

10. A MINISTRY TO MANY

When we moved to Wausau the District office was located at the corner of 28th Avenue and Seymour Lane. From our Rothschild home it was quite readily accessible via the Hy. 51 bypass, a distance of about 10 miles. At the time there were just three of us working full-time, the Education Counselor, a secretary-bookkeeper and myself as Stewardship and Missions Counselor. The treasurer position was part-time and he came in periodically to give instruction re procedure.

Besides serving as counselor in stewardship to 220 congregations scattered throughout the northern half of Wisconsin and upper Michigan and supervising the subsidized stations, I had to keep abreast of opportunities for new missions in communities where our Synod or Lutheranism was not well represented. This meant arranging for surveys and otherwise studying the growth potential before recommending a new undertaking to the Mission Board and then overseeing the beginning activity. In our type of District, which serves mostly smaller cities and rural areas, such opportunities were limited, especially since at the time we were trying to cooperate with ALC and LCA leaders at avoiding duplication of effort or undue competition for a growing territory. To accomplish this, we arranged for at least annual consultations about plans for development in the communities that our District lines covered and agreed on which group might best serve a specific growing area.

At the office I was also to serve as office manager. This included supervising and hiring personnel, as well as making decisions regarding office machine maintenance and replacement. The latter was usually referred to a committee of the Board for final recommendation after spending time researching the various options or equipment that was available.

In addition, I was asked to manage the Church Extension Fund. This included decisions about

people's investments as well as the temporary investment of currently unused funds.

One day we received a bequest of \$35,000 to be used for the support of students training for the ministry. Since this arrived by mail shortly before I was to leave for a trip to visit some congregation, the check waited until the next day for a decision. However, I became aware that each day's delay would result in a loss of investment interest and made sure that this amount was placed in some kind of interest-bearing investment until the District Board could decide how the bequest should be used. While we regularly budgeted an amount from District funds for aid to students studying for full-time church work, I felt that this bequest should not be used for one-time grants-in-aid and thus quickly used up. It pleased me when the Board resolved to "lend" this money to the Church Extension Fund with the stipulation that each year's accrued interest be used to support students at the Seminary level. This provided for the perpetual use of the money for its intended purpose.

Since our secretary-bookkeeper on the job wanted to cut back on her hours due to family responsibility, I hired an accounting graduate of the local Technical School to take over the bookkeeping part of the work and to assist with other tasks as needed under the District treasurer's direction.

After a year or two the District president's position was made a full-time job. As a result he moved into our office building and needed secretarial help and the use of additional office machines. Gradually this increased staff needs and the need for appropriate machines to do the work efficiently. All of this involved decisions regarding office personnel and management, an area for which I had no special training and had only limited experience.

After less than 3 years the State Highway Dept. sent a representative to inform us, "We have plans for your building," because they needed

our corner to construct an off-ramp for the four lanes to be constructed to the south and east of our location. This necessitated the planning of a new building at a new location. The site selected was at the west end of the open area about two blocks west on Seymour Lane.

When the plans for the building were completed and during construction, I had to manage the available Church Extension funds so that investments matured at regular intervals to be able to make contract payments when due. When the building was completed we added to secretarial staff and more office machines were needed. Dealing with questions related to their responsibility began to take up so much of my time that I had to neglect the duties for which I had been specifically called, stewardship and missions. This problem came to a head in 1969 when I was asked by the two other executives to find some project to keep the office staff busy while the three of us would be attending the Synodical convention for ten or more days. Not feeling able to accomplish this, I asked to be relieved of the office management responsibility so that I could devote appropriate time to the task for which I had been called. This resulted in the Board's decision to hire a layman to serve as full-time treasurer and business manager, who also took over the management of the Church Extension Fund. Such a layman was available in a person who had just returned from a period of service in the New Guinea mission field.

After this move was made I was able to devote more time to visiting congregations, especially for stimulating more response to our program for reducing the alarming total of "back-door" losses and in counseling and supervising new mission undertakings.

Several examples of counseling to congregations come to mind. One of the first was a visit to a small two-congregation parish nestled between four ALC congregations in a mostly rural setting. When they were without a pastor they asked for help in deciding what to do. In a consultation with the vacancy pastor and the circuit counselor we thought we came up with a reasonable solution. When this was presented at the meeting, they asked, "What

would you say if we wanted to join in an area self-study with the four ALC congregations near us?" This was encouraging, coming from them. So we readily agreed. As a result we arranged with the ALC leadership for an area meeting with representatives from all six congregations involved to explain the procedure and set a date for a common report and evaluation. Sad to say, our two congregations that had suggested the area study, did nothing and failed to show up at the report meeting. Instead they found a pastor who was looking for a lighter load and called him to serve them, thereby retaining their identity and undisturbed status. So it remains to this day.

A second example was a visit to a congregation which had existed for quite a few years in a small rural village and shared a pastor with another congregation about 15 miles away. They had an old building that needed modernization or replacement, the windows were so airy as to make it difficult to heat. It was a cold evening when we met to discuss the possibilities for the future. They felt they could grow if they had a better building, but were fearful of going into debt to provide it. We tried to get them to see that any debt incurred would be a shared responsibility and could be managed over time. They still seemed to hesitate but a year or so later they decided to build a new structure on a new site that a member had donated and have since grown to a size to be able to support their own pastor and to better serve larger attendances during the vacation period, since their area serves a sizeable resort and vacation territory.

A third example is about a congregation of Finnish background that was served by a pastor living 20 miles away. They did become courageous enough to call their own pastor and built a comfortable parsonage in their little village with their 200 communicants of record. But their church was old and needed considerable attention. Usually the older Finnish churches enlarged their facility by adding a small educational and fellowship area back of the altar. In this case we had scheduled a meeting about their problem for a Sunday evening. That morning their furnace gave out completely so they had to hurriedly arrange for

the church service in the local high school, where our evening meeting was also held. At the meeting they discussed the possibility of building a new church but seemed very fearful of the cost which they estimated at \$50,000. During their break for coffee and cake or cookies after about an hour (according to Finnish custom), one of the older ladies (they came to us with woman suffrage intact) expressed hesitancy about such a cost or debt as though she had to bear the whole load herself. So I reminded her that this involved an obligation of only about \$250 per adult member and that few of them would hesitate to go in debt for that amount if they really wanted a new TV set or some other convenience. She admitted that she had never thought of a congregational obligation in that way and no doubt shared her new insight with others. At any rate, they soon thereafter decided to build the new church and in due time got it paid for, too.

While our leadership often considered it wise to close some small churches in rural communities that had in earlier days served their purpose, this could seldom be achieved. There was too much nostalgia associated with the old church. But I do remember one instance where it was achieved. The pastor had discussed the matter with the people and they resolved to discontinue services for 3 months on a trial basis. During this period the members were encouraged to visit neighboring churches. At the end of the period they agreed to meet again to discuss the possibility of closing for good. For this meeting the pastor asked me to come and support him. After an hour of discussion, which centered on personal association with the old church and the hesitancy to break away from it, I asked what might be the feeling of people who had children in Sunday School. One mother spoke frankly that to her the small Sunday school of less than 15 children was discouraging and a non-challenging situation. She observed that as a SS teacher she could teach her 3 children at home with the same enthusiasm. Even the chairman, who had a grandchild living with him and attending, thought it might be better for the growing generation to get them involved with larger groups that offered more challenge and fellowship. Thus, the discussion turned more

toward closing. But someone then raised the question, "But what will we do with the cemetery?" For this problem I happened to have a ready solution. I knew that they had a small investment in the Church Extension Fund. So I suggested that they leave this as a cemetery maintenance fund, using the annual interest to pay someone to look after the cemetery and keep it neat, as well as to select a committee to administer this and supervise the work. In that way they could provide a type of perpetual care. This suggestion seemed to provide the last hurdle. So they resolved to disband with the provision that all members select a neighboring church to which their membership was to be transferred.

In other instances no amount of persuasive argument could achieve such a result. In fact, I know of at least three instances where the little group is determined to continue even though unable to find another church nearby whose pastor will serve them. They have engaged a retired pastor to provide them with Sunday services and to conduct funerals as needed. Besides that there is little or no ministry to one another or the community. In short, it's difficult to practice "church euthanasia."

As far as the start of new congregations is concerned, each situation has its own unique circumstances and possibilities. Therefore, I hesitate to discuss any of them in detail except the one in Schofield or Town Weston. There a suburban study indicated the future growth to be extensive. So a District committee looked for a piece of property to purchase as a site for a future church. This was purchased just a few blocks from the new area high school. We tried to encourage one of the Wausau churches nearest (6 miles) to this site to consider sponsoring a new mission. But this was not considered. So after seeing several years of growth in the area we decided to make a survey of the area to establish the interest. Then we resolved to call a pastor to begin work there. This soon blossomed into what became Mt. Olive church and has thru the years grown to a size where they have added a second pastor to their staff, as well as a few years ago constructing their second building for worship purposes.

There are a couple of strange events associated with visits to congregations and overnight stays at area motels. In one instance my wife and I had checked into a room and used the comfort facilities on our way to the pastor's home for dinner. Later that evening after a meeting with the congregation we returned to the motel. When we unlocked the door with our room key, it would open only slightly because the security latch had been engaged. Then a voice from within the dark room asked, "What's going on here?" So we explained our earlier stop with the same key. Apparently the proprietor either had only one type of key for all doors and had made a mistake in assigning the same room twice or there was some other foul up. When we checked at the desk, there was no explanation, but they did have another room for us. Fortunately, we had not left any belongings in the room during our earlier stop.

On another occasion we again checked in at a rather sizeable motel in Sturgeon Bay before having dinner with the pastor and his wife. We did notice that we were led into our room without a key but were given one so we could lock the door and get back in at a later time. When we returned later that night, after a meeting with the congregation, it was nearing midnight. Before retiring I wanted to look up the telephone number or address of a couple, whom we wanted to pay a short visit the next day. When I opened the bedside stand drawer to get the directory, I found between \$600 and \$700 in smaller bills in the drawer. Because the door had been unlocked when we checked in, all kinds of possibilities crossed our minds and caused us a restless night. By early morning we decided to report the find to the local police, since the proprietor wasn't up yet or available. The police came to check out the situation and to get the cooperation of the proprietor in identifying former room occupants who might have left the cash. Because the proprietor was somewhat miffed that we hadn't reported to him first, we were glad we had gone the route we did, for we wondered whether he might even have made an effort to find the owner but instead pocketed the cash. Some weeks later we received a "thank you" letter from some representative of a New York firm, who enclosed a \$40 check as a reward. We still

wonder why such an amount of cash in smaller denominations had been put into that drawer and temporarily forgotten. It leaves quite an opening for speculation.

In the area of counseling with congregations in stewardship most of my effort was spent in providing seminars or workshops in the individual circuits with the hope that the suggestions and stimulation we tried to provide would be used by the leaders in the local congregations. After one such presentation in which we had urged a year-round stewardship training program, instead of a once-a-year emphasis when seeking a financial response, I received what I considered a typical response in the comment, "Pastor, that was a fine presentation; when the money doesn't come in we'll call on you." Apparently programs of this kind weren't needed except in a crisis. Yet this type of training is most effective when local leaders are convinced of the need and will seek the help that is offered at the District level. In my later years I tried to concentrate more on an effort to get congregational leaders concerned about a high percentage of listed members who had not communed during the preceding year. I tried to stimulate a concern about such members and encourage elders to assist the pastor in an effort to get such members more active in worship and Communion attendance.

In the area of evangelism I was asked in my later years to take on the responsibility of stimulating more activity on the congregational level. But I kept backing off because I was afraid of spreading my time out too thin to be effective in any area. My successor was called to serve in three areas, but after several years he asked to be relieved of one of them.

I remember a few mishaps associated with my travels in District service. One of them was in January after a warm spell which ended with freezing rain that left about an inch or so covering of ice everywhere, even on major roadways. One traveled but at a reasonably slower speed. As I was returning from an evening meeting in the east end of the District and came over a gradual slope east of Antigo my headlights showed 6 pair of horses's legs on the roadway. I started to slow down, but

couldn't use my brakes and just hoped. As I neared the 3 larger horses, they sort of moved apart for me to pass between them. But as I turned to stay between them, my momentum started me sliding toward the snowbank by the side of the road. With ice under both back wheels I had no traction to back out. This happened to be between two farm houses. When I knocked on the door of one of them I asked about a tractor to pull me out. But the man who answered the door said they couldn't help and sent me to the neighbor across the road. There, despite a bright outside light, no one answered my knock. So I went back to the first place to ask for a shovel and saw the three straying horses in their yard. This time the men had gone to bed and the lady offered a shovel. I was rather miffed by their disinterest in my problem since it apparently was their horses which had caused it. As I tried to free my front wheels by shoveling snow, two young lads stopped and offered to help. They shoveled my wheels free and helped push my car back on the roadway as I supplied what little power my back wheels could supply. With their help the car was freed. When I offered to pay them for their trouble, they flatly refused. This experience restored my confidence in the charitableness of the younger generation. All the way toward home I was thankful and long afterward I was thankful for the protection of the Lord's angels to move those heavy horses apart just in the nick of time.

Another time I was leaving Wausau to attend some meeting in the eastern part of the District. It had snowed a few inches and the highway was not cleared yet. As I was about to follow a curve to the left in the sparsely settled area to the east on Hy. 29, a truck coming from the east kept going straight at the curve headed toward me. I applied my brakes as I moved to the right out of the truck's path, but on the wet snow I kept sliding in the direction that I had turned until I hit a small tree off the roadway with the middle of my front bumper, leaving it with a v-shape and with me quite shaken up but only slightly bruised. Fortunately, the truck driver stopped and accepted blame for my mishap and offered help. The local police came to check out the accident and graciously offered me a ride home so that I could arrange for the towing

of my wounded car to the repair shop. Again the Lord was thanked for sparing me more serious bodily harm. Obviously, I didn't make the meeting planned for that day.

This is a good point at which to turn to our life in Rothschild and beyond. In the house on Falk street we first arranged to have the living room and dining area carpeted. Then the bathroom floor and wash stand top needed repair. I undertook this as a weekend project, replacing an area of the rotted subfloor, laying new linoleum and then putting a new laminated top on the wash basin stand.

The first Christmas Roger brought his girl friend up from Illinois for a visit while Gloria was home from Valpo. We have a few pictures of their enjoyment in the snow. In the spring of 1966 Gloria would be graduating from Valpo and would need her own transportation. On one of my trips to the Green Bay area I stopped at a dealer's lot in Kaukauna, where I found what I thought was a good buy in a smaller car. The odd feature of this smaller Pontiac was that the previous owner had put oversized tires on it in hopes of getting better gas mileage. But it served Gloria's purpose for the first year, since she got a job at Wausau Insurance after her graduation in early June.

Since both of us were now traveling 20 miles round trip each day to our respective offices we began to look for a suitable lot closer to our offices for building a home. The area closest to our offices was still part of the Town of Stettin and did not offer sewer and water services, so we hesitated to buy there. Later in the year we found a desirable lot east of Hy 51 near Holiday Inn and purchased it for \$3,500.

The following year, on our 30th wedding anniversary, we decided to build a home on our lot at 1243 Sunset Drive. Since we had developed plans for construction through the previous winter, we sought several bids on the project and signed a contract on about July 1, 1967. Soon thereafter, the process of construction began. At first it moved rather slowly. But by early fall it was in full swing. We did all of the exterior painting ourselves as well as tiling the floor and walls of the two

bathrooms. This kept us busy on many weekends and evenings. As a result, I skipped a meal several times and in the process lost some excess weight.

The house was ready around December 1, but we had to wait a week or so for the installation of the carpeting. This gave us time to paint all of the interior ceilings and walls. Near the middle of December we sold our home in Rothschild and recouped our original investment and cost of improvements. So we began the process of moving into our new home. Fortunately, we had no snow cover at the time and could use a trailer to haul many of the heavier boxes and items we could handle and drive the slope along side the house to the basement entrance in back for unloading. After each load we could turn around on the dry or frozen ground and easily make the incline to get another load. The larger and heavier items we had moved for us by a van.

Since the front yard was ready earlier, I carefully sloped the area for drainage to the street and covered it with sod on November 1 to avoid carrying dirt and sand in during the winter from this heavily traveled portion. The rest of the property, which was 150' deep we prepared for seeding in spring. Shortly after seeding in early May we had a heavy rain, resulting in some ditches that needed reworking and reseeded. A smaller plot at the lower west end was reserved for a garden. This happened to be back of several choke cherry trees, which died several years later and had to be removed.

When we moved in we had no drapes on the windows. The house to the south was not yet completed and was empty. There were no houses yet directly back and below on 14th Avenue. So we needed to cover only the front dining room window with a sheet for reasonable privacy. At night our street was well lighted so that we could easily move about in the semi-darkness. Edna had someone make the drapes for the front window and the picture window to the back or west in the living room. The drapes for the family room to the south, the basement picture window to the west and the front bedroom she made herself. This kept her fairly busy that first winter.

That first spring and summer I constructed a deck along the south side off the family room and a concrete steps going down from the deck along the back of the house to the back basement door. I also terraced the slope from the steps to a fairly level area in the back for flower beds. A clothes line post for the retractable clothesline was put in and under it I laid some flagstones for a hard surface.

That first spring I planted trees in the back yard. One was a small clump birch that I had gotten from H. Kortbein's (a former pupil) swamp near my brother-in-law's farm and planned to use it in our lot at the office, but I kept it alive when the day after I had brought it north we were informed that our office would be taken over for highway purposes. Another was an elm that started as a wild tree next to the stoop in the back of our office building. So the year before we had to vacate, I pruned it to give it shape and the following spring dug it out and planted it toward the back in our back yard.

The clump birch in the front was brought home in the trunk of my car when I had gone to the Ellis stone quarry east of Knowlton to get some flag stone for use under the clothesline. In the woods it looked small compared to the other trees, but it was 12 feet tall and really hung out of the car trunk. It has lost a couple of its six smaller stems but still grows well.

The silver maple in the back was brought home from a New London nursery on one of our trips to visit Grandma S. in the nursing home there. It has really grown and is well shaped, providing an abundance of shade. Its leaves turn to a brilliant gold later than most trees each fall before they drop off a week or two later.

The hard maple south of center in back came from a plot owned by the first pastor of Mt. Olive in Schofield and grows slowly. It took about three years for it to really begin to grow. Its leaves turn to a brilliant red fairly early in the fall season and are usually fallen before the silver maple turns.

During the second and third winters in the house, I undertook the project of insulating the outside cement block wall and covering it with

paneling. We also put partitions in and made a closet in the basement bedroom in the northwest corner. We also left a storage space and workroom to the north and northeast corner. As part of this project we finished the half-bath that had been roughed in during construction. At the south end we put up shelves for books and my desk and filing cabinets. We also covered the whole liveable area with an outdoor carpeting, except that in the bedroom and half-bath we sewed together a patchwork of carpet samples to cover the concrete floor. To put adequate heat into the area we cut a hole in the furnace plenum and put in a pipe that led to the larger room. The pipe had a control valve. We also cut an opening in the cold air return and put in a vent to get adequate circulation. Some years later we covered the main living area with another layer of carpet we purchased when on sale at Prange's, using Edna's discount privilege.

By fall of 1968 Edna was thinking of finding a job. An opening came when Prange's were planning to open their new store in town and needed clerks and personnel to stock their shelves. So Edna started there, helping to put out stock and then continued as one of their first clerks. To begin with, the store was a combination of the regular Prange's and the Prangeway discount store. A couple years later a discount store on First Ave. closed and the Prangeway stock was moved there, where it still is. The coming of Prange's into town shocked the traditional smaller department stores in Wausau into a change from their old concept of merchandising and brought many new customers in the city. Edna found it interesting to be part of that change and enjoyed dealing with and meeting people from a large surrounding area. Her employment there gave us an opportunity to purchase many bargains we could use, taking advantage of her employee discount.

Gloria continued to share our home after she began work at Wausau Insurance in 1966. After a year she traded her Pontiac in on a new Mercury Cougar and has periodically traded for a newer model of car. She was active year-round in a variety of sports, such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, bowling, golf and softball.

She helped to get women's softball leagues started. For several years she played with a team that participated in fast pitch softball league and in weekend tournaments, serving as pitcher, a position at which she started in Green Bay at the age of 11. She has well over 100 trophies from participation in various sports. In order to expand participation in women's softball the city leagues turned to slow pitch softball. Playing this type of game, she continued as her team's pitcher until she reached 40 or so. Their team won the league championship for ten or more years.

One evening at dinner in about February of 1970 Gloria asked us if we would like to go on a trip to the Mideast and Europe with a tour group from church led by the pastor. Edna asked, "Do you think I could do that?", because she had traveled by air only once. It took me a day to come to the reality of the offer and asked at dinner the next evening, "Did you really mean that?", since she was offering to pay for the 3-week tour. She had planned this earlier but wanted to remove her mother's fear of flying first. So she had insisted that the three of us fly to New York for the Christmas holidays with Jim's. So we arranged to accept this generous offer and signed up for the tour scheduled for late May and early June. This tour took us to Paris, Rome, Cairo, Beirut, Jerusalem and Israel (5 days), plus Athens and Corinth before we took in the Passion Play at Oberammergau, Germany. From there we toured by bus for another 5 days in southern Germany and Switzerland, returning via Munich and Paris. When we landed in New York on a Sunday evening, we left the tour group to spend a few days with Jim and family before completing the trip back to Wausau. This was a most enjoyable trip with many memorable experiences and over 300 slides with which to relive it.

In the spring of 1974 the pastor of Zion was again leading a European tour, this time to northern Europe and the Scandinavian countries. Since our passport was still good, we decided to sign up for this vacation trip. It again covered late May and early June and took us to Amsterdam, Hamburg, Luebeck, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo and Bergen.

After reaching Amsterdam our travel was via bus until we left Bergen to again head back to Wausau via Amsterdam. We visited many interesting places in and near the cities mentioned and have many slide pictures to enable us to relive the enjoyable travels.

In the two preceding years I encountered prostate problems and twice ended up in a hospital emergency center for bladder relief. So in December of 1975 I underwent my first surgery, a prostatectomy. From this I recovered within a few weeks and returned to work. But early in 1976 I had my first hip replacement for what was termed "degenerative arthritis". Both of these were performed at the Marshfield Clinic. When I was able to move about rather freely on crutches I returned to work at the office. As time went on I was encouraged to walk as much as possible. To begin with everything went well.

Early in 1976 I notified the District Board of my intent to retire at the end of the year after 40 years in the ministry and 22 years of it in District leadership. When the family arranged for a celebration in observance of my 40th anniversary that year, the District presented me with a lovely plaque in recognition of my 22 years as vice-president and counselor. The special service at Zion was well attended, which made the occasion all the more memorable.

Despite my early announcement of retirement the District Board made no move toward a successor until well into the succeeding year. As a result I was asked to continue serving on a part-time basis to take care of the basic necessities. This continued thru most of the year, because my successor did not come until early in December of 1977.