

**Thy Will Be Done**  
An Oral History of Pastor Luther Spaude

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Church History  
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Years in school can rarely make up for time spent in the field. That was part of the reason I was sincerely excited to have an opportunity to interview a man who has finished his years as a public minister and to have him tell me what he learned through his ministry. The question for me was whom I should interview. The idea of interviewing Professor Spaude came to me at a unique time. This year I belong to the same congregation as Pastor Spaude, Zebaoth Lutheran Church. Through the year I have had many chances to talk to him in casual conversation. He had been a good friend of my grandparents, Richard and Gertrude Gensmer. He talked about the years he had spent in Saginaw at MLS when my grandfather was pastor at St. Paul's. Along with this building of a friendship between us, I have also seen Pastor Spaude continue to serve God as a member of Zebaoth. Although he is over 80 years old, he never stops finding ways to give back to God and the church. He has spent Saturdays canvassing the neighborhood. He helps his wife teach Sunday School. He serves as a member of the church council. As I sat in church watching him help his wife down the church stairway to teach one Sunday, it occurred to me that this man would be fascinating to interview. He lives his faith. And as a Spaude, he's bound to have some good childhood stories.

Through these interviews I now recognize how little I knew before about Luther Spaude's life story. I feel all the richer through his insights as a pastor. In our initial interview, Pastor Spaude continually came back to the subject of letting God lead your life and submitting to his will. He stated that the most important lesson that God taught him was, "Thy Will Be Done." Seeing the ways he serves Zebaoth stands as proof that Pastor Spaude puts this Christian motto into practice. This interview is about a man who has given his life to doing God's will no matter what it might be. Therefore I have

chosen that theme, “Thy Will be Done” as the scope of this oral history. What follows is now how Pastor Spaude expanded upon this one thought.

Ephesians 2:10 states that we are God’s workmanship. While God begins forming and working us into his servants even before birth, we can also see God’s fingerprints throughout our lives. Before Luther Spaude and I talked about how he followed God’s will in his ministry, we first looked at how God trained him as his servant. Even in looking at his childhood years, I was surprised. Maybe two factors came out most clearly from Pastor Spaude’s recounting of his childhood. First of all he lived in a stern household. He saw his father as a strong disciplinarian. Many of the stories that he shared about his brothers were incidents where they got into trouble with dad and were chastened with the belt. Pastor Spaude saw both good and bad come from this atmosphere. It was clear to me that he wished that he could have seen his father as more playful. At the same time Luther recognized how important it was for him to be set clear upon a path which followed God’s laws. The second factor that Luther talked about was the natural inclusion of God in all of family life. Today we see so many Christian families who neglect bringing God into their home. Luther spoke of how his childhood home was always filled with morning and evening devotions, prayers, and hymns. He took this for granted as we spoke. If only we could take for granted that our families were that way today.

God continued to mold Luther through his schooling. Pastor Spaude talks proudly about being the only Seminary graduate of 1946 due to the war and the accelerated program in our pastor training schools. In our initial interview Pastor Spaude remarked how God used the war to help those studying for the ministry to realize what a

blessed situation they were in. While many young men their ages went off to war, they were permitted to continue studying God's word in safety. While it would be hard to imagine for me not having summer vacations, Pastor Spaude was glad to be able to continue his studies year round.

It was not until Pastor Spaude began talking about his ministry that he really began to show how God led him on a unique journey and how he faithfully followed God's will. This journey began with an emergency call during his school years to teach religion and sciences <sup>at</sup> Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Because he had this contact with MLS, the LORD led this school to call him back after graduation to continue teaching. Thanks to this return to Saginaw he met his wife future wife, Ruth, who was teaching at St. Paul's. They soon got married.

The LORD blessed the Spaude's with three children. God used these children to direct the Spaude's in a special way. Their second child was born profoundly retarded. As with anyone in such a situation, Pastor Spaude said this child was a great joy but also a great challenge which the LORD had put before Ruth and him. While many people today would consider this only a curse or unnecessary trouble that the LORD put upon them, the Spaude's saw this handicap as God's will and they looked for the best way to deal with it. It was clear from early on that this child would need special care in a home like <sup>Bethesda</sup> Bethany of Watertown. This situation played a large role in leading Pastor Spaude to take his second call to Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, where his child could get the proper attention.

The LORD had fantastic plans for using his servant, Luther Spaude, in Milwaukee. The many remaining years of Pastor Spaude's ministry were greatly used to

help start two different colleges. That could be a statement that no one else in our synod could claim.

The LORD's path for Luther's life seemed to naturally flow. While teaching at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, the synod was dealing with the shortage of teachers that was coming out of Doctor Martin Luther College. The answer that came was to open a second teacher's college in Milwaukee on the campus of WLHS. Naturally many of the professors at WLHS were chosen to pull double duty and teach the college students in the late afternoons and evenings. One of those professors was Luther Spaude. While this school was open for a handful of years, Professor Spaude helped mold a couple hundred of the teachers who now serve our synod.

Professor Spaude was extended a call to leave his position at WLHS and become one of the full time professors at the teacher's college. Professor Spaude felt that God's will for him was to remain a part of WLHS. What Luther did not know was that God was saving him to help open a second college in Milwaukee.

The doors to the teacher's college were soon closed for good. The three men who were called to serve full time were given new calls to many different areas, including Pastor Voss's call to be president of Northwestern College. Because Luther Spaude did not become a full time professor at the teacher's college, he remained part of the staff at WLHS. The school closed mainly because of financial reasons. The synod found it too straining to keep two teacher's colleges open. Yet the feeling among many WELS members in Milwaukee was that the synod was closing "our" school. The closing of the teacher's college gave impetus to a new college in Milwaukee. This college would begin as a two-year program junior college and hopefully grow to a four-year school. This

college would be supported by WELS members of Milwaukee. Most importantly, this college would offer a place for all WELS collegiates to go to school for virtually any vocation and still attend a place where God's Word was part of their daily routine. The idea of Wisconsin Lutheran College caught on quickly through Milwaukee WELS congregations. Monetary support was raised. The new school opened, again being taught at night in the classrooms of Wisconsin Lutheran High School.

The remainder of Pastor Spaude's ministry was spent with WLC. He began as a teacher and soon took a full time position in the new school. His position included being financial aid secretary (a job which any established college had special personnel for, yet he did it on top of his teaching). Professor Spaude loves sharing stories of the early years, using whatever materials he could get a hold of for his chemistry labs. The way he spoke showed that these years brought him some of his greatest joys and disappointments as he helped start this new school.

Even as a retired man, God has used Luther Spaude to do his will in unique ways. Again, God put Luther in a unique time and place to help stand up for the truth of the gospel. When Professor Spaude retired, he joined the historical St. John's Lutheran Church on 6<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. This church was the site of the first synodical convention after the Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan Synods joined. The reason the Spaude's joined St. John's was because they wanted to be involved in an inner-city church that could use their experience. St. John's was their pick because they were in need of Sunday School teachers.

Luther spoke highly of his first days at St. John's. Ruth and Luther got to know many neighborhood kids well. The children would come to church on their own and sit

with the Spaude's during the service. Then problems broke out at St. John's. The problems began with the pastor getting involved with troubles at another church. They escalated when the pastor got drunk and spray-painted the other church at which he was <sup>with</sup> mad. <sup>a way of</sup> Pastor Spaude and one other retired pastor stood against their pastor, showing him his sin and asking him to step down and repent. While they worked from within the congregation, the synod also tried to help from outside the congregation. In the end, the remainder of the church continued to back their erring pastor. St. John's broke from the WELS, and forced the Spaude's to leave their congregation. When Luther speaks of this situation, there are clearly hurt feelings. He feels the loss of this historic church. In his own words he calls it, "the most beautiful church he has ever seen." He also said that this situation was by far the ugliest situation he has ever seen. Although he does not find joy in the work he did at St. John's, clearly God used him as a beacon of truth, much like many of the Old Testament prophets.

As you follow the story of Luther Spaude, it becomes clear that God works in special ways. He has plans for each of us. As pastors we can enjoy knowing that God will lead us to where he sees best. I pray many pastors will obediently follow God's will just as Luther Spaude has done before us.

What follows on the remaining pages is a list of the questions used in the final interview, which I had with Professor Spaude.

# Thy Will Be Done

## Oral History of Pastor Luther Spaude

### I. God Train His Servant

#### Childhood

Tell me about where you are from. (Where were you born, where did you grow up, names of parents, and size of family)

What was your home like growing up?

What was your father like? Job, characteristics, favorite memories, hobbies, sayings

What was your mother like? Job, characteristics, favorite memories, hobbies

Any habits that you picked up from your parents? *orderliness*

Do you have any favorite memories of when you were growing up about your brothers?

What was your day school like?

Considering that you went to a public school, how did your parents bring God's Word into your home?

#### Studying for the Ministry

What influenced you to become a pastor?

An interesting fact is that you consider yourself the only graduate of WLS in '46. Could you explain how this came to be? *Accelerated program, Birkholz, Koeniger, Naummensen, 12 apostles in summer session*

How did you receive your emergency call to teach at MLS?

What was Luther Spaude like back in 19--? *Pipe smoker, collection*

### II. God Leads His Servant Through a Lifetime of Service

#### Serving God as a Pastor

Your life as a minister is certainly not a normal one. Could you walk us through your ministry?



Since you have been involved in some very unique situations, I would like to get your first-hand point of view on them. First is the Milwaukee <sup>Lutheran</sup> Teacher's College. How did the idea of starting a teacher's college in Milwaukee come to be?

This college was held right on the campus of WLHS. How were the two schools interrelated?

In what ways were the two teaching schools alike? How different?

About how many students came through MTC?

When and why did the teacher's college end?

Are there any lasting benefits or detriments that the WELS has received from having this school open?

How did Wisconsin Lutheran College come into being?

What was WLC's purpose?

Was the response across the synod positive or were there any naysayers?

WLC will bring in students from other denominations. Some people have raised concerns about this, maybe because they don't understand WLC's policy about enrollment. What is WLC's view toward people from other faiths attending this school?

What were the beginning years of WLC like?

During those early years, you also served as the financial aid secretary at WLC. What was that job like?

In 25 years WLC has grown tremendously. Do you see any reasons for this fantastic growth?

*Thought Questions:*

How would a student in your class have described Pastor Spaude?

As a teacher, you worked alongside many peers rather than being the lone pastor at a congregation. What lessons did God teach you about working with other people?  
*Sometimes must take back seat, be selfless*

You still have had many opportunities to preach. What have you learned from the classroom that had helped you in your preaching? *Preach colorfully, simply, interestingly*

**Serving God as a Husband and Father**

How did God lead you to meet your wife?

Where is she from? Background?

Do you have any favorite memories with her? *Honeymoon story, good with kids*

Do you have children? Tell me about them?

*Thought Questions:*

You are about to reach 50 years of marriage. Do you have any tips?

How has your wife helped you in your ministry through these years? *Understood your ministry, example of son who dated lady who could not imagine being pastor's wife*

During your ministry how did you balance time between church and home? *First call is as husband and father, remember there is always more to do, but doesn't have to be done*

What do you think is the most important thing to remember about raising a child in a God-fearing way? *You are God's representative and are teaching them what God wants*

### **Serving God in many other ways**

As Christians, because we want God's will done, sometimes we are forced to deal with sticky situations. You have been involved in such a situation not too long ago when St. John's Vliet left our synod. First, when did you first get involved at St. John's?

Could you please walk through what happened at St. John's that led that congregation to leave our synod?

(How involved were you in this problem?)

(What finally led you to leave St. John's?)

### **Conclusion**

What were some of your greatest joys in your ministry? *Seeing students as adults, pastors, teachers*

What were some of your greatest disappointments? *Lack of supplies in early years of WLC*

You had told me that many people asked whether you were disappointed that you never really had a parish ministry. What was/is your response to this statement?

Previously, you told me that one of the most important lessons that God taught you through your ministry is trusting the words "Thy Will be Done." Could you explain that?