

## 5. MY MINISTRY BEGINS

On Nov. 15, 1936 I was ordained and installed at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Julesburg, Colo., a small city of about 1500 inhabitants in the NE corner of the state. Having come there as a bachelor, a small corner of the church basement was curtained off for a bed and dresser and an office desk which I had purchased in Lincoln, Nebr and had shipped to Julesburg. This served as my home for 6 months. I made my own breakfast over an oil stove in the church's small kitchen. I was able to arrange for my lunch and supper at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Otto Nicolaus. If I planned to be out making calls or was invited out for a meal, I told them in advance and was not expected there at mealtime.

At the first service after my installation the pianist didn't show up. Since no substitute was available, I had to lead the singing of the hymns as well as the rest of the service. Fortunately there was little liturgy and I knew enough music so that I could strike the right key on the piano for the beginning of each hymn on the right pitch. As a result there was no problem with that. Also it was fortunate that I had selected hymns with easy and familiar melodies.

At first I also served a second station, called Trinity, about 12-15 miles to the southeast where a group of about 10 families had organized a congregation at that time because of the depression which had made the purchase of gas for travel difficult. At 8 cents per bushel for corn a farmer could hardly do more than buy gas for a truck to haul it to the elevator.

Other farmers would make the Sunday trip to church also a grocery shopping trip, since one store was open on Sundays for their convenience. When one member used a lack of gas as an excuse for missing church, I suggested that they approach the problem in keeping with the Lord's promise in Matt. 6: 33 and also make church going a shopping trip as others did.

On the return trip from the country church I picked up a boy for Sunday school. Later I also picked up 4 children whose parents were deaf and with whom I could only communicate in writing. Some 35 years later the father of the boy named Duerr reminded me in a letter of how I had helped them out in getting their son to Sunday school regularly.

On one of my trips to the "country" church the bright sunshine was pleasant after several inches of rain had fallen during the week. But such rains sometimes left lakes or lagoons in the middle of the road, since the so called table land was quite flat. Normally driving thru such a lagoon was no problem. One just shifted into a lower gear and slowly drove thru, knowing that it was not deep enough to cause any real problem. However, in this case I didn't make it thru. When I got near to the far end two of my Model A Ford wheels just seemed to drop into a hole so that the axle or transmission hit the higher ground and left my wheels spinning in the water. I learned later that an oil truck had gotten stuck in that lagoon the day before and had made these holes in an effort to dig its own way out. So all I could do was grab my bag with my pulpit gown and books and jump from the running board across the edge of the water and start walking the remaining 1 and 1/2 miles. As I was walking down the road one of the parishioners met me and explained that the group had decided to cancel services for that day because I hadn't arrived. So he arranged to help me get out of the lagoon so that I could get back to town for my services there by another route. When I explained the next Sunday what had happened the week before, everyone had a good chuckle.

Very few people in the community had a telephone. So it was impossible to phone anyone. Consequently we never had one in our home nor was there one in the church. At the first meeting of the Ladies Aid in December, which was their Christmas party, 3 younger unmarried ladies came as guests, perhaps because the pastor was single. That was the

only meeting the three attended. Since I later purchased a diamond from the local jeweler, who was a member, it soon became generally known that the pastor had a steady girl friend. So chances for a "catch" were eliminated.

This probably is a good spot to mention how our engagement and plans for our wedding were arranged. This may be of special interest to the grandchildren and later generations. Our communication was entirely by mail. In those days a phone call was made only in an emergency since the charges were so high. A quick message was usually sent by telegram. As a result I had to propose by letter and mail the engagement ring. And my prospective bride had to answer or respond by letter. Today that may sound rather impersonal but in the economic conditions of those days this procedure was quite common when people were separated by many miles, as we were.

At that first meeting of the Ladies Aid I tried to relax the tension in the presence of the new pastor by telling a story I had just read, by which I also tried to point out the importance of their organization to the parish. The story was about a young man who came into town as a new teller at the bank. A lady came to his window with quite a bundle of small change. While he was counting this he tried to carry on a friendly conversation. In the course of it he assumed that this change had resulted from selling eggs and remarked, "Isn't it wonderful what a bunch of old hens can do?" You can imagine how embarrassed he was when he asked to which account this cash should be credited and was told, "The local Ladies Aid Society."

As it turned out this story had more appropriate application than I first thought. The Ladies Aid had more money than the church treasurer in those difficult times when farm products brought such a small return. If any special improvement, such as painting, was needed the ladies had to decide to pay for it. They also seemed to make the major decisions because they had some funds with which to work. Gradually, we managed to get that back into the hands of the voter's assembly, where constitutionally it belonged.

Since there had been no confirmation instruction during the vacancy, the first confirmation was not held until in December, 1937. The first marriage didn't occur until Easter of 1937. A couple came from out of state to get their license on Saturday and wanted to be married on Sunday. However, because of the country service at 8:30 and Sunday school before the city service, in which I had a Baptism and Communion, the marriage had to be postponed until about 12:30 p.m. I remember that the groom was very flippant about the affair until the part in the ceremony pointed out his responsibility. Suddenly the fellow became very serious about it all.

The first adult, Wilbur Conner, whom I baptized and confirmed later in October of 1937, attended his first service on that Easter. He was a cement and mason contractor who was so busy that one could not find him at home. I remember that my first conversation with him was at the grain elevator where he was doing some cement work in the dumping pit. He was down in the pit and I was in the driveway level above him. But I did get a pointed invitation in for him to come to church, a sort of "Come and see." His wife was Lutheran but had not attended either. We retained contact thru all of many years since then. (Both of them passed away while I was compiling this.) He became very active after they later moved to Englewood, Colo., where they reared their two adopted children whom I had baptized.

One of the members, who himself lived in a sod house they put together after their home had burned down on a farm about 10 miles to the south, wanted to be sure to support the pastor adequately, especially if and when he became married, which became a strong likelihood after the diamond purchase. So he proposed at the annual meeting in January to add \$15 per month for rent to the \$75 per month salary that was offered in the call. This was approved and made the future look a little brighter.

Before our marriage at Bear Creek, Wis. on May 15, 1937, it was possible to rent a 2-bedroom home about 2 to 3 blocks from the church. Actually the church was a chapel with

a higher than usual basement walls which could be converted into a dwelling, which it is today. The home I rented did not have indoor plumbing and had a small detached garage in the back that one entered from the alley. The outhouse was next to the garage. Available in this home was an oak dining table and 6 chairs, which I bought for \$15 and a used electric washing machine that I also purchased. Because I had seen my landlady in Wisconsin do all her laundry without a machine during my 3 years of vicarage, I was determined that my wife was to have this convenience. I don't remember what I paid for the machine. However, the machine was used at least 15 years, after which two legs became wheels at one end of a table for a mounted jig saw. After living in this rented home for about 3 years the landlady added plumbing and a bathroom, for which she raised the rent from \$14 to \$17 per month. Because I couldn't get to Wisconsin before late Monday, Edna's mother had to go with her to the county seat in Waupaca to apply for the marriage license a week in advance.

We were married on a Saturday, a lovely May day with lilacs in full bloom. The ceremony was conducted in the church where I had vicared 3 years. We had only two attendants, Edna's brother Irvin and her cousin, Luetta Labudde. Both of them are still living after 55 years. The reception was held in the bride's home. The only relatives from my side attending were Dad and Mother, who had ridden along with me from Nebraska. A dinner for about 60 guests was prepared by Edna's Aunt Emma (Klemm) and her cousin Lula (Wolff) and was served family style. They were assisted by a neighbor lady. At least double that number was invited to the reception in the evening. It was a custom there for a group of friends and neighbors to come for an evening chivarie, serenading the married couple with noise with the expectation that treats would be served.

There was no formal honeymoon. Soon after we drove back to Nebraska with my parents. After spending a few days there we drove on to Julesburg. Along the way Edna was taken aback by the barren treeless countryside and wondered whether Julesburg was like that. This

question was hard to answer because the city at least had its share of trees, although the surrounding country was similar to what we had seen en route. At any rate, she recalls seeing tumbleweeds rolling down main street driven by the wind as we came into Julesburg.

The first Saturday after we had moved into our house, the local merchants had a special promotion, giving away numbered tickets with all purchases; the larger the purchase, the more tickets you received. Since we had purchased some furniture and other home furnishings, we had quite a number of tickets. Since the drawing was held while I had confirmation instruction, Edna went to the drawing and came home with two prizes of \$5 and \$2, which was quite a gift in those days.

Our first refrigerator was purchased about 2 years after we were married. In February our milk had soured overnight on the back porch and to keep our small ice box running year round was not cheap. We calculated that the Montgomery Ward refrigerator at \$4 down and \$4 a month would pay for itself at least half of year in savings on ice purchases plus avoiding milk souring and other food spoiling during the rest of the year.

For the first two years we ate our meals off a card table in the kitchen until we purchased an unpainted dropleaf table and two chairs. This set had seen several coats of paint and still serves in Gloria's cottage or golf course home.

The first electric range we purchased about 6 months after the refrigerator. We had been making do with a 3-burner kerosene stove. We had a small oven for it and Edna was able to even bake a cake in her aluminum skillet over one of the burners. However, the decision to buy the range came after a mishap one morning. Jim was a baby and woke up early, wanting his morning bottle. So I got out of bed and started a burner to warm his bottle. Since it was cold in the house I crawled back under the covers while it heated. But soon Jim went back to sleep and so did we, only to awaken some time later with the house full of black smoke from the improperly adjusted burner. Fortunately the bedroom and study doors were closed. To clean

up the greasy soot after airing out the house took a couple of days. It meant cleaning the wallpaper and washing all the woodwork. To avoid another experience of this type we decided to purchase a range at once on the time payment plan, \$5 per month. I still have a copy of the purchase contract.

During the 4 years in Julesburg we never had a telephone, nor was there one in church. In case of emergency a telegram had to be sent. Otherwise we were dependent on mail service. Very few of our members had a telephone, so they were accustomed to making a trip to town and the pastor's home if he was needed. However, I recall few such emergencies affecting our members.

Our landlady and her husband, W. J. & Josephine Kelley, who became Michelle's birthday twin by 90 years, were early homesteaders and community pioneers. They lived across the street from us at the other end of the block. They had no children and were around 60 years of age. They also owned the lot across the alley back of our garage. There she kept a small flock of chickens in an enclosure. She was much interested in what happened in our home. This was especially evident when and after Jim was born. He was born on St. Michael's Day on a Thursday about 1:00 p.m., weighing 5 and a half lbs. in the local hospital, a former home converted into such a facility. He was greeted with the local high school band playing as they marched down the street, seemingly rehearsing for some parade or sports event. This may have set the tone for his life's interest in music. Since Jim was rather small at birth, few people had expected his arrival so soon. His birth date is Sept. 29, 1938.

After Jim was born, we bought a used reed baby buggy, in which he went for rides in sunny weather and could be wheeled to church. Being troubled with colic, he often needed to be rocked for several hours. Occasionally we took him for a ride in the car to get him to drop off to sleep. In fact, when Roger came along the two of them could ride to church in the buggy we had.

One time when Jim was a baby Edna was carrying him in her arms, wrapped in a blanket. Near the car she stepped in a depression and fell with him in the snow. Since she heard no sound or felt any movement, she hurried back to the house to take a look, only to find him all smiles. It so happened that she broke her fall by landing on her elbows and knees as she hung on to the baby. The only result was some sore spots on her elbows and knees.

After Jim was born Mrs. Kelley was a daily visitor on her way to feed her chickens. She chose to do this about the time Jim would get his daily bath. She just loved to watch him steadily grow up. She was anxious to give him some candy and offered to give him some chocolate again and again. Can you believe that we were able to stall her off until he was about 16 months old?

One summer she wanted the house painted and asked me if I would do it. Since I was free to arrange my own time, I agreed to do it. But she was disappointed with the resulting coverage. It was hard to explain to her that she had bought such cheap paint that one could almost call it white linseed oil.

Another time she wanted me to paint the kitchen cabinets in her home. I can still see the colors - a deep gray trim with a purple for the door panels. But she loved darker colors and the result pleased her.

Although she was Methodist she occasionally attended our services. Her husband was rather frail physically but a sharp business man. They were fairly well-to-do but lived rather frugally. However, they were fairly generous with their resources as they kept several nephews thru their high school years and then supported them thru college. As a result they were justifiably proud of their nephew's later accomplishments.

We retained contact with Mrs. Kelley until she was in her 90's. After her husband's death she moved to her former home area at Beloit, Wis. When we did not hear from her anymore for a Christmas or two, we learned upon inquiry that she had entered a nursing home, where she passed away in her upper 90's.

Roger was born on a Saturday about 2:30 p.m. and weighed 8 lbs. That was on March 2, 1940. Since the doctor judged that it would be several hours before he would arrive, I went to conduct my confirmation class scheduled at 1:00 p.m. Although I did cut the session short I didn't reach the hospital until shortly after his arrival, seeing him as the nurse was cleaning him up. In his case everyone was expecting his arrival earlier, though he made his debut on schedule. Edna had difficulty carrying him. After she had the flu at Christmas, she could hardly walk. She was unable to get to church for almost two months. In fact, she couldn't stand to ride in our Ford so we had to borrow a car for the regular trip to the doctor for a checkup. We also had to hire part-time help to care for Jim and assist with the housework.

After he was born, the two of them, as mentioned earlier, rode to church with Mother in our grand old style baby buggy. At church Mrs. Otto Nicolaus always took care of Jim, while Edna managed Roger.

The two families, named Kluth, tried to help the pastor keep food on the table by bringing a dozen of eggs each along to church each Sunday with the understanding that in the event we got more eggs than we could use, the surplus could be taken to the grocery store and traded for other needed items, as many farmers did in those days.

At one time a farmer named Buchholz - the sod-house dweller - was culling his flock of laying hens and gave us 4 heavy red hens that we could butcher as needed. So we made a small pen in the corner of the garage to keep them. We fed them so well that on many days we gathered 4 eggs from these hens. In time we butchered them and used them for meat.

It was not unusual for us to be given a live chicken in a gunny sack on a visit to a farm home. This meant killing it at home, defeathering it and otherwise preparing it for use. This was usually a task we somehow worked out together, especially at first. This is where experience growing up on a farm was a helpful advantage.

Some people at that time had a strong feeling about the pastor being present during surgery, not just in the hospital, but in the operating room. I didn't relish the idea but agreed in one instance. The lady undergoing a hysterectomy was quite short and heavy. I remember observing the entire procedure in the hospital at Ovid about 5 miles to the southwest. And if desired, I could describe some of the problems the surgeon had with closing the incision because of the heavy layer of fat between the inner and outer skin. I also recall that her youngest son, being short and light, tried to make it in the horse racing world as a jockey.

One aspect of living in Julesburg was the frequency of tramps coming to our door for a handout. Since 37 trains came thru daily on the mainline of the Union Pacific toward Cheyenne and the branch line to Denver, this common occurrence was understandable. But somehow our home must have been identified as an easy touch, because we could from our front window see them walk up the street toward our home 7 blocks from the tracks without stopping anywhere along the way. We always shared a little food with them but made it a policy never to invite them to the house or to give out cash.

One day such a "bum" met me outside a bakery-restaurant downtown after I had made a purchase there and asked for a handout. So I invited him to come into the restaurant and I would pay for a meal. To this he objected since he wanted cash so that he could buy lunchmeat to share with a buddy who was getting some bread. To this I objected but invited him to go with me across the street to a grocery store. As I went I could smell the liquor on his breath and told him that I didn't hand out money because in many cases it was used for booze. In the grocery store I gave the butcher a small amount of cash with instruction to give the man some lunch meat. He wasn't exactly pleased with the procedure but he got what he had basically asked for.

During Holy Week of the first spring I made a call at the home of members who lived on a farm about 20 miles out, where I was invited for the evening meal. During the meal a snowstorm had blown in and the air was so

heavy with flying snow that the family insisted I remain there for the night and not face the danger of being stranded on the way home. Well, the storm continued into the next day and didn't let up until later in the afternoon. When I was preparing to leave, we first had to brush and sweep the snow out from under the hood of my Model A Ford where the force of the wind had packed it. Most of the snow had been caught in the stubble of the fields and had blown across the built-up road. As a result I encountered no drifts over the 20 miles except at one spot where a small grove of trees had acted as a snow fence and left a fairly narrow drift in the roadway. As I approached this I shifted into 2nd gear and stepped on the accelerator and was able to get thru without being stalled. When I reached town the storm had left quite a few drifts in the streets. However, I was able to get back to my makeshift apartment in the church without serious difficulty.

While at this farm home during the snowstorm I had to do something to help prepare for the coming weekend of services on Thursday, Friday and Sunday. Since I had done some advance planning I was able to borrow writing materials and sat down for several hours to write my first Easter sermon. This took the pressure off for the rest of the week with its schedule of extra services.

I recall one occasion when I had the privilege of baptizing a family of six children at one time. None of them was beyond grade school age. Their family name, as I recall, was Rose.

On one occasion I visited a family a few miles from town where I was invited to join them for a meal. The head of the house was a widower, named Gallitz. The older daughter, about 18, had to help meet family expenses by working for another family and living in and the younger daughter was still in grade school. So father and the 16-year-old son became hungry for a cake. So they tried mixing one up and baking it. It turned out to be a little heavy and fell in the center. Since they still wanted it to look like a regular cake, they mixed up enough powdered sugar frosting to make it level and jokingly

referred to it as their "drop" cake, Needless to say, the center pieces were extra-sweet.

Another interesting experience was a jack rabbit hunt. The population of jack rabbits in that area had increased to such an extent that they damaged various crops. Therefore, to reduce their number the community arranged for a roundup. In this participating hunters lined up along roads forming a square of 2 miles in each direction. Then they gradually walked toward the center where a large enclosure made out of snow fence was set up. As they walked along the jack rabbits would jump up out of the stubble to run for their lives away from the marching hunters. Many of them were shot already at this point but others continued their escape toward the center. As the lines drew closer together near the center some rabbits had become wary and crouched down in the stubble until the hunters had passed and then raced in the opposite direction. If they were noticed in time some of them fell from shotgun blasts but others escaped. Those rabbits that kept moving ahead of the hunters were finally trapped in the snow fence enclosure with no place to go. Here clubs were used to finish them off. The carcasses of these rabbits were then sold to a firm that would remove the skins to be used for "chinchilla" fur coats or felt hats. After a couple seasons of this kind of hunts or roundups the rabbit population was brought under control, partly also with the aid of a disease that took its toll. One such hunt reportedly netted as many as 2000 of the creatures.

Similar roundups were also arranged in the general area to reduce the number of sheep- and small animal-killing coyotes. These were usually planned to cover larger squares and the hunters rode on horseback. A hunt of this type was considered successful if at least 6 coyotes were killed.

Occasionally I went golfing on a course about 5 miles out of town with grocer or at times with the minister of the local Christian church. The grocer had quite a temper and would occasionally break a club because of a poor shot. The encounter with the minister helped me to get acquainted with their beliefs about Baptism and about the success of their

evangelistic weeks. The greens in that dry country were patches of sand. When you reached the "greens" you would use a piece of pipe about two feet long with a handle to smooth the path from the hole to your ball. Then you hoped that your putt would reach the hole on the first try. Occasionally a poor putt would hit the edge of the smoothed-out path and veer back to hit the hole. At one time I played a course at Cheyenne, Wyo. where the "greens" were covered with cotton seed hulls to make a fairly smooth surface. One didn't play golf too often in those days unless clergy were privileged to use the course free, because low salaries left little room for recreation that took money needed for family expenses.

One recreation I participated in that community was softball. We had a league of several teams. Usually only one or two games were played in an evening. On one occasion the neighboring pastor and his wife dropped over for a visit on an evening when my team was scheduled to play. So we invited them to watch the game and after it to continue our visit. Something at the game disturbed him. But he was the type who had difficulty discussing his disturbance face to face. So two days later I received a letter from him. In it he mentioned that what disturbed him was the impression created when the announcer over the public address system would announce the next batting order, that might go like this: "Al Smith at bat; Joe Lyons on deck and Rev. Brauer in the hole."

Visits from a neighboring pastor named Dreyer, who lived in another direction, became quite regular. At first he, a bachelor, would stop in about 12:30 or so after coming to our larger town for a little shopping and for lunch. When my wife kept inviting him to come earlier and have lunch with us, if he was satisfied to share what she had prepared, he after a few weeks arrived at about 11:30 a.m. On the first occasion she had made some tasty vegetable soup with a sandwich. Since he was very fond of this kind of soup, from that time on he never hesitated to drop in to share our noon lunch. We always enjoyed his company and kept in touch with him for many years after our paths separated.

With some degree of regularity I was asked to perform a marriage ceremony for out-of-state couples. This came about because Nebraska had a 3-day waiting law after applying for a license while in Colorado you could get the required blood test and license the day of application. If the couple was Lutheran, they then looked for a Lutheran pastor to perform the ceremony. It was ironic to observe that when a couple drove up to our house in an old car the offered fee (since I had no set fee) was usually noticeably larger than when the car they arrived in was a newer classier model.

Most of the time the couple hadn't come with the required two witnesses. So we had to find two persons to serve in that role. On one occasion a lady happened to be visiting our home at the time, so she and my wife served in that capacity. At another time we enlisted the services of our landlady who lived at the other end of the block and she shared the experience with my wife. She got quite a chuckle out of this since she was around 60 or more years of age.

I specifically recall that one couple both had the same Scandinavian family name and came from South Dakota. However, they explained that they weren't related in any way. Another couple, I remember, came by train from North Platte early in the day, arranged for the license and then sought out a pastor for the ceremony before returning to North Platte to celebrate with friends there in the evening. Being on the main line of the Union Pacific this was easily done. The groom happened to come from Germany and was born at Worms. An interesting sidelight of this - if I connect this with the right couple - is the fact that they wrote me a detailed letter about their nice family as they invited me to Omaha for their 40th wedding anniversary.

Speaking about weddings calls to mind a church ceremony for some members by the name of Maahs from the congregation. Even though I had checked with the best man before the professional whether he had the rings, at the appropriate time and after a noticeable pause while waiting, he could not produce the rings. What seemingly happened was that he had put

them in his lower vest pocket which was cut to a rather sharp point and when he reached for them his finger didn't reach deep enough. So he seemed to panic as he tried the other three vest pockets with no result. Then he fruitlessly started around a second time. By this time I felt that the pause had lasted long enough and completed the ceremony without the ring exchange. On his way out during the recessional he finally found the rings and said: "Here are those darned things." So the bride and groom quickly exchanged rings before greeting the guests in the small vestibule.

On one occasion a couple had arranged for their wedding but wanted the ceremony performed in the bride's home a few miles out of town. Everything proceeded as planned but when I was about to fill out the certificate and get the signature of the witnesses on the license, I became aware that the license was issued in Colorado but we were in a home just across the state line in Nebraska. As a result, the marriage would not be legal unless at least the essential lines were repeated in the state issuing the license. We could have gone into a field across the road with the bride, groom and witnesses for this procedure. But this wasn't very romantic and lacked atmosphere. So we chose to drive the few miles into town to use either our home or the church as a more proper setting before the family proceeded with the dinner and the celebration.

During one of the summers the youth group decided to have a picnic. There was no developed park in town where softball could be played so they chose a pasture in the flat valley. We improvised a place for our lunch and then laid out a diamond. It being rather warm we ran out of soft drinks before the play ended. So we began to slake our thirst at a nearby well or windmill. It didn't take long before we became aware that the membranes of our lips were shrinking and they began to pucker unnaturally. Then we realized that the water had an unusual amount of alkali in it to cause this. This was the signal to end the picnic lest we suffer some major difficulty.

Here I might note that these wells in pastures were mostly self-maintained. A wooden float

on the surface of the large tank was attached to a wire that led to the control mechanism of the windmill at the top of the tower. When the water level in the tank reached a certain level the float would disengage the gears so that the windmill would stop turning and no longer pump water to keep the tank from overflowing and develop puddles around it. When the water level dropped to a certain point, the float would start the windmill running by means of a breeze, of which there was some most of the time, and again fill the tank to the desired level.

These were some of our experiences in the first parish that I was called to serve. I was in no way dissatisfied or having an inner longing for a call to another parish. Yet in the late summer of my 4th year the Lord in a somewhat unusual way opened the door to make a move to another congregation. This becomes the subject of the next chapter.