard while serving the small congregation. Rudy was interested both in parish work and in continuing his studies. He accepted the call and made plans to move early in 1962.

The Bethany student body organized a farewell program in his honor:

Indicative of the respect and high esteem in which the professor-now-become-pastor is held, was the student-sponsored program in his honor in the Bethany chapel on February 4th. To the accompaniment of a number of photographs projected on a movie screen, a summary of the highlights of his life was presented to a warm and appreciative audience. Several schoolmates and members of the Bethany staff participated in the program, too, which was enjoyed also by the parents and other relatives and friends of both Prof. and Mrs. Honsey. At the conclusion of the program a Private

³² Madson, 6. The Bethany Lutefisk Dinner continued long after Rudy was in charge of it, and he and Betty always enjoyed taking part.

³³ Willitz, 9.

³⁴ Falconer, email, November 18, 2020.

³⁵ Rudolph E. Honsey, "Harvard Street Lutheran Church," *Lutheran Sentinel* (May 1964): 153.

Communion set and a check were presented to Prof. Honsey as a farewell gift from the student body.³⁶

Then Rudy (age 43), Betty (age 38) and their five kids (ages 10, 9, 7, 5, and 2) loaded into the family Rambler and set off for their new home on the east coast.³⁷

Rudy the Pastor

Now for the first time, Rudy was a parish pastor. He was not totally without parish experience. He had actively participated in the work of the Mt. Olive congregation and also preached “on literally innumerable occasions” at congregations in the Mankato area.³⁸ Betty was likewise prepared to be a parish pastor’s wife, having grown up in a parsonage. She was particularly familiar with the Cambridge congregation, since her father had served there from 1928 to 1952. She and Rudy were married in this church, so by the time the Honseys arrived, both they and the Harvard Street members were acquainted with each other. Rudy indicated that it was tough for the members to shake their past association with Betty: “People would call her the pastor’s daughter, instead of the pastor’s wife.”³⁹

Rudy diligently carried out his work as pastor. He had preached once a week in Bethany’s chapel, so he was used to preparing sermons. And he may not have been in a Bethany classroom anymore, but there was still plenty of teaching to do with catechism, adult instruction, and weekly Bible classes. By the end of 1962, he reported a membership of 150 souls with an average attendance of 67. According to the *Synod Reports* for the years 1962 to 1966, Rudy baptized twenty-five plus children and one adult, confirmed nine children and eight adults, and conducted ten weddings and about twenty funerals. The location of the church near both Harvard and MIT meant that university students regularly visited the Harvard Street church. The Honseys were happy to invite them to the Sunday dinner table for roast beef or baked chicken. Judi remembers “first meeting Bill Overn (a longtime BLC regent) at

³⁶ Otto, 76. The same source recounts another farewell hosted by the faculty at President Teigen’s house on February 6th.

³⁷ Judi recalls the family’s travels to Massachusetts and back again each June for Synod Convention: “All 7 of us piled into a little Rambler (!), 4 of us in the back seat and the youngest, Ralph, in the front seat with Mom and Dad. Of course, no seatbelts. Mom and Dad would keep us entertained with road games, singing, searching for license plates from different states, landmarks, etc.” Haaland, email, October 14, 2020.

³⁸ Otto, 77.

³⁹ Willitz, 9.

our table when he was a part of the Mariner project to Mars. There were countless others, and you can believe that anyone from Minnesota was invited!”⁴⁰

As he carried on his pastoral work, Rudy also looked into higher education opportunities nearby. Harvard University was just down the street, but its liberal biblical criticism approach left much to be desired. He soon set his sights on Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, where Dr. Cyrus Gordon taught. Since the tuition cost of some \$3,000 was nearly equal to his pastoral salary, Rudy applied for a scholarship. President Teigen in the June 1964 edition of *The Lutheran Sentinel* shared the happy news:

Rev. R. E. Honsey, pastor of our Harvard Street Lutheran Church Cambridge, Massachusetts, recently was awarded a very substantial scholarship by the Graduate School of Brandeis University. This scholarship will enable him to study the Old Testament under conservative scholars who believe in the true historicity of Abraham and the patriarchs. Pastor Honsey’s studies, it is hoped, will ultimately lead to a doctorate in Semitics. He will be privileged to study under Dr. Cyrus Gordon, an archeologist of considerable fame, who believes that the Old Testament accounts as given in the first five books of Moses are not myths, but truths. Dr. Gordon has also done a great deal of archeological work which attests the first five books of the Bible, as being historically true.

We congratulate Pastor Honsey on receiving this substantial scholarship, and we trust that his investigations will prove to be of value to our church.⁴¹

Rudy now engaged in serious language study, especially ancient near eastern languages. Dr. Gordon was an expert in Ugaritic and required his students to buy one textbook that had a bit of sticker shock. Judi reports:

I remember vividly when Dad attended Brandeis, that he had to spend \$30 on a Ugaritic textbook, which was a fortune at that time for us. But he definitely used it, and it was reluctantly given to BLC when he had to move [to assisted living]. He studied many languages, but not all were obviously orally proficient as many are

⁴⁰ Haaland, email, October 14, 2020.

⁴¹ B. W. Teigen, “Synod News,” *Lutheran Sentinel* (June 1964): 174.

unused: Phoenician, Minoan, Cretan, Arabic, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Akkadian, Sumerian, Babylonian and Ugaritic, to name a few.⁴²

Even with his family and parish duties, Rudy excelled in his classes. Two years after starting at Brandeis, he earned a Master of Arts degree in Mediterranean Studies. He had now done all the coursework for a Ph.D. But before he could complete his doctoral thesis, Bethany Lutheran College called him to return as full-time professor. Those were challenging times for Bethany. The recent break-up of the Synodical Conference had led to a steep drop in student enrollment. If Rudy returned, he would be asked to take on a heavy teaching load again. He accepted the call. In his final letter to the members at Harvard Street Lutheran, he encouraged both active and delinquent members to faithfully and regularly receive the means of grace. He also recounted his work among them:

The Word of God is our most precious possession, and it is a great privilege for a pastor to proclaim the Gospel of salvation and to minister to the spiritual needs of fellow sinners. As I look back on my ministry among you, I thank God for that privilege. And, realizing my own shortcomings, I also ask His forgiveness and yours for whatever mistakes I have made in my ministry. I can, however, state that it has been my endeavor to proclaim and apply the Word of God in its truth and purity, and to fulfill the duties of my calling to the best of my ability.⁴³

He mentioned that Pastor Paul G. Madson would arrive soon as their new pastor. He urged the people “to receive [him] as an ambassador of Christ, to heed the Word of God which he brings to you, and to give him your full cooperation during his ministry in your midst. Please remember both him and me in your prayers.”⁴⁴ Rudy also gave the members a preview of what was in store for his family upon returning to Mankato:

Next Sunday will be my last day as your pastor. After services, my family and I shall leave for Mankato, Minnesota. God willing, we hope to arrive there on August 30. Our new address will be: 924 Plum St., Mankato, Minn. 56001. For the first semester I shall

⁴² Haaland, email, October 13, 2020.

⁴³ Rudolph E. Honsey, letter to “Members and Friends of Harvard Street Lutheran Church,” August 22, 1966. Accessed at the Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

teach Old Testament Religion, First Year Hebrew, Second Year Hebrew, First Year Norse and Second Year Latin in the college department. For the second semester I shall also teach a Hebrew Exegesis class in the seminary department. In addition, I shall take part in conducting chapel exercises and assume various other duties during the year. Judith and Carole will be enrolled at Bethany Lutheran High School, and Philip, Ellen and Ralph will attend Mt. Olive Lutheran School. My wife will be very busy with her household duties, especially during those first months.⁴⁵

He also thanked the members for the surprise party they had thrown at the Honsey parsonage about a week earlier. They had presented him with a new briefcase and attaché case for his books, and they gave individual gifts and a generous purse to the rest of the family.⁴⁶ Now it was back to Bethany where Rudy would begin teaching right after he arrived. There was hardly time for him and the family to catch their breaths. Rudy said: "I preached the last Sunday in August in Cambridge and made it back to Mankato to start the school year a few days later."⁴⁷

Rudy the Teacher, 1966–1996

Bethany was glad to have Rudy back, and he hit the ground running. Besides his heavy teaching load, he was asked those first two years to cover vacancies in Cottonwood and Tracy. "I suppose I wasn't the best family man during that time," he said.⁴⁸ Many changes were happening at the college when Rudy returned in 1966. The classrooms were undergoing renovations, so the professors and students had to make adjustments. Rudy recalled: "We met everywhere except the classrooms."⁴⁹ Rudy would see many more changes happen at the college over the next three decades. New buildings were constructed: the Memorial Library (1967), the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center (1990), the Sports and Fitness Center (1994), and Trinity Chapel (1996). After B. W. Teigen's resignation from the college presidency in 1970, Rudy worked under four more presidents, including two long-time faculty colleagues: Norman Holte and Marvin Meyer.

Along with his courses at Bethany College, Rudy also taught Old Testament courses at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Farewell for Honseys," *Lutheran Sentinel* (November 1966): 338.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Willitz, 10.

The seminary operated out of the Old Main building on the Bethany campus for nearly thirty-four years until a new building was built and dedicated nearby in the summer of 1978.⁵⁰ Rudy served as a seminary professor from 1966 to 1980 and again from 1986 to 1991 under four different presidents.⁵¹ The last of these, Wilhelm Petersen, was a former student and the son of his vicarage supervisor. During his time as seminary president, Petersen was asked to describe Rudy:

He is kind, compassionate, and took a personal interest in students. He always helped them above and beyond the call of duty—never put anybody down. In my reviews with the students, his name was mentioned more than any other teacher. He is a real asset to Bethany and influenced a lot of students. To sum it up—Rudy is competent, compassionate, caring, and humble. He has a tremendous sense of humor—a real blessing.⁵²

As much as Rudy loved academic study and teaching, he loved his students more. “The subject matter was important,” he said, “but the students were more important.”⁵³ The students were so important to Rudy that he never forgot them. He greeted former students by name whom he had not seen in years. Not only did he remember their names, but he also remembered many details about their lives. This was true all the way to the end of his earthly life. Former student Jim Olsen described his memory as “elephantine.”⁵⁴ David Meyer wrote that his father “had Prof. Honsey for Norwegian when he attended Bethany High School in the early 1950s and I remember listening with awe as they recalled students from that class 40–45 years later.”⁵⁵ Jean Wiechmann says that he could recall “classes he taught, students in that class, where they sat and what grade they got.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, “History: Pastoral Training Now,” <http://www.blts.edu/about/history/>.

⁵¹ Gaylin Schmeling, email, October 13, 2020. Until 1976, the college president oversaw the seminary, but the seminary dean had direct oversight. Bjarne Teigen was both college president and seminary dean when Rudy started teaching at the seminary in 1966. Milton Otto became seminary dean in 1968. Ted Aaberg was called as the first seminary president in 1976.

⁵² Katherine Juergens, “Almost an Angel,” character sketch interview for a late 80s–early 90s Erling Teigen class. Falconer, email, December 4, 2020.

⁵³ Schwartz, 13.

⁵⁴ Olsen, email, October 7, 2020.

⁵⁵ Meyer, email, October 18, 2020.

⁵⁶ Juergens.

Rudy's impressive memory was not only attuned to student information or the finer details of language study. He was also a walking "encyclopedia of baseball knowledge."⁵⁷ He could report the statistics of current and former players in jaw-dropping detail.⁵⁸ His love of baseball started in his younger years. As a seminary student, he was in the stands for Stan Musial's first major league game with the St. Louis Cardinals.⁵⁹ His son Phil reports that "any excuse for Dad to talk about the great Stan Musial or Charlie Gehringer was taken. My brother Ralph talked a lot more baseball with Dad than I did, but, if you were around Dad, you did talk baseball."⁶⁰ Jim Olsen remembers getting in on "several years of Red Sox statistics, Ted Williams et al."⁶¹

Rudy's sharing of his baseball hobby was one way he connected with his students. This personal connection enhanced the learning environment of Rudy's classrooms. Joe Abrahamson described the front of the classroom as Rudy's "stage" where he was constantly moving around, demonstrating things on the chalkboard, and working to elicit participation. He wanted all the students involved, from the front row of desks to the back.⁶² He wanted them to be excited about learning, so he taught

⁵⁷ Jonathan Madson, email, October 6, 2020.

⁵⁸ Rudy's obituary stated: "He was known in the faculty lounge for his ability to give the batting average of any number of professional baseball players on any given day." <https://www.woodlandhillsfh.com/obits/obituary.php?id=643422>

⁵⁹ Haaland, email, October 15, 2020. Judi also recounts how her dad got to meet Musial thirty-one years later at his restaurant in St. Louis and told Musial about attending his first game.

⁶⁰ P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020. Phil provided more insight about his dad the baseball fan: "No question that Dad was a huge Al Kaline fan. In June of 1967, Kaline struck out against Sudden Sam McDowell, the hard-throwing Indians pitcher. When he returned to the dugout, Kaline angrily slammed his bat into the bat rack, breaking his thumb in the process. He missed the next month of games due to the injury. Dad was livid. I'm not sure he ever forgave Kaline for injuring himself that way! No great player should take himself out that way, Dad often repeated, in disgust. He was so disappointed. / I believe Dad's love of the Tigers started with 2nd baseman Charlie Gehringer. When I would try to pin Dad down, tho, Dad would say Kaline was his favorite, but then, there was Gehringer, and then Musial... he couldn't really say. / There's no question in my mind, tho, that Dad was a huge Twins fan. In later years, it was all about the Twins. / As much as he loved it, baseball was restful for Dad. At times, he could stay awake for several innings. I believe the only way he would ever see the seventh inning stretch would be if someone woke him." P. Honsey, email, October 17, 2020.

⁶¹ Olsen, email, October 7, 2020.

⁶² Joe Abrahamson, phone, October 22, 2020. Abrahamson remembers a student being especially noisy one day, so Rudy turned to the blackboard and scratched it till he had everyone's attention. He wasn't there to waste anyone's time. He wrote in 1963: "If [students] are not trying to learn anything, they are wasting their time at school,

with great energy and enthusiasm. Students David Meyer and Tony Pittenger attended Bethany about twenty years apart, and they both describe Rudy's teaching in the same way. Said Meyer: "Prof. Honsey had a great joy in teaching and seemed to get as much pleasure from seeing his students 'click' with a concept as you felt as a student."⁶³ And Pittenger: "Rudy seemed genuinely happy, almost giddy, to teach.... Rudy seemed to be filled with joy to be in the classroom."⁶⁴ Pittenger remembers that when Rudy would come across a Bible passage used in Handel's *Messiah*, he would break into song and "would then sing the rest of that section to the end."⁶⁵ Jean Wiechmann also noted Rudy's love of this musical masterpiece. He would play excerpts from the *Messiah* for his Isaiah classes and explain its rich message.⁶⁶

One of Rudy's special joys was participating in the "Mequon Program," which ran from 1961 to 1988:

The program was an intensive pre-seminary program that prepared men (many times older, second career individuals) for entry into the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. Honsey taught summer Hebrew and Greek to classes that were sometimes as large as twenty-five students. "We were in class up to four hours straight with a quick coffee break," said Honsey.⁶⁷

Glenn Obenberger traveled to the Bethany campus in 1976 to enroll in the program, and he remembers the impression Rudy made on him at their first meeting:

Both Professor Rudolph Honsey and the Registrar Norman Holte greeted and met with us. Lisa and I were greeted so warmly with the eager promise to accommodate all my needs as a student. We were so very impressed and fell in love with BLC on the spot. With this experience, along with many others in the next couple years, the decision was made to drop out of the "Mequon Program" and switch to Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Prof. Honsey's

something which they will undoubtedly regret in later years. Students ought to try to learn as MUCH and as WELL as possible." "The Importance of Learning," *Lutheran Sentinel* (1963): 325.

⁶³ Meyer, email, October 18, 2020.

⁶⁴ Tony Pittenger, email, October 7, 2020.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jean Wiechmann, email, October 8, 2020.

⁶⁷ Schwartz, 13.

humble approachable demeanor was observed and appreciated all through my college and seminary instruction and influenced me to prepare to be an ELS pastor.⁶⁸

David Emmons received the same welcome when he came to campus for language study. Rudy and Betty welcomed him and his family to their home and did whatever they could to help them. Years later, Rudy was glad to learn that David had accepted the call to serve his childhood church at Lime Creek.⁶⁹

Rudy did not take the training of future pastors lightly. He gave these men his best effort, and his zeal for the subject matter was contagious. Paul Schneider remembers taking his exams: "Very fair, never asking anything he had not taught. And when you left the room you were mentally exhausted with the feeling that he PULLED out of your brain every detail he had put in."⁷⁰ Obenberger highlights the care and concern Rudy had for his students:

He made Hebrew one of my favorite subjects and I consistently got As on my tests in his classes. But one day I failed achieving that mark. He came up to me after class in all seriousness and remorsefully apologized that he obviously failed me in his instruction. He wanted to know how he could improve. I, of course, was the one who failed. He did not. You see, I only got an A- for a grade on that particular test. I never wanted to see him so dejected again and finished the year getting all As once again!

Rudy could not imagine a pre-seminary student who was not excited to study the biblical languages. Richard Tragasz recalls telling Rudy that he did not like Hebrew. His humble, soft-spoken professor then "became quite agitated and gave me a mild scolding about my attitude."⁷¹ Dan Metzger said that "for that one hour a day, he made Hebrew the most important thing in my life, next to his constant reminders of the one reason we are here."⁷²

Rudy shared many good-humored moments with these young men. Greg Haugen relates a unique incident from Hebrew class:

⁶⁸ Glenn Obenberger, email, October 17, 2020.

⁶⁹ David Emmons, phone, October 13, 2020.

⁷⁰ Paul Schneider, email, October 11, 2020.

⁷¹ Richard Tragasz, email, October 7, 2020.

⁷² Juergens.

We began a Hebrew class one day by talking about the upcoming basketball game. He was a Bethany sports fan. We were talking about cheers and before the end of the discussion he helped us complete a Hebrew cheer: “Dagesh forte—dagesh lene—mapeke in the hey—We can beat _____ any old day.” We used it at the Bethany home games for the next two years at least.⁷³

When doughnuts were on the table in Summer Hebrew, Obenberger recalls hearing from Rudy “at least once when I was behind him in line: ‘*Get behind me Satan, and PUSH!*’”⁷⁴ Joe Burkhardt remembers Rudy talking about a paper he had written some years before. Rudy had changed his mind about something in the paper but said, “I think I can still be in fellowship with myself.”⁷⁵

Rudy was also a master of pun usage. He reminded his seminary students about the importance of coming to class on time: “Gentleman. I do not want to address you as the late Reverend.”⁷⁶ He likewise urged them to mind their appearance: “I don’t want any of you to be dressed like slobs. I want you to be suit-ably a-tie-red.”⁷⁷ Obenberger still regularly shares this one: “What other man besides Adam had no parents? Joshua, of course, son of Nun.”⁷⁸ Karl Hermanson remarked that Rudy’s puns were not restricted to the English language: “He is the only guy I know who makes language puns in languages nobody has spoken for thousands of years.”⁷⁹

Rudy the Scholar

Rudy’s unassuming demeanor betrayed his towering intellect. Bethany colleague Steven Reagles described him as “probably the most brilliant person I’ve ever studied with. There is no question that he is the best Hebrew teacher in the U. S.”⁸⁰ David Emmons said that he and his classmates were convinced that Rudy had the whole Old Testament memorized.⁸¹ Lois Jaeger believed he “could have taught in any

⁷³ Greg Haugen, email, October 6, 2020.

⁷⁴ Obenberger, email, October 17, 2020.

⁷⁵ Joe Burkhardt, email, October 13, 2020.

⁷⁶ Haugen, email, October 6, 2020.

⁷⁷ Abrahamson, phone, October 22, 2020.

⁷⁸ Obenberger, email, October 17, 2020.

⁷⁹ Juergens. Pun usage was also popular in the Honsey home. Ellen says: “our family didn’t speak in tongues, we spoke in puns.” P. Honsey, email, October 14, 2020.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Emmons, phone, October 13, 2020.

prestigious university in the world—yet he devoted his life to Bethany.”⁸² Rudy loved the study of Hebrew and of many other languages. But more than an academic pursuit, he knew the biblical texts were inspired by the almighty God. When he studied the Scriptures, he recognized he was “standing on holy ground,” and he approached these studies with great reverence and awe. His goal in his work was not to gain followers for himself, but to guide people to the merciful LORD. “But just think of the advantages we can have in knowing more than one language, especially in reaching those who do not know our language, and in bringing them the Gospel,” he said. “If by learning other languages we can become instruments of God in bringing others into His kingdom, let us learn more languages.”⁸³

His understanding of Hebrew led to his participation in several major projects. In 1978 he was asked to be on a committee to review the Bible translation work of Dr. William F. Beck. Beck published a translation of the New Testament in 1963 and prepared a draft of the Old Testament by the time of his death in 1966. After some revision, the complete text of Beck’s *An American Translation* of the Bible was published in 1976.⁸⁴ But Lutheran Bible scholars suggested more revisions, and Rudy was contacted to help with the Old Testament. Regarding the project, Rudy said:

Since there is need of a doctrinally sound translation of the Bible in contemporary American English, I feel that the work that is being put into Dr. Beck’s *An American Translation* is important and worthwhile. I therefore am glad to put in my share of time and effort in order to help in this endeavor.

It has been a stimulating and enjoyable experience to work with such well-qualified and dedicated Bible scholars as Pastor Phillip Giessler, Mr. Reu Beck, and Dr. Horace Hummel and Dr. Erich Keihl with whom I served on the Old Testament subcommittee.... May the Lord bless the efforts of those who worked on this project, and may this translation be a blessing to many future readers.⁸⁵

⁸² Juergens.

⁸³ Rudolph E. Honsey, “The Gift of Language,” *Lutheran Sentinel* (1957): 187.

⁸⁴ Rudy wrote a review of this translation: “A Few Preliminary Reactions to Beck’s Translation of the Old Testament,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 16: nos. 2 & 3 (1976): 66–76, <http://www.blts.edu/lsq/lsq-archive/>.

⁸⁵ Herman Otten, “A ‘Monumental’ Bible Translation Improves,” *Christian News* (May 29, 2017).

Reu Beck, fellow committee member and the son of the Bible translator, said about Rudy:

[A]s I sit at the feet of Professor Honsey (and the other learned professors) and see first hand the depth of his love in tracing the Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek in an attempt at searching out the best phrase to fit those difficult passages under study, I think I can perceive a little better David's spiritual joy and desire to dwell in the house of the Lord or even to be its doorkeeper than spend his time any other way.⁸⁶

A second edition of *An American Translation* was published after the committee completed its work.

In the 1980s, Rudy was asked to contribute to Northwestern Publishing House's *The People's Bible* series by writing a commentary on the book of Job. Rudy had not specially focused on Job up to this point, but he was more than ready for the challenge.⁸⁷ He described the book of Job as "a literary masterpiece. It is highly poetic, abounding in striking figures of speech and bold imagery."⁸⁸ He also noted that the book contains many challenging words and grammatical constructions.⁸⁹ Some scholars have approached these difficulties without proper regard for the larger context of the book. One reviewer highlights this problem and praises Rudy's approach:

Rudolph Honsey has written a book with qualities that can best be seen when comparing it to another Commentary (in this case, John Gibson's commentary on Job...). While Gibson gives a wild roller-coaster of a commentary, Honsey gives a steady, traditional train ride. While Gibson shocked me, thrilled me, and made me wildly angry, Honsey made cool, logical sense the entire way through....

When [Honsey] sees something that points forward to Jesus (or some other part of the Bible), he points it out; when Job says something that borderlines blasphemy, he give[s] Job the benefit of the doubt (God commended him for his righteousness so Honsey

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Rudy's children wonder if he was selected for this commentary through the recommendation of former Wisconsin Synod students who participated in the Mequon Program. P. Honsey, email, November 18, 2020.

⁸⁸ R. Honsey, *Job*, 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

won't accuse where God doesn't); he explains his thinking and why he disagrees with other Bible commentators.⁹⁰

Rudy's commentary on Job was first published in 1992 by Northwestern Publishing House and was republished in 2000. Concordia Publishing House also printed the book in two editions in 1995 and 2004. This book is a masterful study of what Christians should make of suffering in this life and where they can turn for comfort and strength. Here are a few portions of the book which illustrate the lessons Rudy learned in his study:

God's drastic surgery is for the sufferer's highest good, and the heavenly hand that uses the knife also tenderly binds up the wound.⁹¹

God's children may suffer many hardships in this life, but for believers such suffering is not punishment but loving chastisement.⁹²

Job confessed that we cannot understand God, much less presume to instruct him. God, who judges the highest, including even the angels, surely knows how to deal with us mere mortals. Yet it is often difficult for us to understand and accept his dealings with us.⁹³

Let Jesus, then, be our perfect example when we must undergo persecution and suffering. And when we do, let us also remember that Jesus already suffered for us and atoned for our sins. He has removed our heavy burden and given us his burden, which is light, and his yoke, which is easy (Matthew 11:30).⁹⁴

Elihu reminds Job and the three friends that suffering is a wholesome learning experience. God can use suffering as a means of bringing a person to the realization of his own sin, his helplessness, his need for forgiveness, and his need to trust in God, who loves him.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Matthew Gunia, Amazon review, September 30, 2002, <https://www.amazon.com/Rudolph-Honsey-Peoples-Commentary-Paperback/dp/B00SB3MX6W>.

⁹¹ R. Honsey, *Job*, 47.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

[Job] also needs to realize that the God who has allowed him to suffer is really not his enemy but is his true friend who loves him. Job needs to learn that God's relationship to Job is a gospel relationship, not a law relationship.⁹⁶

With the eyes of faith Job looked toward his Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose afflictions and sufferings were even greater than those of Job. He suffered for Job, for you, for me, and for all people, that we might be spared eternal suffering in hell. By his suffering and death our Savior took upon himself the punishment for our sins. The afflictions we suffer as Christians are no longer punishment administered by an angry God but tender discipline given by a loving heavenly Father. Job learned that lesson. May we learn it also.⁹⁷

Rudy the Caretaker

Rudy's life was not free of suffering, and neither was his wife Betty's. After they returned to Mankato in 1966, they settled into busy schedules at Bethany and at home. Betty soon took a job as a teacher's aide working with intellectually challenged children and then taught remedial reading for about three years at a school in Gaylord, Minnesota. When she was informed she would need a bachelor's degree to continue this job, Betty enrolled in night classes at Mankato State University. She completed her degree, but changes at the school and changes in her health caused her life to take a different course. She began to develop symptoms similar to multiple sclerosis. In the mid-1970s, doctors discovered a meningioma tumor on her upper spine. When the tumor's growth caused a marked decrease in mobility and difficulty with breathing, it was surgically removed. But the damage done to her spine was permanent. She dealt with declining mobility over the next two decades and was then confined to a wheelchair for the last eighteen years of her life.⁹⁸

This is not how Rudy and Betty envisioned their future together. But they accepted these challenges as the will of God and trusted Him to give them strength for each day's duties. In his Job commentary, Rudy

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 363–364.

⁹⁸ Haaland, email, December 4, 2020.

wrote about such hardships and how God wants His dear children to respond to them:

In his dealings with you and me, there are times when we might wonder why God allows sickness, accidents, the loss of loved ones, or other afflictions to touch our lives. We might even be tempted, with Job, to accuse God of being unfair to us. But when we have such thoughts, let's remember that God has his own good reasons for sending us joy or sorrow, prosperity or hardship. Let's also remember that as surely as we are his children, he loves us and does for us what is in our best interests, even though we can't understand or appreciate it at the time. Instead of questioning him, we ought to submit to him in faith. We ought to find comfort in his Word and turn to him in prayer.⁹⁹

God caused Rudy and Betty's love and care for each other to deepen through these difficult times, and He continued to inspire love in their hearts for others. This was evident in the way they opened their home to others. According to their daughter Judi:

I remember them entertaining some basketball players that did not go home during Thanksgiving break for Thanksgiving dinner in Mankato. They also talked about a Korean pastor that Dad was tutoring in Hebrew in the late 90's—his wife also attended all of the sessions in their home....

There was an outstanding memory of mine of a Christmas Eve that Mom and Dad entertained people from 5 different countries—Michio Yamazaki from Japan, Lous and Arne Troelstra from the Netherlands, Jensens and daughter Anne from Denmark, Mario De Liska from Hungary, and a couple from Germany (forgot their names). We have a picture somewhere of all of them.¹⁰⁰

After Betty was hospitalized twice for pneumonia in 1997, home health aides began to come morning and evening to help Rudy with her care. Being immersed in health care was not exactly Rudy's strength. Mom was always the one to tend to the kids' scrapes and injuries, since Dad was not so comfortable with blood. But Rudy was very good at the detail work—keeping an exact record of Betty's daily condition and medications.¹⁰¹ This arrangement with home health allowed them

⁹⁹ R. Honsey, *Job*, 336.

¹⁰⁰ Haaland, email, October 14, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020.

to remain in their home for three years. But after celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary in August 2000, they agreed to move to a care facility in Mankato. They did not live in the same apartment, since Betty required more care than Rudy. But they still spent much of each day together. They “ate all of their meals together.... Both did a lot of reading, played some games, participated in some activities, had devotions together and took comfort in each other’s company. They also LOVED the Andy Griffith Show!”¹⁰²

For all the health problems she had endured, Betty showed remarkable strength and patience. She commended herself, her body and soul, and all things into the hands of her heavenly Father. Her humble acceptance of God’s will for her was a shining example to her children, her grandchildren, and many others. Judi said that her mom “had a smile and a ready laugh for all, and did not openly show any feelings of dismay and pity for herself. She was truly an example of a loving Christian woman who bore her physical burdens gracefully and put her faith in God. She counted her blessings, not her misfortunes.”¹⁰³ Rudy greatly admired Betty’s fortitude and faith and thanked God for his dear wife. Betty had struggled for nearly forty years with health issues, and God had preserved her through her eighty-eighth birthday. Then it was time for her labors to end. She came down with pneumonia again, and Rudy and his daughter Carole went to see her at the hospital.

Before we left Dad had a prayer and then we said the Lord’s Prayer together. For quite a while Mom had a hard time getting enough air in to speak loud enough or clear enough to be understood. Once we started I was in shock. She said the prayer loudly and I understood every word. In fact she led us in the prayer. I was amazed. She passed away the next morning.¹⁰⁴

The day after Betty died, Carole wrote a poem about her to share what a special woman Betty was. Rudy asked the pastor to read it during the funeral service:

Mother

She was not rich in life yet she enriched our lives
She was not strong in body yet strong in her faith
She could not walk yet she left footprints on our hearts

¹⁰² Haaland, email, December 4, 2020.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Falconer, email, December 5, 2020. Betty died January 10, 2012.

At times she could not speak yet her life spoke volumes
She was humble
She was kind
She was stoic
She was brave
She was accepting
She was inspiring
She loved her God, her husband, her children and their children
She was greatly loved
She is greatly missed
She is our Mother¹⁰⁵

Rudy was now without his wife of sixty-one-and-a-half years. He was heartbroken. About four years before this, Rudy had received word that Bethany College intended to name its newest academic building after him. He was asked if he and Betty could be interviewed for an article in the *Bethany Report* to mark the occasion. At the top of the article is a beautiful picture of Betty and Rudy sitting side by side, both smiling, and holding each other's hand.¹⁰⁶ It is a picture of how Judi describes their relationship: "They had each other's back; they had each other's hand."¹⁰⁷ Their marriage was their greatest earthly blessing. But now, for a time, they were separated. This was difficult for Rudy, but he did not despair. Even in his anguish, He remembered the LORD's promises.

To us too it may sometimes seem as if God is unjust when he allows us to suffer great misfortunes such as sickness, accidents, or the loss of a dear one. God's wisdom, however, is infinitely greater than ours. His thoughts and ways are far beyond our limited human understanding. He has also given his believers the assurance that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Not only is God wise and just, he is also loving and merciful.¹⁰⁸

Rudy was not called to take care of his wife anymore, but God had more work for him to do. Rudy was always present when the area ELS and WELS pastors conducted weekly chapel services at the assisted

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Schwartz, 12. Photo by David Norris.

¹⁰⁷ Haaland, phone, December 13, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ R. Honsey, *Job*, 255–256.

living center. Dan Basel, a former student and then Rudy's pastor, said: "There was hardly a time when Rudy was not thinking of inviting someone else at the center to worship and we were always looking for opportunities to follow up with prospects or those needing pastoral care and a Gospel message."¹⁰⁹ Lois Jaeger witnessed a special chapel moment in October of 2013 when she attended with her mom:

As we all sat in the Pathstone chapel at the appointed time and the clock continued clicking the minutes past the hour with no sign of the scheduled preacher from Immanuel, Rudy became increasingly concerned and a bit agitated. But what put him over the edge was when one of the well meaning aids picked up a "devotion book" of apparently dubious origin and appeared about to read from that as the chapel service. Rudy humbly asked if he might step in to lead. There was no hesitation, Rudy was not only loved but highly respected by everyone at Pathstone. I've been blessed to hear countless excellent sermons by so many wonderful preachers over the years. But this one may well be the most memorable.¹¹⁰

Rudy never stopped being a pastor. As long as he was able, he conducted visits to fellow Mt. Olive members and old friends who also lived at the care facility. Lois' mother Signe was one of these:

In my mom's final days on earth in December of 2013 as she lay in her bed at Pathstone and was often either non-responsive or confused and agitated, Rudy came up to visit almost every day and he always had a passage, hymn, and/or prayer that was wonderfully comforting. But most of all I remember his last visit when mom was not responding to most of us, but Rudy said, "Let's pray" and put his hand on the bed near her side. As he prayed, she lifted her hand and placed it on his and the image of those dear, wrinkled, weathered hands of two Christian friends is crystal clear in my mind. Rudy's

¹⁰⁹ Dan Basel, email, October 7, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Lois Jaeger, email, December 13, 2020. Lois also shared the words of her Facebook post from the same occasion: "What a blessing to see this wonderful man step to the lectern and proceed to read Psalm 90 as well as the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son. His voice took on added strength as he read the selections with feeling and enthusiasm while interjecting thoughtful remarks. I cried the whole time—such a dear, Christian man whose passion for the Word never wanes. He continues to teach just as he always has."

daughters Judi, Carole, and Ellen were there too and we were all weeping at the dearness of it.”¹¹¹

Not all visits were initiated by Rudy. Many friends and former students stopped by the care facility to visit him. Rudy’s mobility was decreasing, and he was getting hard of hearing, but his mind was still sharp. He greeted every new visitor by name.¹¹² Judi said that her dad appreciated these visits immensely: “When Dad felt ‘useless and a burden’ in his last years, we reminded him of those that had taken the time to honor him with their visits. AND that he continued to pray for so many, and that it was as important as being physically active and productive.”¹¹³ As much as Rudy felt honored by the visits, his visitors felt more honored. They could see how deeply he cared about them, and they were strengthened by his evangelical encouragement. Any who visited with Rudy, including the workers in the care facility, knew that his confidence was in Jesus who died and rose again to save all sinners.

He must have had many personal conversations and light moments with the staff of the care facility. When he learned that one of the volunteers was from Germany, he conversed with her in German.¹¹⁴ His impressive language ability never left him. His Hebrew Bible was so well used that duct tape was required to hold it together. While many have Bible passages in English committed to memory, he had memorized numerous passages in Hebrew. These were the holy words of God which both humbled and comforted Rudy. This instruction and comfort is what filled his mind in his last days. Joe Abrahamson visited three days before his death to read and sing Psalms to him in Hebrew. Adie Harstad read more passages on the day of his death. Both used Rudy’s duct-taped Hebrew text.¹¹⁵ Shortly before his death, Rudy even spoke

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Emily Faugstad recalls one of her visits: “After Rudy turned 90, I visited him in the care center. I remember walking into his room wondering if he would know me. Of course he did and he greeted me heartily! We got on the subject of hymns and I felt like I was at the feet of a great man. His memory and knowledge was phenomenal! He liked Wesley as a hymn writer and would quote word for word his favorite verses. We sang through many hymns that day and he never had to look once. He had a wealth of knowledge about each hymn and each hymn writer. I also loved how he sang with such gusto! His enthusiasm for the truths of scripture expressed in the hymns showed how dearly he held to the truths of the Bible.” Emily Faugstad, email, October 12, 2020.

¹¹³ Haaland, email, October 14, 2020.

¹¹⁴ Haaland, email, October 13, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Haaland, email, October 14, 2020. The family gifted this Bible to Joe the day of Rudy’s funeral.

to a caretaker in Hebrew.¹¹⁶ And then just after noon on May 11, 2017, he breathed his last. According to Judi, he “entered heaven as gently as he lived his life on earth.”¹¹⁷

Because of what Jesus had done for him, Rudy was prepared for this day. In his Job commentary, he spoke about the death that all must face, but that believers in Christ can look forward to with confidence:

We dare not ignore the fact that the time will come, perhaps sooner than we think, when we will no longer be alive. Countless others have already died, including many friends and relatives. They are now on the other side of the “gates of death.” We can’t ask them, and they can’t tell us what it is like. It is our confident hope that those who believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior have now entered their eternal rest, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. Such is also our hope for ourselves.¹¹⁸

Rudy Remembered

Whether he was known by “Rudy,” “Prof. Honsey,” “Dad,” or “Grandpa,” he was dearly loved by many. As much as he appreciated this, he was most deeply humbled by the love which God had for him. Rudy knew his many sins, and the more he studied the Scriptures, the more he became aware of them. This explains his reaction when he was informed in 2008 that Bethany planned to name its new academic building after him: “I don’t deserve it,” he said. “I hope there won’t be too many protests.”¹¹⁹ I think he would have said the same thing if he knew this article would be written about his life and work. He would have said it was not necessary, and that the journal paper could be better used in another way.

But then he would have said it was an honor. He said that very thing when a young Bethany couple knocked on his door and asked him to preach the sermon for their April 1977 wedding. As a professor, he was not often asked to conduct weddings, since that responsibility fell to parish pastors. In this case, as long as the parish pastor was okay with it, he would be glad to preach. I have a recording of his wedding

¹¹⁶ Haaland, phone, October 13, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ R. Honsey, *Job*, 298–299.

¹¹⁹ Schwartz, 13.

sermon, since my parents were the couple married that day.¹²⁰ It didn't take long for Rudy to connect us when I came to Bethany as a student in 2000. I remember visiting with him several times in the hallway of the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center when he came to campus for a play or performance. I was impressed by how warmly he greeted me and how, with so many former students and friends surrounding him, he took time to talk with me. Many years later, my mom and I went to visit him at the care center, and he greeted us by name when we found him in the dining area. He was honored to know us, but we felt that the honor of knowing this humble Christian man was really ours.

Rudy was a man to be taken seriously, but he didn't take himself too seriously. He was a man of many accomplishments, but he always deferred to what Jesus accomplished on his behalf and for his salvation.¹²¹ This is why we remember Rudy, not most of all for his intellect, his abilities, or his many good qualities. We remember him for his humble confession of Christ. This is fully in line with God's own command in Hebrews 13:7: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."¹²² Rudy himself cited this passage in a *Lutheran Sentinel* article about his vicarage supervisor, Justin A. Petersen, and said:

Those words urge us to think of our pastors, also those who have departed this life and entered their eternal rest. It is God's will that we honor and respect the faithful ministers whom He has given to preach the Law and the Gospel to sinners who are in need of salvation, and to thank Him for having instilled in them a love of His Word and of fellow human beings, who like the pastors themselves

¹²⁰ This was the conclusion of the eight-minute wedding sermon: "When a married couple sees marriage in the true sense that God intends it to be, there will be less danger of going to either the extreme of women's liberation or that of male chauvinism. Rather there will be true love and understanding grounded on a real awareness of one's own sins and shortcomings and a genuine faith in Jesus Christ. May you then, dear Emily and Jim, begin your married life with such a faith in Jesus. And may your faith increase as you continue to repent of your sins, confess them, receive forgiveness for them, and grow personally in knowledge and in faith. Then you can both have the assurance that throughout life, you will experience that even greater love, the love of which your conjugal love is a picture, the love that Jesus Christ has for each of you and for both of you. God bless you, and give you a truly happy marriage for Jesus' sake. Amen."

¹²¹ In the file containing the diplomas for all his advanced degrees, Rudy had also placed his diploma from the Lime Creek Christian Day School and a framed copy of his Confirmation certificate. Falconer, email, November 18, 2020.

¹²² *English Standard Version*.

can find their hope for salvation only in the free and boundless grace of God.”¹²³

We thank God for His humble servant Rudy whom He equipped and called to bring encouragement and comfort to so many. Rudy now hears the song of the seraphim at the LORD’s throne: “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh—Holy, holy, holy* is the LORD of hosts!”¹²⁴

Blessed be his memory. LSQ

Along with his Job commentary, Rudy prepared many articles on a variety of theological topics for these publications:

- *Clergy Bulletin*—<http://www.blts.edu/lcq/clergy-bulletin-archive/>.
- *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*—<http://www.blts.edu/lcq/lcq-archive/>.
- *Lutheran Sentinel*—contact the synod office for a list at 507-344-7354.

A list of his essays for the ELS General Pastoral Conference can also be accessed at: <https://els.org/our-work-together/archives/>.

¹²³ R. Honsey, “In Remembrance,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 47, no. 9 (May 1964): 139.

¹²⁴ Isaiah 6:3, *English Standard Version*.

Reflections on the Life and Service of J. B. Madson

*John A. Moldstad
President, Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mankato, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

HAVING HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF BRINGING synod greetings to the family gathered at the funeral of Prof. Juul Madson on April 7, 2008, I remember feeling awestruck by the way in which the Christian influence of this dedicated husband, father, grandfather, pastor, and professor has carried over in the lives of so many. One of the best summaries of Juul's life was found in two key sentences in his obituary: "He loved his family and devoted endless hours pointing them to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His diplomacy, wisdom, thoughtfulness and dedication to God, his church, family, and friends made him an example for all of us to follow." The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:7, 8).

Brief overview of his life

Juul Benjamin Madson was born in Bode, Iowa, to Rev. Norman and Elsie Madson on November 17, 1920, and was brought to faith in Christ through holy baptism at the St. Olaf Lutheran Church, served by his father. When the family had moved to Princeton, Minnesota, following his father's acceptance of a call to the country church of Our Saviour's, Juul was confirmed into the Lutheran faith in June of 1935.

After attending Bethany Lutheran High School and Bethany Lutheran College, Madson entered Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and received his Candidate of Theology degree in 1945. His life as a parish pastor took him, his wife Clarice, and large family to the following locations: Northwood, Iowa; Lakewood, Washington; Mayville, North Dakota; and Cottonwood, Minnesota. Then, in 1970 Juul accepted the call extended by the synod's Board of Regents to become professor of New Testament Studies at the seminary, a position he held from 1970 to 1994. During those years, he served on the synod's Doctrine Committee, was chaplain at Bethany Lutheran College, and was a member of the 2001 Catechism Review Committee. From 1966 to 1970, Madson, while still a parish pastor, served as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Juul was married on September 14, 1946, to Clarice Huso (1926–2020), whom he met while pastoring the Northwood, Iowa, parish. Besides being dedicated to filling the role of a faithful pastor's wife, Clarice was known for her lovely soprano voice that graced many choirs and soloed at weddings and funerals. Together, Juul and Clarice had nine children, one of whom (Paul) preceded them in death while in midlife and on a bicycle trip with one of his sons in the state of Iowa. Their son, Jonathan, presently serves as pastor of our ELS church in Sebring, Florida. (For a more complete summary of Juul's life history, I encourage readers to see *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, no. 2 & 3.)

Years as synod president

During the four-year span (1966–1970) when Madson was ELS president, a number of interesting developments occurred. In 1967 the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum was established as a way for twenty-four leaders from the WELS and ELS, twelve from each church body, to gather for mutual edification and consultation. Initially the group met annually; now in later years it convenes biennially. The forum consists of representatives that hold responsibilities respectively in the areas of administration, doctrine, higher education, and missions.

Through the efforts of the forum during Madson's time as president, the two church bodies and their doctrinal commissions were urged "to arrange for exploratory meetings of other confessionally minded Lutheran churches to discuss a doctrinal basis for the possible establishment of a federation similar to the former Synodical Conference."¹

¹ Armin Schuetze, "The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference: How It Came to Be," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 12, no. 2 (October 1994): 21.

That reality came to fruition, when Juul, no longer synod president, was nonetheless part of the original planning committee for the establishment of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in 1993.

The golden anniversary for the synod received attention at its 1968 convention. In his oral message, Rev. J. B. Madson pointed all to where every bit of praise and glory must be found:

We are commemorating this event of a half century ago, an event which was remarkable not so much for the bravery of the people who there resolved to continue in the old paths as for the grace of God which led them to this course of action. For the passage of time, with its many developments and revelations, has vindicated the action of a despised minority in 1918. Because it was the Lord's will to which they were obedient, their undertaking could not fail, and we today, as beneficiaries of their labors, rejoice in our inheritance.²

This same year of jubilee for the synod witnessed the initiation of our mission work in Lima, Peru. Having presided over the opening of our first stand-alone foreign mission, it must have been a moving and memorable experience for Juul decades later, when he, Clarice, his brother-in-law, seminary President Em. Wilhelm Petersen and wife Naomi, were able to visit personally and to conduct lectures (Madson—Exegesis of First John; Petersen—Law & Gospel) at the Peruvian seminary building in 1999.

Beginning his first term as synod president, Juul and the synod had to address fellowship issues concerning the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's relationship with the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (SELC)—the Slovak church body that had been in the Synodical Conference. Madson stated in 1968: "It is with sadness that we make special note of the recommendation of the Doctrinal Committee to declare an end to fellowship relations with the SELC. Severance of fellowship should not be a casual thing; let it rather be an earnest effort to restore. May the Lord have mercy on Christendom!"³

In 1969, at the request of the General Pastoral Conference, Madson as president put out the call for synod congregations officially to petition for a special synod convention. Forty-three churches requested a

² Juul Madson, "The President's Message," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1968, 9–10.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

special convention. That assembly then was held on April 8–9 of that year when a difficult decision was made to close the Bethany Lutheran High School, primarily (said the regents) because of the contention that the high school was having an adverse effect on acquiring accreditation for the college. Juul, being a product of the high school, no doubt prayerfully agonized over this decision by the synod. This writer was in ninth grade at the time and recalls witnessing heated discussions leading up to that special convention.

The regular 1969 June convention focused thematically on the Person of Christ, stressing the necessity of the union of the two natures—divine and human—unique to our Savior. “Though both these doctrines [the divinity and humanity of Christ] have been denied down through the history of the Church,” said Madson, “it is the doctrine of the deity of Christ that has most often come under attack, even as it is being subjected to a relentless assault in our present age of brazen apostasy. When the Word of God is being attacked the fearful are often soothed with the sophistry that so long as they retain Christ, they should not worry about what higher criticism, for example, may do to that book called the Bible. Only too late have many realized that in losing the Bible as God’s verbally inspired Word, they have also lost the Christ of that Bible, the Christ who is the WORD, the eternal God.”⁴

Years in the classroom

For the twenty-four years (1970–1994) that Juul Madson taught the New Testament Greek exegetical courses at the seminary and other related subjects, he was known to his students as a well-qualified and dignified instructor who had a command of his subject. Simultaneous with seminary duties, the college also employed his services in teaching the first and second year Greek courses. The Mequon Program⁵ not only brought extra men into these classes (Hebrew by Honsey; Greek by Madson); it meant, because of the necessary curriculum, that one of the second-year Greek courses for BLC was of a classical nature (e.g., Xenophon and Homer). Madson employed his expertise in Koine and classical Greek but also exhibited it by his daily instruction, his

⁴ Juul Madson, “The President’s Message,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1969, 9.

⁵ The “Mequon Program” (Meq-Beth) consisted of second-career men from the Wisconsin Synod who attended Bethany College to take the preparatory biblical languages before heading off to the WELS seminary. This program lasted from 1962 to 1988 and was regarded as having the side benefit of fostering a fraternal spirit between our synods.

appreciation for Latin and English grammar, and a love for literature in general.

As one who benefited from his classes in the seminary, I recall how thorough Madson was in pursuing a puzzling question. Juul had a way of giving the questioner more than he imagined, not leaving room for uncovered territory. In his lectures on St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians, students probably remember well the amount of time spent on investigating the various arguments for either a northern theory or a southern theory, as to which was likely the Asia Minor geographical location of the recipients to Paul's letter. Then, too, Madson ventured a detailed presentation of the acceptable and non-acceptable theories offered in explanation of the moving star for the Magi in Matthew chapter two.

A couple of anecdotes from the hermeneutics class can be noted. As an example of horrible exegesis by disregarding scriptural context, Juul referenced the prime minister of India. He also mentioned this officially in his reactor remarks given at the 1993 Reformation Lectures:

One of my prize accounts of such perversions, which you may likely be able to top with other instances, appeared in the October 24, 1977, issue of Time Magazine. Morarji Desai was still a vigorous prime minister of India at the age of 81. When a reporter queried him concerning the secret of his youthful vigor, Desai, besides producing the expected reference to a chiefly vegetarian diet, startled the reporter by adding that each morning for at least the previous five years he had drunk a glass of his own urine. "It is very good for you," he said. Of **special interest** to me was the fact that he enlisted the Bible in support of this practice saying, "The Bible says, 'Drink from your own cistern!' What is your own cistern? It is your own urine. Urine is the water of life." While at least three passages in the Old Testament speak of drinking from one's own cistern, the most likely reference in the mind of the prime minister would have been Proverbs 5:15, where it would take more than a consummate allegorizer to produce the interpretation espoused by Desai.⁶

When going through Romans, loaded with justification terminology, Prof. Madson frequently emphasized the *forensic* nature of this great doctrine of scripture. He rightly wanted to make sure each student had a clear understanding of the difference between *universal*

⁶ Juul Madson, "Reaction," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 34 (March 1994) 1:99-100. The "cistern" biblical reference applies to staying with one's own wife and not seeking another (cf. Proverbs 5:18).

redemption and *objective justification*. He was interested in making certain each future pastor of our synod knew the importance of justification as being a judicial, worldwide declaration of forgiveness from God as the almighty and merciful judge, as a result of the fully accomplished work of Jesus Christ at the cross. Juul's passion on this distinction also revealed what he himself as a lowly sinner was firmly holding onto for his own salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ.

Family leader

Anybody invited as a dinner guest to the home of J. B. and Clarice Madson would have been treated to an unforgettable devotional at the close of the evening meal. Typically this was punctuated with a harmonious blend of voices singing by memory numerous verses from a Lutheran hymn. That exemplary practice evidenced itself at the time of Juul's death as family members surrounded his bedside at the Mankato hospital joining their voices in song to the Lord.

The large and extended Madson clan, usually numbering over one hundred for reunions, revered "Uncle Juul" as a respected, handsome and well-dressed patriarch who seemed to choose his words well. Many recall his interest in sports and his attention to gardening, with both items occupying healthy participation for the members of his immediate family. Traditionally, family and friends looked forward to Juul's "Year-End Letter" which he composed with his trademark eloquence. After relating key family experiences that occurred month by month, he would end with sincere spiritual encouragement. As a taste of his pen, we note these words from a 2002 annual letter of greetings:

With three years of the newly numbered century now history, we discover that the twenty-first does not differ greatly from the twentieth, in which our life has been largely spent.... As 2003 now lengthens out, let the message of Christmas and Easter and Pentecost renew in us not only a penitence for our sins but also a renewed faith in the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for then, whatever the year may hold, its value as a gift from God will not be lost on us. In the truth of this message we may—and do—wish you a Blessed New Year!⁷

⁷ Personal file from J. B. Madson.

Personal and closing thoughts

My own library is full of books containing the signature of J. B. Madson. Transitioning from the parish to the seminary, it was natural to feel some inadequacy and trepidation as I was called to take up the classes of my revered former professor and uncle. Juul's kind and considerate manner in helping me adjust, supplying me with good resources, and assuring me of his prayers and support were deeply appreciated. Often it happened that Madson, viewed as an editor *par excellence*, provided a better worded sentence or well-chosen term for a particular article publication. As an example of his thoughtfulness, he brought to my office one day in 1995 his own full translation of many pages of a journal article written in Norwegian by my grandfather, the Rev. John A. Moldstad (1874–1946) of Chicago, when Moldstad had the privilege of serving as the impresario for the trip to Norway by the Lutheran College Band of Decorah, Iowa. In a special note Juul wrote: "May you enjoy this brief account of what must have been a most memorable five months in the life of 'Sunny Jim,' your distinguished grandfather!"

Finally, we go back to his love for singing. Possessing the same hymnology skills of his father, Rev. Norman A. (1886–1962) and that of his younger brother, Rev. Paul Gerhard (1927–2018), Juul assisted with editing in the production of our synod's 1996 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. Included among the ample supply of hymns on the Lord's Supper is found Juul's translation of fourteen verses of Thomas Kingo's famous hymn, "O Jesus, at Your Altar Now" (ELH 324). Together with Kingo, Madson believed and confessed the essence of our Christian faith in these words of the second stanza:

My heart to you I gladly bring;
So sorely wounded by my sin,
And healing find in that great tide
That flows from out Your wounded side. (ELH 324:2)

Appendix

We thank God for the gifts to our synod, to our seminary, and to the church at large that have come through the abilities and faithfulness of Juul Benjamin Madson.

Included here is a chapel talk which Juul (who has served as college chaplain in the 1990s) delivered on the eve of the Trinity Chapel dedication at Bethany Lutheran College.

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have gained him the victory. (Psalm 98:1)

Fellow redeemed visitors to Trinity Chapel on the eve of its dedication, grace is yours and peace, from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ!

We are not very far removed from Cantate Sunday—the fourth Sunday after Easter—and even if we were far removed in time, the nature of this pre-dedication Vesper Service, as well as of the hymn-fest this afternoon, reminds us that even as each Sunday is a celebration of Easter, so each Sunday is also a Cantate Sunday, for what child of God is not ready and willing to join in singing praise to his God?

Cantate Sunday gets its name from the opening Latin words of the Introit for that day: “Cantate Domino canticum novum—Sing to the Lord a new song,” the opening words of the brief text we have just read.

In this exhortation to sing a new song, it is unlikely that the psalmist, who may again have been the highly talented King David, had in mind a number from the current hit parade. We need to understand that the modifier “new” (*καινος* in the Septuagint) does not have reference so much to the “chronological factor” as to the “freshness factor.” And the freshness is determined by the content of the song.

So we are not to think that the “new song” was unknown to the people of the Old Testament. The Song of Moses, the Song of Hannah, the many songs of David, the song of Simeon, the Song of Mary—all are the new song, for they sing of deliverance wrought by God.

Deliverance wrought by God is ever the major key for this new song. In other words, the new song is a song born only of the Gospel, the good news of our gracious deliverance by a merciful

God—deliverance from the plight into which our forbear Adam plunged the human race, a plight in which we have aided and abetted him ever since.

But in order to be able to sing that new song of joy and praise, we must perforce have learned also the song in the minor key—what might be termed the “old” song, if you will. That is the song of lament to which we are attuned when the Law convicts us of our sin and shame before God and rebukes us in all our futile efforts of self-deliverance.

In many of his psalms David shows that he had been schooled also in this song. Hear him as he leads us in confession at the beginning of Psalm 38:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your wrath, nor chasten me in your hot displeasure!

For your arrows pierce me deeply, and your hand presses me down.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger,
Nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin.

For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness....

And then at the end he prays: “Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord of my salvation!”

That Lord of David’s salvation was not far away—nor is He ever far from us—for two psalms later David begins his song:

I waited patiently for the Lord: and He inclined to me, and heard my cry;

He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.

He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God.

And why the praise of a new song to our God? Our verse makes it clear: “For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained for Him the victory.”

That is the basic message of joy and praise which has been created in all God’s people here below—just as in the case of Zecharias, who by the Holy Spirit was moved to exult: “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.”

This new song can be sung only by God's people, for this kind of singing is not alone from the vocal chords, but, above all, from the heart which, in the words of another Psalm of David, "has believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13).

This evening we sing this new song in a pleasantly designed new chapel, which we shall tomorrow formally dedicate in the name and to the glory of the Triune God. But the glory of this new song for us is two-fold: It can be sung not only in a beautiful cathedral, but also in the most humble church or chapel or home, and it will be sung eternally in the far more glorious mansions of heaven. The Apostle St. John writes in the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation concerning the vision of heaven granted to Him:

"And they sang (as it were) a new song before the throne. And no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth"—in other words, the ELECT of God, who, as Paul assures us in his letter to the Ephesians, were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Those who believe in Christ alone for their salvation have a song to sing which is given to no one else to sing, a song which confesses:

Since Christ has full atonement made
 And brought to us salvation,
 So may each Christian now be glad
 And build on this foundation:
**Thy grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,
 Thy death now is my life indeed,
 For Thou has paid my ransom!**

Let us join in singing to the Lord, even now, this new song!
 Amen! 

A Brief Biography of President Theodore A. Aaberg

*Michael D. Muehlenhardt
English Lutheran Church
Cottonwood, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD RIGHTLY cherishes its heritage in the old Norwegian Synod, and we are thankful for men like J. A. Ottesen, U. V. Koren, and H. A. Preus, among others, who worked so diligently to establish the orthodox Lutheran faith in the Norwegian Synod in this country. The ELS is also grateful for those individuals who stood firm against the unionistic fever that overtook the Norwegian Synod in the early twentieth century and set out against great adversity as a faithful remnant to maintain the doctrines of the old Norwegian Synod.

To simply appreciate our forefathers, though, will never be enough to ensure that purity of doctrine is maintained. Every generation must continue the diligent effort of maintaining both the purity of doctrine and the historical record of what their forefathers did and for what they stood. As Theodore A. Aaberg wrote:

Earthly inheritances can be handed down from generation to generation more or less automatically, but not so the *great* heritage. Truth, as a body of doctrine, can indeed be set before a people by the preceding generation, but each succeeding generation must, through the Holy Spirit, make this truth its own as a part of its very faith and life before it can actually be said to possess it. There is in this sense no continuity to synodical history. Each succeeding generation must start all over again. In this way alone is a new generation spared from offensive pride, dead orthodoxy, and liberalism. In this

way alone is a new generation able to sing: “God’s Word is *our* great heritage.”¹

Therefore, each generation needs men who will stand for truth against all odds, who will not succumb to temptations to abandon truth for convenience sake, who will continue to proclaim the Gospel in all its truth and purity. Pastor Theodore A. Aaberg was one of those servants of Christ whom we do well to remember and emulate.

Personal Background and History

The Rev. Theodore Arne Aaberg was the third in a line of pastors. He was born January 29, 1925 in Wildrose, Williams County, North Dakota, the third son of Rev. Theodore Aaberg and his wife Alette (Greibrok). T. A. Aaberg (Ted) had six brothers: Herman, Joseph, John, Randolph, Paul, and Philip, and two sisters: Ida (Bernhard Callies) and Ingeborg (Earnest Quick), all of whom survived him. Ted’s father baptized him as an infant at Wildrose Lutheran Church which Theodore served as pastor. Ted was confirmed in the Christian faith in August, 1940 at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church, LCMS, rural Wildrose, by Pastor Ralph R. Radtke.²

The Aaberg family traces its roots to Sogndal, Sogn, Norway where Ted Aaberg’s grandfather, Ole Hermundsen Aaberg was born October 13, 1844. He immigrated to this country in July, 1865, arriving in Detroit, Michigan, and then worked for four years on the Sjur Hilleboe farm near Arkdale, Wisconsin. Ole became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America on October 21, 1868 in Juneau County, Wisconsin. He had been baptized and confirmed in Norway and after four years in Wisconsin he began his pastoral education. Ole attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, 1869–1874; Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 1874–1875; Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, 1875–1876; and Norwegian Lutheran Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, 1876–1877. He was ordained in the Norwegian Synod in 1877 and served first at a congregation at Alexandria, Minnesota.

¹ Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian Synod) 1918–1968* (Mankato, MN: Board of Publications: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 265.

² Taken from Aaberg’s “A Brief History of My Life,” an unpublished recollection and from Aaberg Family History Book compiled by Joseph Aaberg, both of which are available at the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives.

Theodore Aaberg (no middle name),³ Ted's father, was born in Devil's Lake, North Dakota, on April 20, 1891. He also became a pastor. He graduated from Pacific Lutheran Academy, Parkland, Washington, in 1909; Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, in 1911; and Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1914. He was ordained as a pastor of the Norwegian Synod on August 23, 1914. Pastor Theodore Aaberg served churches in "Sioux Falls, S.D., 1914–15; Livingston, Mont., 1915–18; Westby, Mont., 1918–22; and Wildrose, N.D., 1922–." Theodore Aaberg married Alette Greibrok in 1919. At the time of the merger of the Norwegian churches, Pastor Aaberg entered the merger, even though he was a "Minority man."⁴ He died December 19, 1950.

Alette Aaberg, Ted's mother, born September 20, 1892 near Bygland, Minnesota, was also a dedicated and conservative student of the Word. She graduated from Pacific Lutheran Academy in 1910 and taught at Parkland Christian Day School from 1910 to 1920. She remained a strong supporter of Christian schools until her death July 31, 1976, the day before her son began his duties as president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.⁵ Alette's brother, Rev. Aanon Greibrok, was another pastor ordained in the Norwegian Synod who entered the merger. Greibrok graduated from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, one year after Theodore Aaberg and was ordained in 1915.⁶ Alette, however, was not inclined to be a part of the merger. Though her husband had joined the merger, she did not attend his church, and for this reason Ted was confirmed in a Missouri Synod church. Ted attended church with his mother and inherited his mother's insistence on orthodox Lutheranism, but it should also be noted that he spent much time with his father while he was attending to the duties and the various services in the Wildrose parish, and his father should be considered a conservative Lutheran. Alette Aaberg retained a lifelong love of Bible study and theological debate.⁷

³ Because his father did not have a middle name, Ted felt it unnecessary to use the designation, "Jr." with reference to himself. Theodore A. Aaberg, letter to Norman A. Madson, April 1, 1968.

⁴ *Who's Who Among Pastors in all the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America 1843–1927*, trans. and rev. Rasmus Malmin, O. M. Norlie, and O. A. Tingelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1928), 8; Aaberg, "A Brief History"; Aaberg Family History Book, 95; Theodore A. Aaberg, letter to August R. Sueflow, St. Louis, MO, April, 1, 1968.

⁵ "In Memoriam," *Lutheran Sentinel* 59, no. 20 (1976): 318.

⁶ *Who's Who*, 187.

⁷ Rev. Juul Madson, and Melvina Aaberg, interviews by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 23, 2005 and January 5, 2006.

Education

Ted's education consisted of nine years at Wildrose Public School followed by two years (1940–1942) at Concordia Academy, Portland, Oregon. He then attended Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, graduating with his AA degree in June 1944. After graduation from Bethany, Aaberg immediately enrolled at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. Courses began in June because students who were not enrolled in college were subject to the draft for World War II. Therefore, Aaberg's first year at St. Louis ran from June 1944 to January 1945. The second year followed the normal schedule, and he graduated Concordia Seminary in June 1946 with a BA degree. After taking two years off from school to serve as a Christian day school teacher (explained later), Aaberg returned to school at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, beginning in the fall of 1948. He graduated Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in June 1950.⁸

Theodore A. Aaberg began his service of the Lord at the conclusion of his first year at Concordia Seminary. Given that it would be almost eight months until classes resumed, Aaberg returned home to Parkland, Washington, and assisted "the pastor at Parkland Lutheran Church, doing office work, mimeographing, preaching on occasion, some calling, working up vacation Bible school, etc." Aaberg spent the next summer, after graduating from Concordia, doing many of the same things at St. John's Lutheran, LCMS, in Austin, Minnesota, with the addition of "canvassing Blooming Prairie for a new mission."⁹

In September of 1946, Aaberg began a one-year vicarage teaching at Saude Christian Day School. For much of that year he also "served as vacancy pastor at the East and West Paint Creek Churches, Waukon, Iowa, going there once every three weeks for the weekend for confirmation class and services and sick calls, from Christmas to summer of 1947."¹⁰ At the end of the school year, Aaberg wrote in his farewell in the Saude Lutheran Beacon:

You will forget much of what you have learned this year. But don't ever forget Jesus. Remember that He has died to save you. And when you are sad and troubled, then pray to Him. He has told you to do that. If we all believe in the Lord Jesus, then our school shall

⁸ Aaberg, "A Brief History."

⁹ Aaberg, "A Brief History."

¹⁰ Aaberg, "A Brief History."

be together again—in heaven. May the Lord bless and keep all of you!¹¹

As the school year at Saude ended, the Jerico congregation was considering the addition of its own school. The decision became easy when Aaberg volunteered to postpone his seminary training an additional year and teach at the new school if the Jerico congregation would start it. In the 1977–78 school year, Pastor Aaberg had the joy of seeing his two daughters teaching at these two schools—Sarah at Jerico and Marie at Saude.¹²

More changes were in store. On June 26, 1949, the Rev. Justin A. Petersen resigned from Scarville-Center Parish because of ill health. At his recommendation, the congregation extended the call to seminarian Theodore A. Aaberg, who accepted and by early July had moved in and begun preaching. Pastor Craig Ferkenstad reports that Dean Norman A. Madson of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary did not approve of this call because Aaberg still had a year of school to complete at the seminary. Aaberg responded, “It’s the call that makes the pastor, not the Seminary.” Aaberg was ordained August 28, 1949, by the president of the ELS, Pastor Adolph M. Harstad. Aaberg also returned to school at the seminary in the fall “spending from Tuesday through Friday at the Seminary, and the weekends in the parish, preaching every other week.”¹³ Aaberg graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in May 1950 and was accepted as a member of the synod at its annual convention in June.

Family

It is not good for a man to be alone, and in the spring of 1948, Ted found a suitable helper in Melvina Olson, a new teacher at Norseland. Time did not allow for a courtship at that point, but in the fall of 1950, after he had graduated from the seminary, Aaberg invited Melvina to dinner by means of a letter. She remembers their first date as the start of a wonderful relationship.¹⁴ The courtship of Theodore and Melvina proceeded with occasional dates of dinner and a movie, usually on

¹¹ “Jerico and Saude Christian Day Schools’ First Alumni Reunion Commemorative Booklet” (Jerico, Iowa: Jerico Lutheran Church, August 6, 2005), 64.

¹² Saude-Jerico Commemorative Booklet, 21, 42, 53, 91, and 92.

¹³ Rev. Wilhelm W. Petersen and Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, interviews by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 21, 2005 and January 6, 2006; “Scarville Lutheran Church History,” December 26, 2005, <http://www.wctatel.net/web/scarvillelutheran/scarvillehistory.htm>; Aaberg, “A Brief History.”

¹⁴ Melvina Aaberg, letter to Mike Muehlenhardt, January 11, 2006.

Sunday evenings. They were married October 8, 1951 at Zion Lutheran Church in Tracy, Pastor Stuart Dorr officiating, and Melvina gladly began her role as helpmeet to the busy young pastor of the Scarville-Center parish.¹⁵

The Aabergs were mutually blessed in their marriage. In Melvina, Ted had a wife who was a fine mother to his children, a gracious hostess, a diligent secretary, and his best friend. For Melvina, Ted was a considerate husband with a romantic touch, a Christian head of the family, a dedicated father, and her best friend. The couple was blessed with five children: Theodore E., born September 16, 1952; Sarah, born October 8, 1953; Marie, born November 23, 1954; Jonathan, born March 7, 1961; and Joel, born August 7, 1965.¹⁶

The Aabergs considered a Christian education absolutely essential for the children. With Pastor Aaberg's encouragement, the Scarville congregation re-started their Christian Day School which had closed in the forties. All of the Aaberg children received their educations at Lutheran grade schools and graduated from Lutheran high schools. Indeed, Pastor Aaberg grieved greatly when Bethany High School was forced to close, but Marie and Jonathan attended Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, Minnesota, and Joel attended Martin Luther Prep School in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin.¹⁷

The Aabergs' commitment to Christian education continued at the college level. All five children spent at least some time at Bethany Lutheran College or Dr. Martin Luther College. Ted E. eventually attended Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary where he had the opportunity to study under his father's guidance, and after graduating, his father had the privilege of performing the rite of ordination and installation at Our Savior's in Albert Lea, Minnesota, where Ted E. served for one year.¹⁸ Both Sarah and Marie Aaberg graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College and taught for a number of years in the ELS.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 5, 2006, and Aaberg notes.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1978, 25.

¹⁹ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005.

Health

Many of our forefathers faced affliction in their lives; Pastor Aaberg's affliction began with a troublesome cough. After a number of attempts to receive help from his local doctor in Emmons, Minnesota were unsuccessful, Ted was x-rayed when the Red Cross had a van touring the countryside testing people for tuberculosis. In December 1962, Aaberg was informed that he had "a rare lung disease" called Sarcoidosis, and he needed to seek help as soon as possible at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. There was no cure. The best that could be hoped for was to stop its progression.²⁰

Sarcoidosis caused Aaberg to curtail his activities numerous times and also made every job more difficult. He was hospitalized several times and any cold could cause serious problems. Aaberg was allergic to penicillin, but erythromycin was a great help for fighting lung infections. He also was prescribed prednisone to help ease the inflammation in his lungs. Strenuous activity became more and more difficult. Aaberg's Mayo Clinic doctor, Dr. Arthur Olsen, became his very good friend (Dr. Olsen was a nephew of Holden M. Olsen, former president of Bethany Lutheran College).²¹

Though Aaberg always looked healthier than he actually was, physical exercise was very difficult. In a 1967 letter to his good friend, Torald Teigen, Aaberg reported that his lung condition was similar to emphysema. The greatest danger he faced was any infection such as pneumonia which would further reduce his lung capacity. Several times even a simple cold required Aaberg to be hospitalized so that he could be on oxygen. Pastor Ferkenstad reports that a former parishioner, who was afflicted with emphysema, told of how Aaberg could only climb half-way up a fourteen-step flight of stairs before stopping to rest.²²

By 1979 Aaberg's health was again deteriorating. This was likely exacerbated by his agreeing to serve as interim president of Bethany Lutheran College as well as the seminary. There is general agreement among those who knew him that taking the call to the seminary was good for his health because it allowed a more consistent schedule without some of the rigors of parish life. Yet, the extra workload of the dual presidency was too much. Aaberg resigned from the interim

²⁰ Ibid.; "Theodore A. Aaberg 1925–1980," *Lutheran Sentinel* 63, no. 4 (1980): 52–3.

²¹ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005.

²² Ibid.; Rev. Theodore A. Aaberg, letter to Rev. Torald Teigen, August 12, 1967; Craig A. Ferkenstad, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 6, 2006.

presidency in January 1978, but his health continued to deteriorate. In February 1979, the Board of Regents granted Aaberg a six-month leave of absence, beginning March 1, 1979.²³

By August of 1979, it was clear that Pastor Aaberg's health would not be improving. He resigned from the presidency of Bethany Lutheran Seminary at the regents' August meeting. Pastor Aaberg died on January 8, 1980. His funeral was held on the bitterly cold winter day of January 11, 1980 at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota. Pastor Wilhelm Petersen, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, preached the sermon, and he comforted the survivors by reminding them of the great joy that awaits the Christian at his death. Petersen also quoted Aaberg's article on "The Joyous Death" in which Aaberg contends that for Christians, the death date should be celebrated more than one's birthday, for the day of death is when we meet our God and Savior face to face. Aaberg was buried in the Scarville Cemetery.²⁴

How best to sum up the person of Pastor Theodore A. Aaberg? Perhaps Rev. Erling Teigen gives the best synopsis of the man in his sermon for the memorial service for Aaberg at Bethany Lutheran College on January 15, 1980. In that sermon Teigen explained that among other things, Aaberg was "a preacher ... a scholar and a theologian ... a pastor to pastors," and that he was a man who "would sacrifice anything, even his health, for the sake of Christ's Church here on earth." Most important:

Ted Aaberg was above every other consideration a pious Christian believer. He believed without reservation and with a child-like simplicity the precious truths of the Gospel and of God's revealed Scriptures. No matter how erudite a doctrinal treatise he wrote, no matter how eloquent a sermon he preached, it was always most apparent that behind it all was that simple, trusting faith in the promises of God.²⁵

²³ All interviews. J. Herbert Larson, Secretary of the Board of Regents, letter to the Pastors of the ELS, February 27, 1979.

²⁴ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005; "Theodore A. Aaberg 1925-1980," 52-57.

²⁵ Rev. Erling Teigen, "In Memoriam," Bethany Lutheran College Chapel, January 15, 1980.

Aaberg Ministry: Parish

Pastor Aaberg was ordained and installed at Scarville-Center on August 28, 1949. The first year of his ministry he also attended Bethany Lutheran Seminary, spending four days a week in class and the weekends in the parish, preaching every other week. Aaberg was devoted to serving his congregations, but he also was active in serving the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

For his work on the parish level, Aaberg was devoted to his people. They, likewise, appreciated him. He was very committed to visiting the sick and shut-in members. He once commented, "You really have to put yourself in their boots." Though he had compassion for the elderly, Aaberg was equally interested in the youth. First, he was committed to Christian education, and he worked to get that effort re-started in Scarville. His work was rewarded when the Scarville congregation re-opened the Scarville Lutheran School in 1958. That school remains open and active today.²⁶

To understand Aaberg's commitment to Christian schools, his essay on "Christian Day Schools," delivered at the 1951 Synod Convention, is as relevant today as it was seventy years ago. In this essay, he rightly outlined God's command for parents to properly educate their children. Neglecting to fully instruct the children, especially in spiritual matters, is indeed a grave error and sin. Aaberg explained both the strengths and weaknesses of the various types of Christian schools such as the Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, but for him, the Christian Day School is easily the "best school which a congregation can have for the thorough teaching of the children." Aaberg was convinced that the value of Christian education far outweighed its cost, and that our synod should certainly make every effort to expand this great institution for as Aaberg concluded, "There is nothing which would make Satan feel 'bluer' ... than to hear that we had started a great number of new Christian Day Schools. May God grant us the wisdom, strength, and courage to forge ahead in the field of Christian Day Schools."²⁷

In addition to his work for the school, Aaberg helped establish "the first Youth Camp to be conducted by the Iowa-Southern Minnesota Circuit." He served as director that first year in which about sixty youth participated. The camp was held at Clear Lake, Iowa, and in addition

²⁶ Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005; "Scarville Lutheran Church History."

²⁷ Theodore A. Aaberg, "Christian Day Schools," in *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1951, 35-40, 37, 40.

to providing a number of activities and Bible studies for the youth, it served as the meeting place for the Circuit's "annual Young People's Convention."²⁸

Aaberg served the Scarville-Center parish until August 1968.²⁹ Beginning in 1956 and continuing until 1962, Aaberg also served the small congregation of Bethany at Story City, Iowa. This required much driving, for Story City is 110 miles from Scarville. Shut-in and hospital calls during this time took Aaberg from Albert Lea, Minnesota, to Forest City, Mason City, and Ames, Iowa. The congregation remained small, having only two baptisms, but seven funerals during the seven years that Aaberg served them. In 1968 the congregation made the decision to move to Ames, Iowa, where it continues to this day.³⁰

During the late fifties, Aaberg's involvement with the synod was also growing. However, his parish work also increased in August 1961, when, in addition to his duties at the other three congregations, he took on the vacancy at Lake Mills, Iowa. He served Lake Mills until May 1962.³¹

In 1968, Pastor Aaberg received and accepted a call from the Norseland-Norwegian Grove congregations outside of St. Peter and Gaylord, Minnesota. The Scarville-Center congregations celebrated their fiftieth anniversaries that summer, and Aaberg remained with the congregations through those celebrations. Scarville celebrated on July 7, 1968 and Center on July 21. Aaberg was installed at Norseland-Norwegian Grove on August 4 by the Rev. Hugo Handberg, Circuit Visitor.³²

The congregations of Norseland and Norwegian Grove are two of the oldest congregations in the ELS. Norseland was organized in 1858, and Norwegian Grove is a daughter congregation begun in 1881. They have shared a pastor since the beginning of the Norwegian Grove congregation, although Norwegian Grove did not join the synod until 1977. These two churches had a combined membership of 470,³³ substantially larger than Aaberg's former parish, but they did have the

²⁸ "Scarville Lutheran Church History," 3; "Youth Camp," *Lutheran Sentinel* 38, no. 15 (1955): 238.

²⁹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1950-1969.

³⁰ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1956-1963; Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005; *ELS Directory of Pastors and Congregations* (Mankato, 1998), 18.

³¹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1962-1963.

³² Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1969, 10-11.

³³ *ELS Directory*, 40 and 46; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1969.

advantage for Aaberg of somewhat less driving than he had been subject to in the late fifties and early sixties.

Pastor Aaberg threw himself into the work of his new parish. Pastor Craig Ferkenstad reports that Aaberg was appreciated both for his preaching skills, his leadership, and his confessionalism. Aaberg always had a reputation of being somewhat stern, but these two congregations also recognized his personal side. He was viewed as a friendly man who enjoyed good fun. They also remember him as something of a practical joker. The Norwegian Grove congregation remembers that evening Bible study was always followed with lunch and conversation that sometimes ran for several hours. One evening Pastor Aaberg teased the people asking, "Don't you people have homes to go to?"

As one might expect, there were times when the voters and Aaberg had to decide on issues affecting the church. For instance, the Norseland congregation had maintained a Christian Day School for a number of years, but it was run and supported by an association of parents rather than by the congregation. Some years this caused certain individuals to be strapped with the financial burden instead of it being borne by the congregation as a whole. Under Aaberg's leadership, the congregation decided in 1970 to sponsor the school and cover any financial deficit, should there be one. On the other hand, in 1975, over Aaberg's objections, the congregation voted to drop its Saturday School in favor of Sunday School, which Aaberg felt was not enough instruction for those students not attending the Christian Day School.³⁴

By and large, Pastor Aaberg and the members worked well together. One external item, however, caused Pastor Aaberg much stress during his ministry at Norseland–Norwegian Grove; namely, the closing of Bethany High School. In line with his usual strong support for Christian education, Aaberg could not condone the loss of this institution, but many felt that the closing was needed so that Bethany Lutheran College might be kept strong. The ELS met at a special convention on April 8 and 9, 1969 to determine the high school's future, and the decision was made to discontinue the high school and encourage its students to continue their high school education at WELS high schools. These students would also be offered a subsidy to attend the WELS school of their choice. Unfortunately, a flair-up of Aaberg's illness forced him to miss this special convention, and he was unable to forestall, or even to speak in person against its closing. This situation grieved him

³⁴ Craig A. Ferkenstad, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 6, 2006.

considerably and he was sorry that Bethany Lutheran High School closed.³⁵

Aaberg Ministry: Synod

Pastor Aaberg's involvement in synod activities began almost as soon as he graduated from the seminary. Aaberg was accepted into membership in the synod in 1950 and served on the press committee that first convention. Throughout his ministry, Aaberg attended every convention of the synod, except one special convention and the regular convention in his final year when his health had deteriorated too far. At each convention, he served on at least one committee and often on two. Through the course of his years he served on almost every convention committee at one time or another, which gave him a wide range of experience.³⁶

At the 1951 convention, Aaberg was elected as an Associate Editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel*. He would have an active role in this magazine for much of his career, eventually contributing over ninety articles for publication in the *Lutheran Sentinel*. He was named as Managing Editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel* at the 1952 convention and he held that position until July 1959. During those seven years he served under four different editors: the Revs. Erling Ylvisaker, M. O. Dale, C. M. Gullerud, and Paul Ylvisaker. In 1954, Rev. Erling Ylvisaker was called home to heaven and Pastor Aaberg conducted his funeral service at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Madison Wisconsin. Almost twenty years later, Aaberg would also preach at the funeral of Rev. Paul Ylvisaker, Erling's brother. This is indicative of the close friendships that Aaberg developed with those with whom he worked.³⁷

The mid-1950s saw much controversy over the actions of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, which led to the ELS suspending fellowship with the LCMS in 1955. The year 1958 brought several startling developments, one of which led to Pastor Aaberg being given a greater role in synod work. Dr. J. A. O. Preus of Bethany Lutheran College, who was also a member of the Union (doctrine) Committee, took a call to the LCMS's Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. ELS president Rev. Milton E. Tweit appointed Aaberg to replace Preus on the Union Committee. That same year Preus's brother, Rev. Robert

³⁵ Rev. Erling Teigen, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 15, 2005.

³⁶ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1949 and following, 1950, 37.

³⁷ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1951, 101; 1952, 83; 1954, 12; 1974,

Preus, resigned from the Board of Regents because he had accepted “an assignment to teach at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.”³⁸ The sudden departure of these two men was a surprise to the synod pastors. They also felt somewhat betrayed, since the Preus brothers had been actively pushing for the ELS to break ties with the LCMS only to jump ship and join the synod that was the cause of so much dissension among the Synodical Conference brethren.

Pastor Aaberg led the Saturday morning devotion at the 1958 convention, treating 2 Corinthians 4:17 concerning “the doctrine of Glorification.” The convention report summarizes Aaberg’s devotion saying:

From day to day we need the strength, assurance, and comfort which is ours in the doctrine of glorification. Paul had many afflictions in this life, for the sake of the Gospel, but he called them light as lasting only for a moment, because he viewed them in the light of the glorious life which awaited him in heaven. In conclusion, Pastor Aaberg stated, “There is only one thing better than the doctrine of glorification and that is its fulfillment, when we sinners, washed in the blood of the Lamb, actually stand before His throne.”³⁹

Aaberg’s devotion was a reminder to a stressed synod that the troubles and disagreements of this world are but a temporary trial that could not compare to the glory yet to come for those who remained faithful to the Word.

Aaberg’s work on the Union Committee took him away from home several times each year. The struggle over dealing with the Missouri problem was the doctrinal issue of the times. The Union Committee’s report to the synod at the 1959 convention suggested that some progress was being made with Missouri and they recommended that discussions continue, but that fellowship ties should remain suspended. Pastors Aaberg and M. H. Otto from the Union Committee, along with the president and vice president of the synod, attended a theological conference in Oakland, California. The conference theme was “Our Fellowship Under Scripture in the Confessions.” Delegates from church bodies around the world, and our members, were greatly encouraged by the similar approaches toward fellowship which were expressed at this conference. The four ELS men expressed hope that through a conference to be held the next year in Thiensville, Wisconsin, an organization

³⁸ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1958, 16.

³⁹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1958, 102.

of fellowship might be attainable with these churches. At this 1959 convention, Aaberg was also elected to the Board of Regents.⁴⁰

The fellowship issue with the LCMS continued to be a festering sore in the synod. Prior to the 1960 convention, several pastors and congregations withdrew from the synod because of the continuing fellowship issues. The Union Committee, in its report responding to the previous convention's resolutions, gave the Missouri Synod every benefit of doubt, yet it had also reached a point in its work where the committee believed that further action was needed against the LCMS. However, the confusion of the times is evident as the committee also recommended "that the Synod make a thorough study of its reasons for suspension of fraternal relations with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1955 with the view of ascertaining whether the continuation of the suspension is justified or not."⁴¹

The 1960 convention decided to recess until November of that year with the hope of reaching a solution to the Missouri problem in company with like-minded members of the Synodical Conference. This recess resulted in several additional congregations leaving the ELS, some protesting that the ELS had not withdrawn from the Synodical Conference, and others leaving to join the LCMS. Incidentally, the name of the Union Committee was changed to "Doctrine Committee" at the 1960 convention.⁴²

The recessed 1960 Synod Convention, held at Jerico Lutheran Church, New Hampton, Iowa, spent much time on the fellowship issue. Statements on fellowship were presented from the four synods of the Synodical Conference: Wisconsin, ELS, Slovak, and LCMS. The LCMS statement was more than twice as long as the other three statements combined. The Doctrine Committee presented an extensive report on the fellowship issue including both positive and negative reasons to break completely with the LCMS. The Doctrine Committee also reported on the 1960 Conclave of Theologians at Theinsville, Wisconsin. The foreign delegates at that conclave expressed their fear that the dissolution of the Synodical Conference would give great joy to the liberals, for then they would no longer have to deal with the smaller, pesky, conservative synods. The ELS recessed its regular convention with the hope that the Synodical Conference Convention in August 1960 would resolve the fellowship issue one way or another, but that

⁴⁰ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1959, 29–30, 97.

⁴¹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1960, 42, 45.

⁴² *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1960, 51–54, 105.

convention also recessed until May 1961. This increased the difficulty of resolving the issue and the ELS finally resolved to wait with its final decision until the 1961 Synod Convention, which was also delayed until August of 1961. The delegates also asked the Doctrine Committee to re-study the issue and bring a definitive recommendation to the next convention.⁴³

At the 1960 ELS Convention, Aaberg served on two floor committees in addition to his work on the Doctrine Committee. The president's report also stated that Aaberg had performed the rite of installation of Rev. Paul G. Anderson at Lake Mills, Iowa on May 21, 1961, and that he had assisted at Anderson's installation at Lime Creek on May 28. One should note that during that past year Aaberg had been pastoring four congregations as well as serving on both the Doctrine Committee and the Board of Regents.⁴⁴

The Doctrine Committee made a lengthy report to the convention on the fellowship struggle with the LCMS. Between November 1960 and the August 1961 convention, the Doctrine Committee had met five times formally and twice informally, including one meeting lasting three days in April. The Doctrine Committee began by relaying the "Statement of the Overseas Committee to the Doctrinal Committees of the Four synods of the Lutheran Synodical Conference April 24–27, 1961," and giving an analysis of said report. Its initial reaction was that the overseas brethren had demonstrated some weaknesses in the ELS statement on fellowship, but that the Overseas Statement also had some serious inadequacies that would require further study.⁴⁵

The Doctrine Committee continued its report by expressing true grief that progress had not been made in correcting Missouri's errors on fellowship. The Doctrine Committee, therefore, felt that the ELS could no longer delay its withdrawal from the Synodical Conference. They thus recommended that the Synodical Conference be dissolved and that the ELS withdraw from the Synodical Conference until it was dissolved or until the LCMS returned to a true doctrinal stance. The Doctrine Committee also wanted to make it clear that the ELS was not at odds with the Wisconsin and Slovak Synods, nor with the overseas brethren. The Doctrine Committee also asked those within the Missouri Synod who were contending for the truth to remember the long efforts of the ELS to restore the LCMS to orthodoxy. In addition,

⁴³ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1960 (Recessed Synod Report).

⁴⁴ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1961, 6, 7, & 11.

⁴⁵ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1961, 44, 50.

the Doctrine Committee expressed support for all Synodical Conference missions that would follow the ELS in its position. Along with several associated resolutions, the ELS officially withdrew from the Synodical Conference and broke all ties with the LCMS, while at the same time extending promised financial support for joint mission efforts that had been ongoing until proper resolution of these issues could be made.⁴⁶

In 1962 the ELS again convened in August. Rev. Aaberg delivered the convention essay, "On the Doctrine of the Church." In this essay, Aaberg first confirms that the Church is only and all those who believe that Jesus is their Savior from sin and trust in Him for eternal life, as they live as aliens and pilgrims here on earth. He then proceeds to explain "how the Christian exists during this pilgrimage, how he locates other Christians who are making the same journey, and how he joins with them as they walk together toward their heavenly home."⁴⁷

In his essay on the Church, Aaberg explains that the Christian's journey through this life is one of danger and trial, yet not without hope. However, the only source of hope for the Christian is the Word of God, not mysticism or pietism. It is only through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, that we hear the truth about mankind and God's grace and will. Christians need God's Word not only for conversion and nourishment but also for protection from evil. God commands and Christians need to have God's Word kept pure. As Aaberg explains:

He who is spiritually careless or unconcerned, sleepy or half dead, may have little regard for the pure Word, but not that Christian pilgrim who is intent on reaching his heavenly home. That the devil has succeeded in getting a vast portion of the visible church to despise and ridicule the necessity of pure doctrine, the pure Word, and thus to undermine and cut away the very ground on which they as Christians stand, is a forceful testimony both to the subtlety and deceitfulness of the "Father of lies," and to the stupidity of the human heart and mind in spiritual things.⁴⁸

As members of the Christian Church we are given the charge of remaining faithful to the Word. God also wants us to journey through

⁴⁶ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1961, 52–55, 63–64.

⁴⁷ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1962, 26.

⁴⁸ Theodore Aaberg, "On the Doctrine of the Church," in *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1962, 29.

life in fellowship with all other Christians. For Aaberg this can be symbolized with a funnel:

We are to begin with the wide end of the funnel, representing fellowship among all Christians, as the principle, and the narrowing down as what has taken place due to the false doctrine and practice of this or that church body whereby we have out of love for the Word and all concerned been forced into an even smaller circle of fellowship.⁴⁹

Of course, Aaberg is speaking here of the visible church on earth, not the Holy Christian Church, which is always a fellowship of all true believers.

How then should a Christian recognize those individuals and churches with which he should be in fellowship? The visible church is recognized by the marks of the church: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Certainly wherever this is carried out, there are believers present. Aaberg explains that there will be Christians present in any church in which the means of grace are properly used at least part of the time. Therefore, in an ideal world one would be in fellowship with all Christian churches. For in churches which use the means of grace, one would expect to find Christians, even though not all members would necessarily be believers. However, some of these Christians fall into doctrinal error, and Scripture demands that one avoids all such error. When one discovers error in someone's confession of faith, one must do their best to correct the error and teach the truth. Yet, if that person (and one must remember that they are always dealing with individuals when they speak of the True Church) is not willing to change their erring stance, they, in effect, separate themselves from fellowship with orthodox believers. Therefore, "the unity of the Spirit is restored among those Christians through the eventual departure of either the error or the errorist."⁵⁰

As Aaberg explores how the Christian is to join with other Christians, he focuses on the need to join a visible congregation and the difficulty in deciding which group to join. It is self-evident that one must use the marks of the Church to determine which church body or bodies are faithful to the Word. Though no church body is the Holy Christian Church, in Aaberg's analysis only the Lutheran church is faithful to Scripture in its confessions. And, even then, the individual

⁴⁹ Aaberg, "Doctrine of Church," 30.

⁵⁰ Aaberg, "Doctrine of Church," 31-36, 36.

must sort out the heterodox from the truly faithful. Merely claiming to follow the Lutheran Confessions does not make a church truly faithful to the Word. However, the Lutheran Confessions are faithful summaries of what Scripture teaches, and any church body that is faithful to the Confessions is a church body that Christians can and should join. Therefore, Aaberg concludes:

Our task ... is to make a most thorough study of 1) the Scriptures and 2) the Lutheran Confessions, and in the renewed and strengthened conviction that what we hold is nothing less than the teachings of the very Word of God, to confess with all vigor and honesty our doctrine before all the world. Let us not worry about our Synod and its growth. Rather, let us preach apostolic doctrine with apostolic fervor, and the Synod will take care of itself.⁵¹

The ELS would have to come up with a more precise statement on the doctrine of the church, but with this essay Aaberg shows the need to realize that the Christian Church is composed of people who believe in Christ as their Savior, and the need for the visible churches to uphold God's Word in its truth and purity.

In 1966 Aaberg delivered an essay on "The Functioning Forms of the Church" at The Lutheran Free Conference, Columbus, Ohio, in which he explained how one was to properly view this so-called "visible church." He explained how there is no one church body that is the Holy Christian Church, but that groups of Christians make up the "functioning forms of the church" when they contain individual Christian believers, who hold to the Biblical doctrines in their truth and purity. It is these true members of the Holy Christian Church through which the functioning form gets its authority to carry out ministry. Aaberg used the Roman Church as an example on how this should be understood, saying:

To illustrate what this means that the source of authority and responsibility in the form is in the Christian: Where can you find such a magnificent functioning form of the church as the Roman Church? Think of its history, splendor, property, and organization. Think of the great authority it displays in the world. Listen to its mighty claims and authoritative pronouncements, so that the very earth should tremble. But all that belongs to the things that are seen. On the basis of Scripture we know that the only true spiritual

⁵¹ Aaberg, "Doctrine of Church," 36-39, 38-9.

authority and responsibility of the Roman Church is that which is exercised by the Christians in her midst, and they in turn have received these gifts of authority and responsibility from Christ by faith, which has involved a rejection on their part of the major tenets of the Roman Church. If Rome did not have in her midst those who in their hearts reject her doctrines and cling instead to Christ alone as their Savior, she wouldn't have any spiritual authority or responsibility, but would be a complete Ichabod.

In addition to contending for the truth that the functioning form receives its power and authority to preach the Gospel from the Christians in its midst, we should be on guard against the idea that the Christians by becoming members of a functioning form have turned over or given up their authority to that form. Each Christian retains all the authority given him by Christ. In the functioning form, he is merely *exercising* that authority together with the other Christians in that particular form.⁵²

This article is another of Aaberg's many works in which he does an excellent job of delineating a doctrinal point in a concise, understandable, and well-researched way. It is well worth the attention of anyone studying the church or ministry issues. In his discussion of the church and ministry issue, Aaberg spoke concerning the history of the discussion "that it is Wisconsin who over the years has had the privilege of faithfully applying this doctrine to the functioning forms of the church and of giving it the prominence and clarity it deserves. In other words, Missouri got the ball rolling, and Wisconsin has kept it rolling."⁵³

The 1962 ELS convention was huge in Aaberg's life. Not only did he deliver the convention essay, but the Doctrine Committee's report was a major part of the convention business, and Aaberg was elected president of the synod and chairman of the Board of Trustees. Aaberg was, and remains, the youngest man to have held the office of synod president in the history of the ELS.

The Doctrine Committee reported that they had held four official meetings that year, and that the Doctrine Committee had attended the Theologians Conference at Mequon, July 9–13, 1962. The Doctrine Committee re-affirmed that the Synodical Conference should be dissolved, and it recommended that the ELS continue to participate in the Theologians Conference process. The committee also favored an

⁵² Theodore A. Aaberg, "The Functioning Forms of the Church" (paper delivered at the Third Lutheran Free Conference, Columbus, Ohio, 1966), 67–86, 72.

⁵³ Aaberg, "Functioning Forms," 79.

international association to replace the Synodical Conference. All these recommendations were approved by the convention.⁵⁴

With Aaberg's election to the presidency, his time continued to be fully used. He did have the benefit, though, of going back to serving the two congregations at Scarville-Center where he continued with his normal duties. As synod president, Aaberg had numerous new obligations. He preached and officiated at the installation of Rev. Julian Anderson as professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary on September 18, 1962, and at the installation of Rev. T. N. Teigen "as pastor of the First English Lutheran Church, Ashland, and Moland Lutheran Church, Mason, WI, on May 26, 1963." Aaberg also preached and officiated at dedications for two new church buildings: For the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross, Madison, Wisconsin, on September 9, 1962, and for Rose Dell Trinity Lutheran Church, Jasper, Minnesota, on September 23, 1962.⁵⁵

With the presidency came many meetings. President Aaberg attended a special convention of the Wisconsin Synod in November 1962. In February 1963, he "and Pastor T.N. Teigen met with President Oliver R. Harms and Vice-president Roland P. Weideraenders" of the LCMS at St. Louis, Missouri, concerning the barriers between the synods. He met with Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Amherst Junction, Wisconsin, in May to discuss calling a pastor. He also met, in May, with the members of Zion Lutheran Church, Tracy, Minnesota, after their pastor, Arthur Schultz, "resigned from the synod for reasons of conscience." This meeting likely kept the Tracy congregation in the ELS. Some members left the synod for a time to start a small LCMS congregation, but they eventually returned to Zion congregation. Pastor Schultz's difficulties with the ELS caused great anxiety among the members of Zion Lutheran Church as he left to join the CLC, and Aaberg was a calming influence on the situation.⁵⁶

Three doctrinal disagreements arose that first year of Aaberg's presidency. First, Aaberg received a letter inviting the synod to participate in discussions designed "to explore the possibility of establishing a new association of Lutheran churches in the U.S.A. to replace or succeed the National Lutheran Council." This letter was signed by the presidents of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church

⁵⁴ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1962, 40-46.

⁵⁵ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 11-12.

⁵⁶ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 16-17, 20; Pres. Gaylin Schmeling, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 2, 2006; Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005.

in America, and The American Lutheran Church. It claimed that these three synods had found greater agreement on doctrinal issues. President Aaberg declined the invitation with a carefully worded response that showed that Missouri's own "Brief Statement" should have precluded the involvement of any orthodox synod in this venture, for the essays of the three inviting synods demonstrated that there was no real agreement in the disputed issues. Aaberg also forwarded a copy of the invitation and his response, as well as copies of six essays of the inviting churches to all pastors and male teachers of the ELS, and he brought the whole concern before the ELS convention for approval. The letter of invitation and Aaberg's response are included in the *Synod Report*.⁵⁷

The second issue arose after a meeting with two independent pastors in the Twin Cities who had come out of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. The meeting with Pastors Wallace McLaughlin and Erick Erickson left these two pastors with the idea that the ELS was "doctrinally divided on the matter of Church and Ministry." Aaberg charged the Doctrine Committee with the task of studying the issue and reaching a satisfactory conclusion in order that the synod could continue to reach out to men like McLaughlin and Erickson. He hoped that with "whole-hearted cooperation from all," the matter could be resolved by the 1964 Pastor's Conference.⁵⁸ We must note that McLaughlin and Erickson went on to become part of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation.

The 1963 synod convention brought the third doctrinal issue of Aaberg's year. The Colloquy Committee, which Aaberg also chaired, had met with Pastor Neil Hilton regarding his application to re-enter the ELS. Because Hilton still insisted that the ELS had sinned by not dropping out of the Synodical Conference in 1955, the committee recommended that his application be denied. On the convention floor it was resolved to re-admit Pastor Hilton because he had submitted a new statement that, while he still felt that the synod had been in violation of Romans 16:17, it had now broken with the LCMS and the ELS did not have to agree with him for there to be fellowship between himself and the synod. The synod welcomed Pastor Hilton back into membership, but "President Aaberg raised an objection." He felt that Hilton was accusing the ELS of false doctrine, while at the same time claiming to be in doctrinal agreement with the ELS. Aaberg stated, "I cannot talk out of both sides of my mouth. What is right is right." Hilton

⁵⁷ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 45–49.

⁵⁸ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 17, 40–41; Theodore Aaberg, letter to the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, January 28, 1963.

then withdrew his application and the matter was turned back to the Colloquy and Doctrine Committees.⁵⁹

After the conclusion of the 1963 convention, Aaberg continued his busy schedule as parish pastor and synod president. On August 11, 1963 he traveled to Amherst Junction, Wisconsin, where he installed Rev. Alf Merseeth as pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church. On August 25 Aaberg preached for the celebration of Rev. Herman Preus's fiftieth anniversary in the ministry, and on September 9 "Aaberg spoke on behalf of the Synod" at the funeral of Rev. S. A. Dorr, who was suddenly called to his eternal rest. That summer Aaberg also attended the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod convention, August 11–14, in Milwaukee, and the Conclave of Theologians, August 19–23, at Bethany Lutheran College.⁶⁰

The combination of workload and sarcoidosis was now becoming too much for him. Pastor Aaberg's health finally forced him to resign the presidency of the synod, effective October 14, 1963. In his resignation letter, Aaberg explained that his doctor had recommended that he reduce his "workload in the hope that less activity and tension will help to bring about an improvement in my health." Though his illness had only been diagnosed in December 1962, it was now apparent that he had been afflicted with sarcoidosis for quite some time, and treatment was not helping to slow its effects. Aaberg also thanked the many people who had been very helpful to him as he attempted to carry out his duties, especially recognizing "the generous sacrifice and co-operation of my wife and the members of my parish," and of Vice-President Joseph Petersen and others.⁶¹

An interesting follow-up to Pastor Aaberg's disagreement with Pastor Neil Hilton shows that Hilton met with the Colloquy and Doctrine Committees February 3, 1963, and again on May 6. The result of these meetings was that Pastor Hilton changed his statement accusing the synod of sin in the Synodical Conference matter. Pastor Hilton was allowed to hold that the synod should have left the Synodical Conference earlier and that the synod's action between 1955 and 1961 "was inconsistent and fraught with danger." The committees recommended his re-instatement, and that was carried out at the

⁵⁹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 80–82; Rev. George M. Orvick, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 20, 2005; Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005.

⁶⁰ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1964, 12, 15, 17, 52.

⁶¹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1964, 15; Rev. Theodore Aaberg, letter to the Pastors, Men Teachers and Members of the Synodical Boards and Committees of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, October 7, 1963.

synod convention. However, Hilton's position had not really changed, for in 1967 he resigned his ministry in the ELS to serve a church of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation.⁶²

For several years after resigning his presidency, Aaberg took a less active role for the synod. He concentrated on his parish work but continued to write articles for the *Lutheran Sentinel* (he was elected, again, as a contributing editor at the 1968 convention) and he remained an active participant at the synod conventions. In 1967, he was elected to a three year term on the synod's Board of Christian Elementary Education. By 1965 the ELS was in the planning stages for its fiftieth anniversary to be celebrated in 1968. As part of that planning, Aaberg was approached about the possibility of him writing a book about the history of the synod. He spent much time the next three years researching ELS history and then writing his book, *A City Set on a Hill*. The initial suggested title of the book had been "Through Stormy Seas." The Golden Anniversary Committee hoped that Aaberg would have his book ready for publishing by September 1, 1967, but several setbacks in his health delayed him in finishing the work. Nevertheless, he continued to write as best and fast as his health would allow, and *A City Set on a Hill* was published just before the synod convention in 1968. It was a work that Aaberg truly enjoyed, and an accomplishment of great value for the ELS.⁶³

Pastor Aaberg's contribution to the synod's fiftieth anniversary celebration did not end with his book. He also preached at the Golden Anniversary Service held on Synod Sunday, June 30, 1968. In the sermon he reflected back not just on the previous fifty years, but on the previous 115 years to the day when J. W. C. Deitrichson first preached to a gathering of Christians who would become the Norwegian Synod, predecessor to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Pastor Dietrichson had preached on the theme, "Can God Furnish a Table in the Wilderness?" Playing off that sermon, Aaberg preached on "The Table Furnished by God," using Matthew 5:6 as his primary text. When one considers that Dietrichson preached to about sixty people, whereas Aaberg was preaching to about 1100, he realizes that the Lord has truly provided a feast for His people. Pastor Aaberg emphasized that God, as in the past, was still continuing to furnish His table with the Word and Sacraments, so that Christians might be filled with Christ's righteousness for eternal

⁶² *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1963, 88–89; 1967, 12.

⁶³ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1967, 93; William Overn, letter to Rev. Theodore Aaberg, September 9, 1965; William Overn, letter to Rev. T. A. Aaberg, April 9, 1967; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1968, 88.

life. While the Father has set this table for all people, it is only those who have hungered through repentance who have been filled by God's heavenly meal. Yet, even this "hungering and thirsting after righteousness is God's work in man," and none of man's doing. "God grant us all such a festival of joy!"⁶⁴

Rev. Aaberg had long been a supporter of Christian Education, so he was a good man to have on the Board of Christian Elementary Education. As part of that work, he and Prof. Glenn Reichwald were researching the possibility of using Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm for the final two years' training of the synod's teachers. Their discussions with DMLC continued through 1970, and agreement finally was reached in 1971 with DMLC and the Wisconsin Synod Board of Higher Education to have an arrangement with Bethany Lutheran College whereby future ELS teachers could do their first two years at Bethany and their last two years at DMLC.⁶⁵

The Board of Christian Elementary Education was a good fit for Aaberg and he became its secretary in 1970. The committee actively promoted Christian elementary education. The board's report in 1970 shows that there were great difficulties facing the synod elementary schools, including "finances and state requirements," as well as the lack of spiritual commitment on the part of many. 1970 was also the first year that the committee published a recommended salary schedule for elementary teachers, including a minimum and maximum salary for three different classes of teachers. That year Aaberg was re-elected to another three-year term on the board, and he was elected as the alternate synod visitor for the Central Circuit.⁶⁶

In 1971 Aaberg was elected to a three-year term as Circuit Visitor for the Central Circuit. He continued to work on the Board of Christian Elementary Education, and in 1972 the board submitted a "proposed ELS Philosophy of Education" statement to the synod convention for consideration. With some modification the statement was to be circulated throughout the synod for consideration and suggestions, with the hope of acceptance at the next convention of the synod. The 1972 convention also saw the re-organization of the Board for Christian Elementary Education, along with the Youth Board and the Board for Secondary Education, into the Board for Education and Youth,

⁶⁴ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1968, 115; Rev. Theodore Aaberg, Golden Anniversary Sermon, June 30, 1968 at Bethany Auditorium-Gymnasium for the Fiftieth anniversary of the ELS.

⁶⁵ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1969, 52; 1970, 58; 1971, 57.

⁶⁶ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1970, 59, 60, 108, 110.

to which Aaberg was elected for a new three-year term. He was also appointed to a Catechism Review Committee.⁶⁷

The 1973 *Synod Report* shows that Aaberg was again quite active in synod business. Aaberg, as Circuit Visitor, performed the rite of installation for Rev. Herbert Swanson at Bethany Lutheran Church, Princeton, Minnesota, on December 10, 1972 and for John E. Smith at Our Savior's Lutheran Church at Princeton, Minnesota, on March 18, 1973. The workload must have been too much, for Aaberg resigned from the Board for Education and Youth. But, then he was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Board of Charities and Support until convention time. He also served as the secretary for this board. Aaberg did not work on either of these boards after convention, but he did continue to work on the Catechism Review Committee.⁶⁸

On August 2, 1973, Aaberg was given the difficult task of preaching the funeral sermon for his dear friend, Rev. Paul Ylvisaker. Aaberg preached a sermon of great comfort based on Luke 2:27–33 (the presentation of Jesus at the temple and Simeon's words of response to seeing the Savior). Pastor Aaberg related how Christians of any age could go to rest with the same comfort and joy that Simeon possessed. Aaberg explained how Simeon's words each fit our lives and how we each can be in Jesus' presence through the Word of God. He closed the sermon by asking all present to join in unison in repeating Simeon's prayer, but his emotions got the best of him, and he faltered as he led the prayer. Yet, with a church full of pastors the prayer did not falter, for the other pastors joined in and led on when Aaberg could not.⁶⁹

At its 1973 convention, the synod had resolved "to study the merits, feasibility and expediency of separating the office of President of Bethany Lutheran College Inc. from the office of President of Bethany Lutheran Seminary." Pastor Aaberg was appointed, along with Prof. Sigurd Lee and Rev. Paul Petersen to this independent committee. Aaberg served as chairman of the committee. This committee reported to the 1974 convention, recommending that Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary be incorporated as an institution separate from Bethany Lutheran College, but under the same Board of Regents, with each school having its own president. They also recommended that the regents begin the process of calling a seminary president immediately. All of their recommendations passed with the exception that the Board

⁶⁷ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1971, 99; 1972, 60–62, 100, 106, 18.

⁶⁸ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1973, 16, 25, 24, 67, 28.

⁶⁹ Theodore Aaberg, funeral sermon for Rev. Paul Ylvisaker, August 2, 1973; Melvina Aaberg, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, October 20, 2005.

of Regents was “to study the feasibility of forming a separate corporation for the Seminary.” Also at the 1974 Convention, Aaberg was elected to a three year term on the Doctrine Committee.⁷⁰

By the time of the 1976 synod convention Pastor Aaberg had found it necessary to resign as Circuit Visitor, but he continued to work as a member of the Board for Theology and Church Relations (Doctrine Committee). At the convention the board provided another lengthy report, particularly concerning the sad problems in the LCMS, the resolution of concerns with the FAL, and the continuing study of the Church and Ministry issue. The most that the synod could agree upon at this convention concerning the Church and Ministry issue was that the Board for Theology and Church Relations (Doctrine Committee) should be commended for its work and urged to continue faithfully in it.⁷¹

Aaberg Ministry: Seminary Presidency

The Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary Board of Regents issued the call for the office of president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary to Rev. Theodore Aaberg on May 25, 1976. The board expressed their understanding of the great responsibilities they were asking Aaberg to assume, but also their confidence that the Lord had prepared him for the office, stating: “We believe that He has given you and has developed within you those talents, abilities and skills which are needed to fill this office in such a way that He will be served and glorified.” The board also waived its own requirement that the seminary president hold an advanced degree, feeling his experience had given him the equivalent knowledge.⁷²

Pastor Aaberg accepted the Board of Regents’ call on July 5, with the understanding that he would take up the presidential duties on August 1, 1976. In his acceptance letter, Aaberg laid out his plans for the transfer in position. The time was short for making the change in leadership at the seminary, but with his typical resolve he threw himself headlong into the work of his new position. Aaberg began his new duties on August 1, with a formal installation held on October 28 in the college chapel.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1973, 61; 1974, 25, 81–83, 124.

⁷¹ *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1976, 28, 64–69.

⁷² Board of Regents: Bethany Lutheran Seminary, letter to Rev. Theodore Aaberg, May 25, 1976.

⁷³ Theodore Aaberg, letter to Board of Regents: Bethany Lutheran Seminary, July 5, 1976; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1977, 89.

As Aaberg began his duties there was hope all around that the new position would prove to be good for his health, since there would be less travel and a more regular schedule for him than in the parish ministry. While he had a more regular schedule, his workload was certainly not diminished. He had the task of preparing for his teaching load as well as carrying out the administrative duties of his position. As president, he served as administrative head and academic dean of the seminary. The first year he taught courses in church history and dogmatics at the seminary and some classes at the college, where he also “served as faculty advisor to the Spiritual Life Committee of the college student body.” He also had the work of determining, along with the college, the space needs for the seminary and the appropriate options to fill those needs. In addition, he was to develop plans for faculty staffing needs for the seminary, based on five- and ten-year projections.⁷⁴

Late in 1976 Aaberg had the opportunity to help synod members in a somewhat unique way. Bill Gothard had been conducting seminars in “Basic Youth Conflicts” around the country, and many synod members had attended and felt that the seminars had much to offer. Pastor Erling Teigen invited Aaberg to join him in attending one of these seminars in November in St. Paul, Minnesota, with the goal of evaluating Gothard’s ideas in relation to confessional Lutheranism. The two men attended the lectures held November 1–6, and then Pastor Teigen wrote out their findings, in consultation and agreement with President Aaberg. The resulting article was published by *Christian News*, but never in the *Lutheran Sentinel* as the two men had hoped. They found that while there was some good in Gothard’s ideas, particularly that he upheld the inerrancy of Scripture; nevertheless, Gothard fell into the trap of confusing Law and Gospel. Teigen would later reflect back saying:

In Gothard’s theology, if it can be called that, there was also an inability to come to grips with the real nature of sin. There was a preoccupation with sins, the sins of omission and commission of one’s everyday life. But there was precious little awareness of the real depth of depravity which afflicts human nature, which cannot be cured by any kind of Law orientation, or any kind of *system*, but only by the radical declaration of grace by the almighty God on the basis of his own righteousness—the righteousness of Christ.

⁷⁴ Various interviews; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1977, 89, 92; Rev. Erling Teigen, letter to President Theodore Aaberg, August 13, 1976.

Though Teigen's article was not published in the *Sentinel*, their findings did circulate throughout the synod, which likely kept many from being misled by Gothard's seemingly "good" message.⁷⁵

Along with his busy schedule during his first year at the seminary, President Aaberg worked with the various synod boards to come up with plans for the new seminary building. He also was developing guidelines for pre-seminary students to give them direction on how best to prepare for entering the seminary, and he was planning to publish a brochure for said purpose. The seminary's catalog was also being updated at this time. In addition, the office of president of the seminary required Aaberg's participation in the work of the Doctrine and Colloquy Committees. Aaberg had also been elected editor of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.⁷⁶

As if President Aaberg did not have enough work, in August 1977 he was appointed acting president of Bethany Lutheran College. Prof. Erling Teigen reports that this was quite a stressful time to have the additional responsibilities: the former president of the college had resigned his position as president, Aaberg was in the midst of overseeing the construction of the new seminary building, and seminary student Bruce Bestervelt was diagnosed with cancer. (Though Bestervelt graduated in 1979 and served a congregation in Florida, the cancer took his life in 1982.) By all accounts, Aaberg did a commendable job of leading the schools through this time of trial, but it also took its toll on his health. Based on his doctor's orders, he resigned the college presidency March 3, 1978.⁷⁷

On October 17–18, 1977, Aaberg attended the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he presented a paper entitled, "What Can and Must We Do to Preserve and Protect Our Doctrinal Heritage?" Perhaps Aaberg's principal point is humility. In his eyes it is too easy to focus one's pride on one's local congregation or synod to the detriment of maintaining truth. We must always remember that preserving our doctrinal heritage is a part of sanctified living and that the "battle for the Truth is essentially no different for a congregation or synod than it is for the individual Christian." Too many times pride in one's preferred organization has taken precedence

⁷⁵ Rev. Erling Teigen, letter to Theodore Aaberg, July 27, 1976; Rev. Erling Teigen, "From the Editor," *Lutheran Sentinel* 64, no. 1 (1981): 2.

⁷⁶ Pres. Theodore Aaberg, letter to Pastor Hugo Handberg, March 16, 1977; Pres. Aaberg, letter to the Pastors of the ELS, May 17, 1977; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1977, 107.

⁷⁷ Rev. Erling Teigen, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 15, 2005; *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1978, 73.

over preserving doctrinal purity, and too many times that has been the misleading motive behind “pastors and teachers and other church leaders.” In trying to maintain doctrinal purity, Aaberg recommends first that the Christian never compromise on doctrine, that he always trust in the Gospel and its power to preserve people in the faith, that he never allow truth to be chipped away gradually, that he continue to teach doctrine in all its depth, and not to arrogantly nit-pick each other to death. All of us have made mistakes with a slip of the tongue or pen, and patient guidance will do much more than excessive criticism. I will permit Aaberg’s closing words to summarize his paper:

When doctrinal questions do arise ... we should not immediately go on the defensive, magnify them, think of them as a great calamity, or think we have the last word. Rather, we should welcome the opportunity to turn to the study of the Word and the Lutheran Confessions on that particular doctrine, and then to sit down together as brethren for mutual discussions, remembering that over the years we may have let slip some of the depth of this or that doctrine, and that this is an opportunity to recapture for ourselves its full dimensions on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. We should gladly confront such doctrinal questions, doing it in the confidence that as we all bow to the Word we will come out together on it, and both be the better for it.⁷⁸

President Aaberg continued in his duties as seminary president throughout 1978 and into early 1979, but the time had come when his health would no longer rebound. By February 27, 1979 Aaberg needed to step down from his duties for one last attempt at restoring his health, and the Board of Regents granted him a leave of absence so that he might try a climate change to see if that would help his lungs. As earlier reported, nothing would help the situation, and in August Aaberg officially resigned from the seminary presidency. He died January 8, 1980.⁷⁹

President Aaberg had the opportunity to influence four classes of men at the seminary. The first year, Aaberg signed diplomas for four men who had just completed their vicar year: Charles J. Keeler, Nile B. Merseth, Steven P. Petersen, and Kenneth V. Schmidt. The next year

⁷⁸ Pres. Theodore Aaberg, “What Can and Must We Do to Preserve and Protect Our Doctrinal Heritage?” (presented at the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum, Milwaukee, WI, October 17–18, 1977), 3, 4, 5–8, 10–11. This document is available in the ELS archives.

⁷⁹ J. Herbert Larson, Secretary of the Board of Regents, letter to the Pastors of the ELS, February 27, 1979; “Theodore A. Aaberg,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 63, no. 4 (1980): 52.

brought the graduation of the first class of men who actually studied under Aaberg's direct supervision: Theodore E. Aaberg, Timothy E. Erickson, Michael C. Krentz, Gaylin R. Schmeling, Otto Trebelhorn, William B. Kessel, and Juan Rubio. The 1979 graduating class of Bruce R. Bestervelt, Jerold R. Dahlke, and Philip M. Vangen spent two years in class and their vicar year under Aaberg. The 1980 graduating class consisted of Joseph P. Burkhardt, Craig A. Ferkenstad, Matthew E. Luttman, Daniel P. Metzger, and John A. Moldstad, Jr. This class came into the seminary with President Aaberg, and Rev. Ferkenstad reports that they were disappointed that he did not live to sign their diplomas. Daniel N. Faugstad was the lone graduate in 1981, but he had the distinction of being baptized and confirmed by Pastor Aaberg as well as studying under him for almost two years at the seminary.⁸⁰

President Aaberg was a stickler for organization, and that was a needed thing when he arrived at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. As reported previously, he re-organized the seminary catalog, and he intended that procedure would be followed. Former faculty member and Dean of Students, Rev. Juul Madson, reports, however, that Aaberg was easy to work with on the faculty, and all were in agreement that his leadership was good for the school. President Aaberg could be irritable, however, and sometimes the students were unsure of how he would react to various matters. There were occasions when the students wondered about his compassion. Yet, President Gaylin Schmeling reports that when he needed assurance concerning his future on the occasion of his not receiving a call on call day, Aaberg was very considerate and counseled him that there was nothing to worry about for he would soon receive a call. Pastor Ferkenstad reports that Aaberg was a demanding teacher, but that he appreciates that quality much more now upon looking back at his days at the seminary. Ferkenstad also relates that the Aabergs treated the students well, inviting them into their home, etc., and that "Aaberg always remained a parish pastor at heart."⁸¹

Pastor Aaberg was not hesitant to speak when he felt the need, as was evident earlier in this paper in the case of Pastor Neil Hilton. Yet, it was not Aaberg's practice to be hasty in speaking; rather, he tended to listen to the various points and study the Scriptures and Confessions

⁸⁰ Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, *Academic Catalog 2004–2007* (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2004), 39; Craig A. Ferkenstad, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 6, 2006.

⁸¹ Craig A. Ferkenstad, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 6, 2006; Rev. Juul B. Madson, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, December 29, 2005; Pres. Gaylin Schmeling, interview by Michael Muehlenhardt, January 2, 2006.

thoroughly before making his decision on a matter. Thus, when the need arose, few could stand against him in an argument. Nor would he hesitate to rebuke even a friend if the need arose. Some may not have appreciated Aaberg's directness, and some may even have feared his temperament. Yet he could be gentle, and he had the respect of the vast majority of the pastors of the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod. He even had many friends among the conservative Missourians. When he spoke, he tended to be right. He was widely considered to be a strong asset for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in its effort to maintain doctrinal purity along with Christian concern for souls.⁸² He was indeed one of the leading theologians in the synod. [LSQ](#)

Books and Articles by Theodore A. Aaberg

Aaberg, Theodore A. *A City Set on a Hill: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian Synod) 1918–1968*. Mankato, MN: Board of Publications; Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968.

———. "Church Fellowship." Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1977.

———. *The Ecumenical Scene*. This was not published at the time of its writing, but it was finally included in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, no. 2 & 3 (Summer 2006): 267–315.

Ninety plus articles that Aaberg wrote for the *Lutheran Sentinel* over the years, as well as additional articles can be found in the *Clergy Bulletin* and *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.

⁸² Interviews with Orvick, E. Teigen, Madson, and Petersen; Rev. Theodore Aaberg, letter to B. W. Teigen, September 15, 1978.

Bibliography

- Aaberg, Melvina. Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. October 20, 2005 and January 5, 2006.
- Aaberg, Theodore A. *A City Set on a Hill: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian Synod) 1918–1968*. Mankato, MN: Board of Publications; Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968.
- . “The Functioning Forms of the Church.” Presented at the Third Lutheran Free Conference, Columbus, Ohio, 1966.
- . “On the Doctrine of the Church.” In *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 1962.
- . “What Can and Must We Do to Preserve and Protect Our Doctrinal Heritage?” Presented at the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum, Milwaukee, WI, October 17–18, 1977.
- Built on the Rock*. Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992.
- ELS Directory of Pastors and Congregations*. Mankato, 1998.
- Ferkenstad, Rev. Craig A. Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. January 6, 2006.
- . “Jerico and Saude Christian Day Schools’ First Alumni Reunion Commemorative Booklet.” Jerico, Iowa: Jerico Lutheran Church, August 6, 2005.
- Madson, Rev. Juul B. Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. December 29, 2005.
- Orvick, Rev. George M. Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. December 20, 2005.
- Petersen, Rev. Wilhelm W. Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. December 21, 2005.
- Report Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1949–1980*.
- “Scarville Lutheran Church History.” December 26, 2005. <http://www.wctatel.net/web/scarvillelutheran/scarvillehistory.htm>.
- Teigen, Rev. Erling. “From the Editor.” *Lutheran Sentinel* 64, no. 1 (1981): 2–3.
- . “In Memoriam.” Bethany Lutheran College Chapel, January 15, 1980.
- . Interview by Michael Muehlenhardt. December 15, 2005.
- “Theodore A. Aaberg.” *Lutheran Sentinel* 63, no. 4 (1980): 52–53.

Who's Who Among Pastors in all the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America 1843–1927. Translated and revised by Rasmus Malmin, O. M. Norlie, and O. A. Tingelstad. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1928.

“Youth Camp.” *Lutheran Sentinel* 38, no. 15 (1955): 238.

Glenn E. Reichwald: Interim President 1979 to 1980

*Theodore G. Gullixson
Archivist, Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mankato, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

INTERIM PRESIDENTS ARE LIKE VACANCY PASTORS. They are easily forgotten and may not have a lasting impact on the institution. However, an interim president has an important role: that of continuing the work of the previous administration and of holding the institution together during a very trying time. This was the role that Professor Glenn Reichwald was asked to take on in the spring of 1979.

Seminary President Theodore Aaberg's health had deteriorated while trying to fulfill two positions: the President of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and the President of Bethany Lutheran College. The Board of Regents gave him a six-month leave of absence effective March 1, 1979, and asked Prof. Reichwald to take over as "Acting President" of the seminary, with the expectation that Pres. Aaberg would recover his health. That year the seminary had three seniors, one middler, and nine juniors. In his report to the 1979 synod convention, Pres. Aaberg noted that 5,000 volumes of the seminary library had been catalogued with an additional 923 books classified as rare books, and that all were moved into the library of the new seminary building, which had been dedicated in 1978. The seminary faculty was listed as T. A. Aaberg, R. E. Honsey, J. B. Madson, M. H. Otto, G. Reichwald and B. W. Teigen.¹

¹ *Synod Report* (1979): 76–77.

Pres. Reichwald preached at the June 1979 graduation service for three graduates: Bruce Bestervelt, Jerrold Dalke, and Philip Vangen. The vicars assigned at that service were Joseph Burkhardt, Craig Ferkenstad, Matthew Luttmann, Daniel Metzger, and John Moldstad, Jr.² On August 22, 1979, the Board of Regents accepted Pres. Aaberg's resignation as president and professor for reasons of health and asked Prof. Reichwald to continue as "Acting President."³

Pres. Reichwald preached the sermon at the opening service for the seminary on August 31, 1979. He spoke about the objectives of seminary instruction. Seminary is not like an assembly line, or getting on an elevator to rise higher in learning, or like hurdles one must get over. Rather the goal of seminary instruction is to learn how to proclaim God's love in Jesus to the people and to know the Word in order that they may know Christ and His salvation.⁴

The students in seminary for 1979–1980 academic year were the senior: Daniel N. Faugstad; the middlers: Roger Fehr, Russell Halvorson, Greg Haugen, Brad Homan, David Thompson, John Wilde, and Richard Long; and the juniors: John Dukleth, James Krikava, Glenn Obenberger, Thomas Petersen, Martin Doepel, and Allen Quist. The faculty consisted of professors R. E. Honsey, J. B. Madson, M. H. Otto, Glenn Reichwald, and Erling Teigen.⁵

As acting president, Prof. Reichwald handled several duties. He became the editor of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. In one quarterly's introduction, he wrote: "It is very easy for those engaged in the work of the church to become unintentional existentialists, people living for the present moment. . . . The present has its roots in the past, and many of the issues of the present are mere repetition of past events. In other words, the past has much to say to us."⁶

He also served as the chairman of the seminary faculty meetings, and he planned the 1979 Reformation Lectures, held on October 25–26. He was moderator for the second lecture of Dr. Wilbert Kreiss from France, who lectured on "The Lutheran Theology of Certitude." In the interest of better academic work, he noted an "obliging attitude [existed] toward language study during seminary years" where students were allowed to take Hebrew and Greek while in seminary.⁷

² *Synod Report* (1979): 77.

³ *Synod Report* (1980): 93.

⁴ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (September 1979): 36–39.

⁵ *Synod Report* (1980): 93.

⁶ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (December 1979): 1.

⁷ Minutes of Seminary Faculty meeting, February 10, 1979.

During the summer of 1979, Pres. Reichwald organized a “Summer Institute” in Mankato for the pastors of the ELS. Prof. Honsey taught a course on Jonah and Pres. Reichwald taught “The Theological History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.”⁸

In 1980 a Summer Institute was held both at Scriptural Lutheran Church, Midland, Michigan and at Mankato, Minnesota. Recently retired Prof. Milton Otto taught “Pastoral Homiletics” at both places. Prof. Honsey taught “Jonah” in Midland, while Prof. Juul Madson taught “1 John” at the Mankato session.⁹

On August 1, 1980, Rev. Wilhelm Petersen accepted the Board of Regents call to serve as seminary president. Bethany professor Mark Harstad was also called to teach Old Testament classes at the seminary.

Although Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary had existed for thirty-one years, Pres. Aaberg was the first full-time president of the seminary. The two years he served brought changes because of the new seminary building. When the health of people in important offices failed, God raises up another to continue their important work until someone else takes over. Through his teaching of history, religion, languages, and pre-seminary training, Prof. Reichwald was well qualified to take up the work from March 1, 1979 to August 1, 1980 and to keep the seminary headed in the right direction.

Biography

Glenn E. Reichwald was born on May 2, 1927 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His parents were Ervin and Elsie (Neitzel) Reichwald. He was baptized on May 22, 1927 by Rev. Carl F. Dietz at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.¹⁰

Glenn had an extensive Lutheran educational background. He graduated from Concordia Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. His first two seminary years were spent at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. The seminary assigned him to help at a church for the deaf, where he learned and used sign language.¹¹ During the school year of 1951–1952, Glenn taught elementary grades at the Saude Lutheran School, Lawler, Iowa, and served as vicar to Rev. Milton Otto.

He continued his seminary education at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and graduated in 1953. Graduations for Bethany

⁸ *Synod Report* (1980): 94.

⁹ *Synod Report* (1980): 93; and an undated letter from G. Reichwald to the ELS Pastors.

¹⁰ “I Am Baptized” (essay, Jan 4, 1977), 9.

¹¹ This was his explanation for why he used his hands and arms as he lectured.

high school, college, and seminary were then held at Immanuel Lutheran Church in downtown Mankato. Rev. Harold W. Romoser of Oak Park, Illinois was the commencement speaker. Dean Norman Madson handed out the diplomas to the seminary's then-largest class of eight men. How much the synod was involved in the Synodical Conference is demonstrated by where these seminary graduates were assigned: Gerhardt Becker became a Synodical Conference missionary in Nigeria; Elmer Boniek was assigned as pastor at Leola, South Dakota [LCMS]; Otto Drevlow was a missionary to northern Rhodesia [WELS]; Julius Larsen served one year as dean of boys at Bethany Lutheran College; George Orvick became pastor at Amherst Junction, Wisconsin; Wilhelm Petersen served as a temporary vicar at Our Savior's, Albert Lea, Minnesota; Glenn Reichwald became pastor at Redfield, South Dakota [LCMS], and Arthur Schultz served as vicar to Rev. Carl Rusch, Chicago, Illinois [LCMS].¹²

During the summer of 1953, Glenn Reichwald was married to Eileen N. Paulson at Jerico Lutheran Church. The couple moved to South Dakota, where he would become the pastor of three Missouri Synod congregations: Zion Lutheran, Rockham; Messiah Lutheran, Redfield; and Redeemer Lutheran, Doland. He was ordained on June 21, 1953, at Redfield by the Rev. C. F. Paul.¹³ After losing his wife and one-year-old daughter in a car accident in 1955, Glenn took a call to serve Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, South Dakota from 1955 to 1958.

In August of 1958, Prof. Reichwald received a call to teach religion, social science, and history at Bethany Lutheran College.¹⁴ Like many teachers at Bethany, Prof. Reichwald taught a varied list of college classes: history, geography, political science, English literature, Greek, Latin, German, and religion. From 1960 to 1975, he worked closely with Professors Rudolph Honsey and Juul Madson to set up and teach a pre-seminary curriculum for students on the Bethany campus who were preparing to attend the WELS seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. From 1965 to 1980, he also taught a parish education class at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

On July 2, 1960, Glenn married Ruth Mau at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Long Prairie Township, Minnesota. God blessed them with four children: Deborah, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Mary. The family lived

¹² *Lutheran Sentinel* 36, no. 10 (May 1953): 155. Note that 1953 was also the year for the May 29 to June 4 Centennial celebration of the old Norwegian Synod.

¹³ *Lutheran Witness*, 72, no. 18 (Sept 1, 1953): 14.

¹⁴ Board of Regents Minutes, July 23, 1958.

at 130 Electa Drive in Mankato. Their daughter Mary Sargent died in 1994, a year before Glenn did.

In 1963 Prof. Reichwald received a Masters in Science degree from Mankato State University. He also took courses at the University of Minnesota, the University of South Dakota, and Moorhead State College. He earned an STM degree from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Prof. Reichwald was a conservative historian, emphasizing the work of God in his college history classes. A few of his many aphorisms were: “For every new book you read, read two older books,” and, “Do not anger your organist or custodian.”¹⁵ He was a life-long Democrat, in part, to “show that Democrats are Christians.” He worked in the party to promote a pro-life agenda on its platform. Prof. Reichwald was a member of the Minnesota Valley Regional Library Board. He joined the Lamp Lighters, Minnesotans Concerned for Life, and Aid Association for Lutherans.¹⁶ He was a member of the ELS Board of Christian Elementary Education from 1967 to 1971.

During the summer months, Prof. Reichwald worked as a salesman at the local Sears store in order to connect with people in the community. He often encouraged students to explore ideas outside of the fellowship so as not to reinvent the theological wheel. He had a compassionate heart for shut-ins. As visitation pastor for Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, he traveled many miles to visit shut-ins in nursing homes. He would often take students with him. Another road trip would take him to Iowa to pick up boxes of food for Bethany Lutheran College which were donated by the Bethany Ladies Auxiliary members. This food helped feed the students who attended Bethany.

During synod conventions in the 1970s and 1980s, Mt. Olive would host a spaghetti supper for the delegates as a fund-raiser. Glenn Reichwald could often be seen in the serving line dishing up spaghetti. He called such work “Pastoral Theology 101.”

Through his college Greek classes, Prof. Reichwald encouraged young men to enter the seminary. Even with the pressures of the seminary presidency, he “always took things in stride. That is, he was always consistent and never seemed too flappable.”¹⁷

After his work as acting president ended, Prof. Reichwald established “The Walther Press” in 1983 to publish “conservative Lutheran

¹⁵ Rev. Glenn Obenberger email, June 8, 2020.

¹⁶ *The Free Press* (Mankato) (December 22, 1995), 14.

¹⁷ Rev. David Thompson, email.

materials ... to honor the great Lutheran theologian of the 19th Century ... by preserving his theology to another generation.” With that goal in mind, he co-edited with Rev. John M. Drickamer and Rev. Arthur Drevlow the book *C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther*, published in 1987. In 1983, he co-edited with Dr. John M. Drickamer a book of sermons on the theology of the Nicene Creed, titled, *Kept in the Faith: An Ancient Creed Speaks to Modern Man* (1983). Prof. Reichwald also edited in 1977, *I Am the Resurrection and the Life: A Collection of Funeral Services by Pastors of the ELS and WELS*.

During his teaching vocation, Prof. Reichwald wrote a number of essays and articles. At the 1970 ELS convention, he delivered the essay, “Where We Stand in the Word.” For the ELS General Pastoral Conference, he wrote three essays: “Exegesis of John 1:1–14” (1960–61), “I am Baptized” (1977), and “Is Dogmatics the Queen of Theology?” (1984). The latter two essays are printed in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. In answering the dogmatics question, he wrote: “Any true Lutheran dogmatical system must be judged practical; it meets the spiritual needs of mankind in terms of Law and Gospel. But it must also be presented in a practical way so as to communicate to people. Any true Lutheran dogmatical system must not become so objective that it becomes an end in itself. It is intended for people. Thus the mission emphasis must never ever be forgotten.”¹⁸

In 1976 at the Reformation Lectures, he was a reactor to Prof. E. C. Fredrich’s essays on “The Quest for True Lutheran Identity.” From 1965 to 1979, Prof. Reichwald was book reviewer for the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. From October 1985 to September 1995, he wrote a periodic column in the *Lutheran Sentinel* titled, “Periscope,” which related religious news from various sources. In his initial article he wrote, “This column, as a periscope, is intended to inform readers of a few of the events happening in the church at large. This should cause readers to think and appreciate the blessings which are theirs in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.”¹⁹ His last Periscope column discussed “The LCMS Convention,” “Church Growth,” and “Cup or Chalice?”²⁰

Prof. Reichwald retired from teaching at the college in June of 1992. He continued to teach in the seminary and to preach at vacancies, such as Grace Lutheran Church, Le Sueur, Minnesota. He was finishing a seminary course in 1995 and serving a vacancy at Grace when he

¹⁸ “Is Dogmatics the Queen of Theology?” (essay, 1984), 12.

¹⁹ *The Lutheran Sentinel* 68, no. 10 (October 1985), 5.

²⁰ *The Lutheran Sentinel* 78, no. 9 (September 1995), 14.

died. On December 20, 1995, Prof. Reichwald had just returned from conducting an Advent service at Grace when he suffered a heart attack at his home and died at the age of 68. His final sermon is printed in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.²¹ In this last sermon, Prof. Reichwald spoke about Judgment Day:

That day will come. God has that day circled on his calendar. It is fixed! And we would do well to be ready. Now, you cannot do much about surprise company. You may be working in the hog barn and be all dirty and smelly when company pulls into the yard. The signs of honest toil are not that bad. You can get cleaned up fast.

But when Christ comes in his glory to judge the world, then it will be too late to get cleaned up. Judgment will be quick and immediate and to the point. That is why there is an urgency that we are ready to meet him.

We who look to Christ, and who look for Christ—we will rejoice. Our Savior has come. We will see Him as He is in all His glory. ... And we will then move on beyond that day, to the other side of that glorious return, to what lies beyond: fullness of joy which we really cannot understand. ... What a glorious day that will be.

The Rev. Donald Moldstad, then pastor at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota, conducted the service and preached the funeral sermon. Glenn was buried in the Norwegian Grove Cemetery in rural Gaylord, Minnesota. At that time, he was survived by his wife, Ruth, three daughters and three grandchildren.²²

In an essay “Our Reformation Heritage,” Prof. Reichwald wrote about the heritage of truth that Lutherans have from Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions:

We know that certainty of our future, for God, Who has called us through the Gospel, has promised also to keep us to the end. Our future is in the loving hands of God, Who upholds us with those hands and on the Last Day will stretch them wide to receive us. Then we will be with Him in glory. Negative? Never! How blessed we are in these truths. May we be faithful to them!²³ LSQ

²¹ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 1995), 68–70.

²² *The Free Press* (Mankato) (December 22, 1995), 14.

²³ “Our Reformation Heritage” (essay in honor of the four hundred anniversary of the Formula of Concord, Messiah Lutheran Church, Minot, ND, October 30, 1977), 12.

Wilhelm Walther Petersen: Pastor, President, Theologian

*Paul C. Fries
Communication Director, Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mankato, Minnesota*

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

WILHELM WALTHER PETERSEN WAS BORN ON October 28, 1928, in Scarville, Iowa to Pastor Justin and Netti (Knutson) Petersen. Being born only ten years after the reorganization of the synod, he was raised in the church parsonage, learning not only in the schoolroom but through the history of the times in which he lived. While most who knew him would describe Petersen as a humble servant of God with a pastor's heart, he was also a staunch defender of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture.

Named by his father after the great theologian Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, Petersen began his formal education at Scarville Lutheran School. He later attended and graduated from Bethany Lutheran High School and College in Mankato, Minnesota and from Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. Petersen graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota in 1953, and was ordained the same year. He was granted an honorary doctorate from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1989.

Petersen served parishes in Oklee, Minnesota; Madison, Wisconsin; and Mankato, Minnesota. While serving full-time in the parish ministry, he also served as the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1976 to 1980. Following his synod presidency, Petersen was called to the presidency of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, where he served until his retirement in 1997.

Wilhelm Petersen married Naomi (Madson) on July 19, 1953 at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota. Their marriage was blessed with six children: Ruth, Joel, Thomas, Philip, Carol, and Kristen.

He died on August 26, 2018.

Heart of a Pastor

In 1953, upon completing his seminary training, Petersen was assigned to the Oklee parish in northern Minnesota. He was later fond of saying that the parish “wasn’t at the end of the earth, but you could see it from there.” This area of Minnesota was still somewhat frontier at the time, with some families still living in original log cabin homesteads.

Petersen’s namesake, theologian C. F. W. Walther wrote,

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise.¹

Petersen loved to recite this quote, especially in later years as the annual time of seminary graduate assignments drew near. While generations of students at various seminaries may have blanched at those words, they could not deny that Wilhelm Petersen had taken them to heart and lived them. When he and his wife Naomi arrived in Oklee, they were initially given what Petersen alternately described as a “small house” and a “cabin” without indoor plumbing in which to live. His descriptions of these living arrangements were never disparaging, however, but simply described what they were given by God through the parish. He spoke fondly of his years in Northern Minnesota, encouraging many seminary students as they received their first assignments.

While in Oklee, Petersen spent many hours visiting not only the farms and homes of members, but of people who did not belong to a church as well. He firmly believed that there is opportunity for evangelism even in the most sparsely populated areas. This desire to bring others to Christ through the means of grace was then used further by

¹ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 207.

the Lord when Petersen was called to begin a mission congregation in Madison, Wisconsin.

In 1960, the congregation of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin organized a daughter congregation on the west side of Madison, and Petersen was called as the first pastor. During his time as pastor, the congregation grew by the grace of God, constructing their first building in 1961. Petersen served the congregation, Grace Lutheran, until he received a divine call to serve Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota in 1978. He served as pastor of Mt. Olive until 1980, when he was called to be the president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Synod President

Wilhelm W. Petersen served as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1976 to 1980, after serving for three years as the synod's vice-president from 1973 to 1976. Until 1980, synod presidents served as full-time parish pastors while serving in the office of president. Petersen served the first half of his presidency as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin, then finishing his term while serving Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

Highlighting his concerns for both evangelism and doctrine, Petersen writes in the 1977 *President's Report*,

Mission-mindedness and a concern for pure doctrine go hand in hand. There is the danger of being so concerned about winning souls for Christ that we overlook the part of the Great Commission which calls for purity of doctrine, thus ending up with a social gospel. On the other hand, there is the danger of being so concerned about pure doctrine that we hide our light under a bushel and are not as zealous as we should be in making disciples for Christ. As we seek to carry out the Great Commission we need to beware of the twin dangers of liberalism and legalism; each hinders and harms the cause of the Gospel. On the other hand, a true love for souls based on pure doctrine glorifies God and makes disciples for His kingdom.²

² Wilhelm Petersen, "President's Report," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 1977, 19.

Seminary President

In 1979 the president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Rev. Theodore Aaberg, requested and received a release from his call due to illness. Rev. Glenn Reichwald accepted the duties of interim president until the Board of Regents could issue the call for a new president. The board called Rev. Wilhelm Petersen to be the president of the seminary. He accepted this call and began his duties as seminary president on August 1, 1980.

In addition to serving as president, Petersen taught a variety of courses at the seminary, perhaps being best-remembered for his homiletics instruction. He guided a generation of students in the art of preaching, helping them to avoid the many snares of preaching in the modern popular culture. His use of Walther's *Law and Gospel* as one of the homiletics textbooks deepened the students' understanding of the importance of dividing these disparate teachings into their proper usages. Petersen sought to instill not only a love of preaching, but the importance of the responsibility of keeping the message straight, as Walther describes:

Commingling Law and Gospel brings about unrest of conscience. No matter how comforting the preaching is that people hear, it is of no help to them if there is a sting in it. The honey of the Gospel may at first taste good, but if a sting of the Law goes with it, everything is spoiled. My conscience cannot come to rest if I cannot say: "Nevertheless, according to His grace, God will receive me." If the preacher says to me: "Come, for all things are now ready—provided you do this or that," I am lost. For in that case I must ask myself, "Have I done as God desires?" and I shall find no help.³

Drawing upon his experience as a parish pastor, Petersen used real-life illustrations in all of his courses, showing future pastors some of the many applications of the doctrine they were being taught. This enrichment of textbook material with experience helped students to think through situations they would be faced with in years to come. Petersen regularly stressed the need for pastors to take the Great Commission seriously as they left the seminary to begin their lives as pastors. In his 1995 sermon for seminary graduation, he said,

³ Walther, *The Proper Distinction*, 41.

In addition to faithful preparation of your sermon during the week, there should also be a serious attempt, motivated by a love for souls, to seek the lost, bring back them that have gone astray, and to look for those “other sheep” which as yet are not part of the fold. Computers and E-mail can be a blessing, but there is also a temptation of spending too much with these marvels of high-tech that we fail to make calls trying to reach the unchurched. It is easy to develop a negative complex and crawl in to a shell and be content with the status quo ... it is incumbent upon us to take the Great Commission seriously and do this now while it is day.⁴

Outside the classroom, Petersen was a tireless recruiter for the seminary, often contacting prospective students by phone himself. Future seminarians often found themselves at his supper table after a day of attending classes and meeting with professors and students, treated to a home-cooked meal prepared by his wife, Naomi. As gifted a recruiter as he was, Naomi was often instrumental in calming the fears of the wives and fiancées of prospective students over dinner conversation.

During his last few years as president, a synod-wide offering was collected to construct a new combined seminary and synod office building. The previous building was needed by Bethany Lutheran College and had become too small to adequately provide for needs of the seminary and synod. A new building was constructed which included a beautiful chapel, utilized by students for devotions and homiletics.

The cornerstone was laid on September 23, 1996. The building was formally dedicated on Synod Sunday, June 15, 1997. The “Messengers of Peace” thankoffering exceeded its goal and, together with major assistance from the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation, allowed the building to be constructed without debt.⁵

The summer of 1997 also marked Petersen’s retirement as president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, though he continued to teach part-time and maintained an office in the seminary building. Throughout his years in this position, he sought to strengthen the institution and left a legacy of grateful students, as well as grateful congregations receiving those students as shepherds.

⁴ Wilhelm Petersen, “Seminary Graduation Sermon,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (September 1995): 7.

⁵ Craig Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders: A Pictorial History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Mankato, Minnesota: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 249.

Theologian

In addition to the many other roles he filled, Wilhelm Petersen was a theologian. He lived through a very difficult period in modern Lutheran history. While still a young pastor, the events precipitating the dissolution of the Synodical Conference had already begun, resulting in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrawing from the organization. This affected Petersen as it did many others: friends and family were divided by church body. His gentle and patient manner allowed him to remain friends with many among the churches comprising the former body. However, he was adamant that withdrawing from the Synodical Conference was correct and defended the decision of the ELS. Years later, he remained hopeful that the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod would be able to correct course and that unity of belief and teaching would once again characterize the larger church body. Following the contentious 1973 LCMS convention, Petersen wrote,

When liberalism makes inroads and is not combated immediately, it can only mean problems for a synod that wants to be confessional. How important that we continue to be faithful to the Word at all times! And as we carry out our Lord's command to make disciples of all nations, may we remember His full assignment which includes teaching *only* what He has commanded!⁶

During the 1970s and earlier, there was considerable discussion in the ELS concerning the doctrine of the church. In 1978, articles in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* were printed concerning this doctrine, indicating the intense deliberations concerning church and ministry that were occurring in the synod. The discussion concerning the doctrine of the church came to a God-pleasing resolution at the 1980 synod convention when the ELS church theses entitled "The Doctrine of the Church," mainly under the authorship of Wilhelm Petersen, were adopted.

While seminary president and a member of the ELS Doctrine Committee, Petersen helped to guide the Evangelical Lutheran Synod through a difficult time. In the 1980s there was a great deal of discussion within the ELS regarding the Lord's Supper, finally culminating in *The Lord's Supper* statement adopted in 1997 by the ELS convention.

⁶ Wilhelm Petersen, "The New Orleans Convention," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 43.

Having lived through the dissolution of the Synodical Conference, Petersen recognized the importance of confessional church bodies working with one another. Along with many others, he saw the need for a new international body that would bring these groups together, united in doctrine and practice. This desire was fulfilled when the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference was established and met for the first time in Oberwesel, Germany in 1993. He served as an essayist at the inaugural convention, expounding on the topic for which he was well-known: properly dividing Law and Gospel. In the conclusion of his essay, he writes,

True Law and Gospel preaching is becoming more of a rarity in our day. Instead of Law preaching we hear much moralizing and tirading against the evils of the day. But the Law is spiritual, and it must be preached in such a way that “every mouth is stopped and all the world become guilty before God” as Paul says in Romans.

... The Gospel is the only solution to man’s problem of sin and death, and therefore we cannot emphasize enough the importance of preaching the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. While the Law must be preached in all of its sharpness and severity, the Gospel must always predominate. Walther said it so well: “So preach the law that it drives the greatest sinner to despair; so preach the Gospel that it gives the greatest sinner hope.” True Law and Gospel preaching must always be a top priority for a Lutheran pastor. Then God will be glorified and His people edified!⁷

Conclusion

In his final years, Petersen suffered from Alzheimer’s. His sharp mind and sense of humor faded because of this terrible disease. But even during this time, the faith created in his baptism continued to be evident to everyone. While he was still able to communicate, he would still easily recite his favorite Bible passages, hymns, and quotes, even as the names of his friends and family members could not be easily recalled. Wilhelm Walther Petersen received his eternal homecoming on August 26, 2018. His own words offer a fitting summary of his faith:

⁷ Wilhelm Petersen, “We Have a Common Concern: Properly Dividing the Word of Truth,” *Proceedings of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference* (1993): 122–123.

The members of a Christian family are guided by this truth. They know that even though their earthly house shall some day be dissolved, yet they have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. A Christian family can therefore face the fact of earthly separation, knowing that there shall be a glorious reunion in the heavenly home, a reunion that will be permanent, free from sorrow, sickness, and hardship, the things which so often characterized life here on earth. The Christian family believes this because Christ our Savior has promised: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). Thus with Luther we can pray: "O heavenly Father, if I let this body depart, I am certain that I shall be with Thee forever."⁸ [LSQ](#)

⁸ Wilhelm Petersen, "The Christian Home," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 2-3 (June-September 2011): 253.

Sermon on John 14:1–6 for the Funeral of John A. Moldstad

Gaylin R. Schmeling
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 61, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2021)

Prayer: O Lord, we are gathered in sorrow and yet not as those who have no hope. We thank You for all the blessings bestowed on our beloved husband, father, grandfather, pastor, president, and dear friend John now fallen asleep and for all the blessings given to us through him. But most of all, we thank You for making him Your child by faith in Christ. Grant that each of us may have that same hope of eternal life by despairing of ourselves and trusting only in Your Son for the forgiveness of sins. Then we will again be reunited in the heavenly mansions, with all the hosts arrayed in white. We ask it in the name of Him who is the resurrection of life. Amen.

Text: *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.*” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:1–6; NKJV)

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, THE RESURRECTION and Life, dear fellow redeemed and especially you, Joslyn, Rachel, John, Matthew, Michael, Andrea, Joshua, and Brittany, who have come here to mourn the death of your husband and father.

Jesus says, “**Let not your hearts be troubled.**” This seems like a very difficult request especially on a day like this when our hearts are weighed down with grief. It is only natural that our hearts should be sorrowful, and we feel an emptiness within for we have lost someone very near and dear to us. The question arises again and again. Why was John taken when so much of his life was still ahead of him? John was full of vigor and energy. He had just bought a home on the lake and was looking forward to enjoying it with his family. He enjoyed life and was so important to our synod as the president. Why now? How may we have untroubled hearts at a time like this?

To give an all-embracing answer to this question would require an understanding of God’s mind which we, His creatures, simply do not have. In the same way, we cannot always understand all the other problems in this world such as war, disease, and pandemics. These things we leave in the hands of our loving Father. But remember this was not an act of some cruel judge in the sky. What do we say in the Lord’s Prayer? We pray, “Our Father who art in heaven.” The Father who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all will indeed work all for your ultimate good (Romans 8:28–32). It was our loving Father who has cared for you throughout your life who has also taken your husband and father home to the heavenly mansions.

It was a terrible shock to you, Joslyn and the whole family, that God so suddenly called John from this life. But for him it is no tragedy; it is a triumph, a victory. Look at what he will no longer have to face. Life can hold pleasures and joys to be sure, but it also is filled with problems and sorrows all the way. John no longer has to face the daily conflicts and disappointments that lay before us. For him there is no longer sickness, despair, disease, and the endless aging process of life. He does not have to face the daily temptations of Satan to draw us away from Jesus by destroying our faith.

Now Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled”: But how can we have such hope? **How may we have untroubled hearts at a time like this? The answer is found in Christ’s words, “You believe in God, believe also in Me.”** Our hope is found in a confident trust in Jesus as our Savior. Since man first fell into sin, our race has been doomed to temporal death and eternal destruction. On our own we were hopelessly imprisoned in sin. We can still see that lost condition in our old sinful flesh. No matter how hard we strive to live the Christ-like life, we still often have hatred, lust, and bitterness within, not loving the Savior with all our hearts or our neighbor as ourselves.

Yet Jesus the Valiant One, our Victor Divine, comes to our defense. He did battle with Satan throughout His life for us, culminating in the Battle of the Ages on the cross. There He crushed the Old Evil Foe under His feet; He broke down sin's prison house and entered into death, tearing it apart so that we would not have to remain in death forever. His bright and glorious resurrection is the crowning seal of His victory over death, and it assures us that now all our sins are forgiven in full through Jesus' blood. Easter Worship services are at times conducted in the middle of the church cemetery, showing that Jesus' resurrection assures us that His brothers and sisters too will arise with glorified bodies like unto His glorified body. Then we who trust in Jesus as our only Savior from sin can have untroubled hearts for we know the dead will rise again. In this faith your husband, father, grandfather, and friend John died.

This faith was already worked in John's heart at his Baptism. He publicly confessed that faith at his confirmation and strengthened it throughout his life through a regular use of God's Word and the Holy Sacrament. He raised his family in that faith and desired the same for his grandchildren. He loved you, Joslyn; he loved his children and grandchildren with all his heart. His faith was shown by his kindness and consideration to all around him. He was always ready to help in need and do whatever he could possibly do.

This faith was evidenced in his life of faithful ministry. As a pastor, the Gospel always predominated in his ministry. As a professor of New Testament studies, he desired all his students to know and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. As the president of our synod, he was a kind and caring shepherd for all the under-shepherds of our synod. He desired the peace and harmony of the Gospel to be the focus of our synod. He promoted orthodox Lutheranism in this land and throughout the world through the CELC. He was a true servant leader. In that faith he died assured of the blessed hope of eternal life. Still all these things did not save him. He was saved alone through Christ's redemptive work.

As was the custom in the Moldstad family, after Pastor Hartwig's fine devotion on the night of John's death, Matthew said we should sing a hymn. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" was chosen. I think this was because John played it on his trumpet. What a wonderful remembrance of your father. He taught you all to treasure Christian and Lutheran hymnody and made it a part of your family devotions. Obviously, I am not known for my musical abilities, but when I sat next to John, I could sing any hymn.

Jesus gives us further comfort, He says, "In My father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you." The Father's house, which is heaven, is the most wonderful place there is. Nothing in this life can be compared to it. Dear grandchildren, Luther once wrote a beautiful letter to his little son Hans. He told him that there is a wonderful garden where there are golden jackets. They eat the most delicious fruit. They have pony rides with golden reins and silver saddles (LW 49:321–324). Today he might have said there are treats and video games and all the other things that boys and girls like to do. Luther here was picturing heaven for his son and he reminds us that heaven is the most glorious thing we can imagine, and it is even more wonderful than that. This is the place where your grandfather, husband, and father is today.

Our loved one, who died in Christ by virtue of his baptismal faith in the Savior, has passed over into a whole new kind of life where God Himself shall wipe away all tears from his eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. For the believer there is nothing to fear in death because we are going home. Right now, John, your husband and father, is in everlasting joy, celebrating the wedding feast of the Lamb with all the hosts arrayed in white. As much as we all miss John, no one can really wish him back in this present vale of tears. Here there is pain and sorrow, but there is joy and rest forever. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also." That the loving Lord Jesus did for our brother a week ago yesterday.

This preparation of Jesus includes one thing more. Those of us who remain and especially you, Joslyn, we are not left without hope as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is by your side each step of the way in this earthly pilgrimage to our Father's house. We remember that if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31). Then at a time like this when our strength almost gives out, we know where strength can be found. Christ strengthens us through His Word and the Sacrament of His body and blood. He is the Good Shepherd who always cares for His sheep. When we falter and fall by the way, He picks us up in His arms and holds us against His strong chest where all our fears and anxieties subside.

St. Paul comforts us with these words, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other

created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Then if there is any doubt in our minds about the way of salvation, we should remember Jesus’ words to Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” This was John’s hope, and may it also be ours. This means we should despair of our good life for salvation and trust alone in what Jesus has done for us. He lived a holy life for us and died on the cross to pay for all of our iniquities, obtaining forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This faith is nourished and strengthened throughout our life through the means of grace. Then when our last hour is come, the Good Shepherd will carry us home, too, as He did for John, for in His Father’s house are many mansions.

There are a number of old German cemeteries that have gravestones which simply say, “*Auf Wiedersehen*.” Now that sounds rather crass and heartless, simply saying, “goodbye.” But “*Auf Wiedersehen*” does not mean “goodbye,” but “until we meet again”—proclaiming the hope of the resurrection. Then today Joslyn, we do not have to say “goodbye forever,” but “*Auf Wiedersehen*”—“until we meet again.” This separation is only a moment and then we will be reunited in joy and peace forevermore in heavenly mansions above, Jerusalem the golden with milk and honey blessed. Amen. [LSQ](#)

Obituary of Rev. John A. Moldstad

(April 06, 1954–January 29, 2021)

The Rev. John Arthur Moldstad Jr., 66, of Madison Lake, Minnesota, was called to his Heavenly Home unexpectedly on Friday, January 29, 2021. He died with the sure hope of eternal life through his Savior Jesus Christ, who promised, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies” (John 11:25).

He was born April 6, 1954, in Bagley, Minnesota, to the Rev. John, Sr. and Gudrun (Madson) Moldstad. He was baptized the same day by his father in the hospital and was confirmed at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

He studied at Bethany Lutheran High School in Mankato for one year before transferring to Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm where he met his future wife, Joslyn Marie Wiechmann. John went on to study at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato. He later completed a Masters of Sacred Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin.

John married his high school sweetheart, Joslyn, on July 30, 1977. Their union was blessed with seven children and fourteen grandchildren. He and Joslyn recently moved to their new home on Lake Washington, where they planned to retire. They enjoyed many wonderful memories with their children and grandchildren at the lake.

John was a third generation pastor, serving first as vicar at Bethany Lutheran Church in Princeton, Minnesota, and then as pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Our Savior Lutheran Church in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, and Faith Lutheran Church in Oregon, Wisconsin. In 1994 he was called to serve as New Testament professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. In 2002 he was called to serve as the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a role in which he served until his death. It was his fervent desire that all come to know their Savior Jesus Christ that through Him they may have forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

John was preceded in death by his mother, Gudrun; and three infant siblings. He is survived by his wife, Joslyn; his father, the Rev. John Sr. (June); his brother, the Rev. Donald (Gina); his sister, Lois Fick (Paul); his children, Rachel Renee, John Andrew (Amanda), the Rev. Matthew James (Joni), Michael John (Annie), Andrea Elizabeth Hopkins (Kyle), Joshua Ryan (Rachel), and Brittany Rachele Cordes (Tony); and fourteen grandchildren, with two more on the way.

John was an active member of Peace Lutheran Church in North Mankato, Minnesota where a funeral service was held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 6, 2021. The committal was immediately following at Norseland Lutheran Cemetery in St. Peter, Minnesota.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13).

2021 Bjarne W. Teigen Reformation Lectures

October 28–29, 2021

We Confess Jesus Christ

Early Church Christology—

Dr. Joel Elowsky, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

Early Modern Lutheran Christology—

Dr. Carl Beckwith, Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL

Modern Lutheran Christology—

Dr. Jack Kilcrease, Aquinas College, Grand Rapids, MI

The lectures will take place at Bethany Lutheran College,
S. C. Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center, Mankato, Minnesota,
beginning October 28 at 10:30 a.m.



Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato MN 56001

PRINTED MATTER