

Interview with Professor Wilbert R. Gawrisch

by

Christopher A. Goelzer

Sources

(Historical Sources)

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(1986)

Pastor Pautz "25 Years of Grace" Compilation of history of Good
Shepherd, West Bend, celebrating 25th anniversary.

Prof W. R. Gawrisch "Our Diamond Jubilee" Compilation of 75 years of
history from Zion, Rhinelander.

(Professor Gawrisch's reports)

"Current Issues in Christology" Presented to Pastor's Institute,
Mequon, WI. Feb. 1993

"Doctrine of Church and Ministry in the life of the Church Today"

Presented to the 51st biennial convention, New Ulm, MN. Aug. 1991

"Homiletics at WLS"

"O.T. Exegesis at WLS"

"Systematic Theology at WLS" All three presented to the World Mission
Seminary Conference, Puerto Rico, 1986.

"Guarding Against Moralizing in Our Sunday School Teaching" Presented
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"Seperation of Church and State" Presented to the Nebraska District,
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"Doctrine of the Ministry of the Keys" Presented to the Winnebago
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"Men and Women in God's World" Presented to Wisconsin State Teacher's

Conference, WLHS, Milw., WI. OCT 1975

"Women in the Teaching Ministry" Presented to Twin City Lutheran

Teacher's Conference, MN, 1975

"What Church do You Mean?" Presented to 4th Lutheran Free Conference,

Chicago, IL. 1967

Date: April 16, 1996

Place: Sussex, Wisconsin (Professor Gawrisch's home study)

The main premise of the interview was to uncover how the Lord shaped and molded Professor Gawrisch to serve in the public ministry.

Question #1

(Background) Could you tell me a little about your family and your parents' background?

Professor Gawrisch explained that his grandfather, Phillip Suxman, came over from Germany. Then Phillip along with his brother, George, attended and graduated from the Seminary in 1888. Phillip became a grade school teacher in Oshkosh and then finally in Fondulac. Professor Gawrisch's great uncle, George, became a pastor after two years at the Seminary. Pastor Gawrisch explained that this was due to the shortage of pastors at that time. Both his father and mother were graduates of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. His father graduated from college in 1913. Professor Gawrisch was born in Milwaukee, but six months after his birth, his family moved to Fondulac. His father taught in Fondulac, taking over for his grandfather who had recently passed away that same year, 1924. Professor Gawrisch's father taught for three years in Fondulac before they moved to La Crosse.

Question #2

Did the Depression affect your family in any way?

Professor Gawrisch expressed that it was a tough time when everyone had to watch their pennies. But during the entire time his father taught in La Crosse until 1946. While Professor Gawrisch was at the Seminary his father

then taught at Wisconsin Lutheran High School. His father taught there for twenty-seven years. Professor Gawrisch also noted that his father taught there before the school split, due to the break of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods.

Question #3

Would you say Professor, that you come from a long line of teachers?

Professor Gawrisch made it clear that he came from a long line of synod workers and it was taken for granted that he would continue in the public ministry.

Question #4

What affect did World War II have on your teenage years as you attended school?

Professor Gawrisch said that he went to Dr. Martin Luther College, attending their high school program, before he was confirmed. He came back to Lacrosse after the 9th grade was completed in New Ulm. While he was at home, his pastor became sick, so his father taught him confirmation. While at home he attended Central High School in La Crosse. After the year when he was confirmed, his parents urged him to stay at Central High School because of all the extra credits he had taken. With that many credits he could have graduated in two years from Central High. Even while at Central High, Professor Gawrisch said that he had decided to attend Northwestern College. While at Northwestern College, he said that he had to study harder than others because he did not have the background in Latin that he needed.

Professor Gawrisch could remember hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on the radio while he was at college. He stated that the war had quite

an impact on college life. He said that the class below his own was "decimated" by people who decided to serve their country in the armed forces. His own class consisted of twenty-four students which graduated in 1944. Theological students were exempt, he said, but the government required that student go to school year round. Just two weeks after his graduation from college, the Seminary started its classes. He recalled that the Seminary was on a nine month schedule at that time. This meant that now the Seminary would have two graduations in 1945. The first was in April of 1945 and the other in December of that same year. Once the war ended, the faculty decided to add half of a year to their courses of training. Because of this Professor Gawrisch was to graduate in the summer of 1946. But he told me, that at this time in our Synod's history, there was a shortage of pastors so often times men at the Seminary were given emergency calls. Professor Gawrisch was called to fill the role of substitute teacher for one year in Mankato, MN. This school was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and consisted of one room for grades 1-8. He said that he had twenty-one students, seven of which were first graders. This was not Professor Gawrisch's first experience in a classroom. He had helped out substitute teaching while he was in New Ulm. He said that he thoroughly enjoyed the experience, but he remembered vividly that the students were given tests by the public school system to make sure they were "up to snuff". I think while he was there he felt some pressure, because he had never taught in a one room school before.

Question #5

Did you have any odd jobs that you worked while going to school?

Professor Gawrisch only had one odd job while he was in La Crosse at a

brewery. Professor Gawrisch said that the brewery was a "WELS brewery" because the treasurer of the brewery was Professor Martin Albrecht's uncle. That was the connection Professor Gawrisch used to get the job.

Question #6

What was it like teaching at Winnebago Lutheran Academy while being a Pastor at St. Peter?

Professor Gawrisch explained that during his call to Winnebago, his duties of Pastor were mainly preaching and filling in for one month in the summertime, while the Pastor was on vacation. His teaching duties required him to take further study at the University of Chicago and La Crosse. While there he took Hebrew courses and Chemistry. Because he was going to teach Biology, he took a summer class at the University of Milwaukee on Biology.

Question #7

How did your wife help you in your ministry?

Professor Gawrisch summed up his wife's help, by saying she took care of their children and was his secretary. At one time in his ministry, while he was serving Zion, Rhinelander, he had a terrible back injury. During this injury, his wife drove him to his visits and shut-ins. He stated that she was a tremendous benefit to his work. They raised together five children, three girls and two boys. The two boys are now serving as pastors. John is currently Professor Gawrisch's pastor in New Berlin and Daniel is the pastor in Hartford, Michigan.

Question #8

What were some of the challenges you faced at Good Shepherd in West Bend?

Professor Gawrisch explained that German services were still being held every other week. He also said that the extreme growth in this congregation was due to the radio program they had. He explained that the radio station would broadcast their Sunday Service. Through that radio program people in town would recognize him as the preacher on the radio.

Question #9

What were the differences between the church in West Bend and the church in Rhinelander?

The size was one difference Professor Gawrisch related. He also mentioned that it was at this time that he had a terrible back injury. But he praised the congregation for being patient and doing everything to help him in his injury. One other challenge that faced that congregation was a debt they had: a school building project of 75,000 dollars. The congregation was trying to pay off the debt by the time of their 75th anniversary. They reached this goal two months after the anniversary.

Question #10

How did you and your family feel upon receiving the call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary?

Professor Gawrisch had received other calls to teach. He received two to teach at Dr. Martin Luther College and to to teach at Northwestern College, but he said that after each call, the people of the congregation told him to stay with them and help them in Rhinelander. When he received the call to the Seminary, the people told him that they could not hold him back any longer. Professor Gawrisch took their advice and accepted the call. He was to teach Homiletics and Dogmatics, but when Professor Peters retired he then took over

some Old Testament courses as well.

Question #11

How do you think you have changed while being a Seminary Professor?

Experience was the thing that changed Professor Gawrisch the most. He said that experience made him a better teacher. The time he spent as a professor gave him the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of God's Word. He also enjoyed the congregational work he was involved in while being a Professor. He served seventeen vacancies while at the Seminary. His teaching style did not change all that much, he said. He did mention that when he first started teaching Dogmatics, he along with the other Professors, were working on adding quotes from the field of modern theologians. Basically they were updating the Dog notes to apply them to the challenges of the church.

Question #11

I got the impression that you stressed Christian education in your ministry. Is that a fair assessment?

Professor Gawrisch said that the Lord had blessed him with a large Christian day school and also a joint day school in his ministry. Professor Gawrisch also served on the board for Parish Education for the Northern Wisconsin District. His duties involved visiting all the schools and teachers of the Northern Wisconsin District.

Question #12

What was it like to attend the first two World Mission Seminary Conferences in Hong Kong and Puerto Rico?

He said that he was always mission minded in that his first five years

in the ministry were spent in home missions. At that conference he gave papers on exegesis, homiletics and dogmatics. He conveyed to me the idea that there was much discussion as to how these courses should be taught differently in the different seminaries around the world.

Question #13

What was your biggest challenge in your ministry?

Professor Gawrisch was quick to answer this question. He said that it was the talks with the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany. The difficult part was the meetings were conducted in German. He told me that he was on the board for inter-church relations during the time we broke with the Missouri Synod. This caused the huge problem of triangle fellowship. He explained that even though we broke with Missouri, other synods with which we were in fellowship did not. The problems were intensified because of distance. In Germany talks went on for many years with the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. Finally in 1992 they formed a federation of Lutheran churches called the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, which Professor Gawrisch is currently the president.

Question #14

How did the Lord prepare you for this challenge?

The great aid or preparation for this challenge was the training he received at the synodical schools. He also attributed some of the preparation to teaching Dogmatics at the Seminary and conducting German services in West Bend.

Question #15

Looking back on your life what brings you the most joy?

To Professor Gawrisch, the joy he receives comes from the people he served. He related the joy he gets from talking with former members and contacting his former congregations. He truly has a pastor's spirit in caring for people. He loved his congregations and the vacancies he served while a professor at the Seminary.

From my research of Professor Gawrisch, I have come to the conclusion that if there was ever a man to receive the title of a Lutheran Pastor it should be him. Professor Gawrisch was raised by good strong German Lutheran parents. They instilled in him respect for their Lord. Professor Gawrisch was always willing to do the Lord's work. Yes, there were crossroads in his life. One occurred when he was to decide between following the course to become a pastor or to continue in the secular fields of Archaeology. From Professor Gawrisch's words, I understood that his love for people is what drove him to become a pastor and to teach people of God's love. Professor Gawrisch truly exemplifies what every young pastor wants to be: a loving shepherd of God's people. Professor gawrisch showed that love by stressing Christian education.

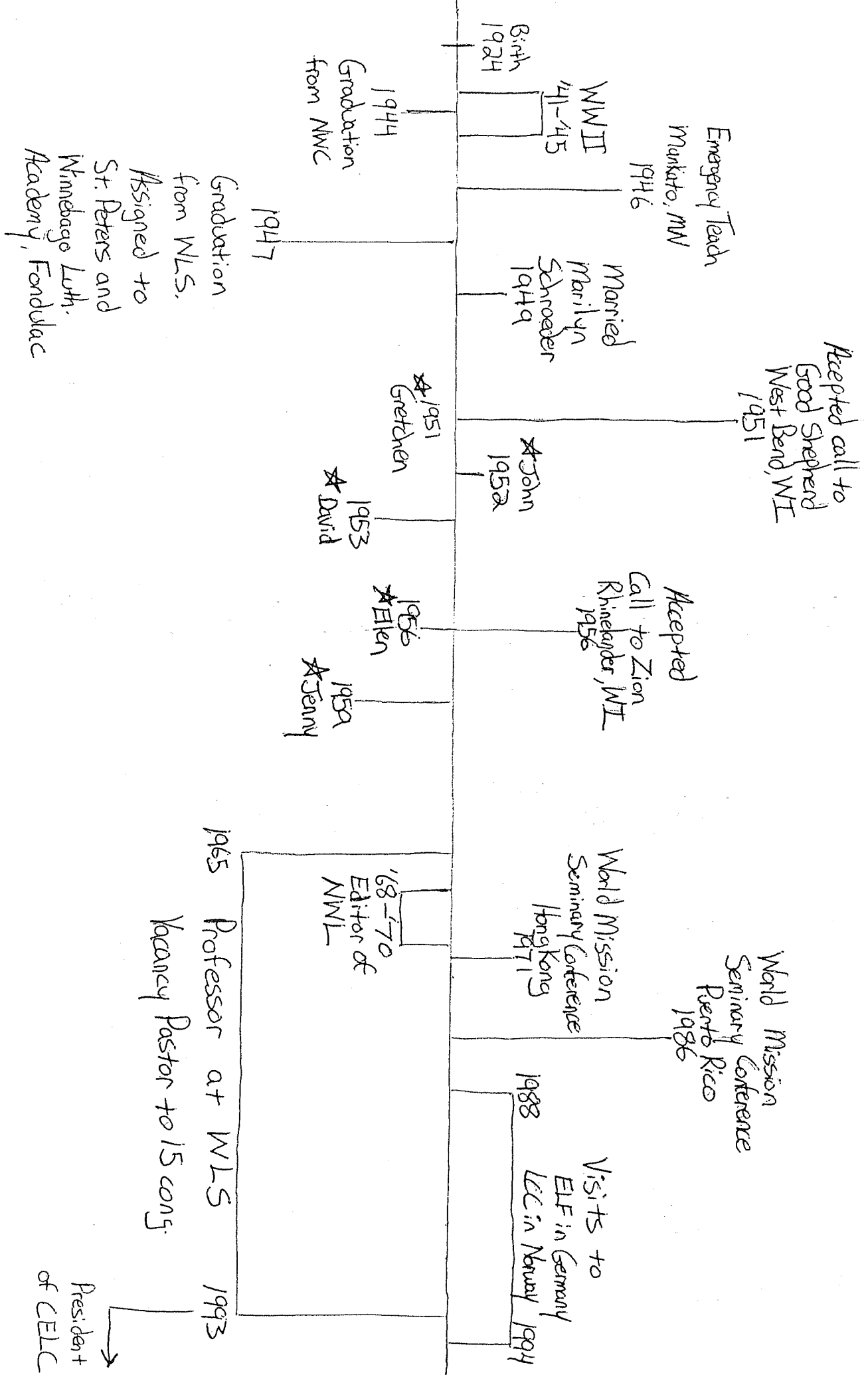
Professor Gawrisch was also a LUTHERAN pastor. From his writing in the "Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly" v76, 1979, we see what makes a Lutheran a Lutheran, "Should we celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession? Most certainly and with a loud Te Deum! But also with a ringing reaffirmation of its doctrines and with a wholehearted rededication to the principle, 'to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, '(Art

VII) An anniversary celebration with out such agreement among the celebrants is a farce."

Professor Gawrisch is a Lutheran Pastor in the truest sense. Throughout the interview Professor Gawrisch was more willing to talk about what the Lord did than what he had done. Some of his former students have said that he is very easy to talk to and always wanted a friendly relationship with the students. I was told of Professor Gawrisch's practice of inviting the Seniors to come to his house one at a time. At this meeting, Professor Gawrisch and the student would do an exegesis as well as relax and talk over a soda and peanuts.

From this interview and research, I have learned that the Lord makes the pastor. Through the experiences He gives, the Lord is preparing the pastor for the next challenge. Just as clay in the potter's hand is constantly shaped and molded until perfected, so is the pastor in the hands of the Lord. The pastor is constantly shaped and molded to do the work of the Lord until he is perfected in glory.

* = Birth of Child



1965 Professor at WLS
Vacancy Pastor to 15 cong.

1993
President of CELC