

THE SEMINARY, NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE  
AND THE DRAFT DURING  
WORLD WAR II  
by

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That Christian ministers should not bear arms and should not shed blood has been accepted as an almost universal principle throughout the Christian world.<sup>1</sup>

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon (Thiensville) Wisconsin is a seminary rich in tradition. Its German heritage and Orthodox Lutheran stand has led to many interesting traditions. The history of most of the Seminary's traditions are easy to establish. One of its traditions can be traced back to its very beginning. It has to do with the class composites that hang on the walls in the classroom building. Beginning back in 1895, each graduating (with a few exceptions) has presented the Seminary with a class picture. Each year a new Senior composite finds its way into the Seminary's hall of fame. Yet, if one was to study these class pictures, a discrepancy would appear. Hanging in room 23 there are two class composites with the graduating year 1945. For years I thought that this was just a misprint. There was, however, no misprint. In 1945 two classes did in fact graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. One might ask; "How did this come about?" This paper will explain.

After Pearl Harbor things changed drastically in the United States. The war effected changes all over the country. Goods taken for granted became rationed. Men were being called into the service of their country. Women began to enter the work force in number, as the war industry picked up steam. Times were hard.

Things also changed at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and at its feeder college--Northwestern in Watertown Wisconsin. In 1941 a new Selective Service Act had required that all men between the ages of eighteen and sixtyfive be registered for military service. When students reached their eighteenth birthday they were required to register with the president of the college, who had been sworn in as an officer empowered to receive such registrations for the local draft board.<sup>2</sup>

During the academic year of 1941-1942, the college and the Seminary, so far as the bona fide students for the ministry were concerned, were listed in the office of the Director of Selective Service as divinity schools. Students were then exempt from military service. This exemption applied, however, only to the Junior and Senior classes at Northwestern College, while the entire student body at the Seminary was exempt. Northwestern was required to report to the local draft board the names of students who dropped out of the divinity course or who were falling below the passing grade in their studies.<sup>3</sup> Professor Kowalke, in his annual commencement address at Northwestern College in May of 1942, had this to say about the special act of Congress that kept most of the men who were studying for the ministry exempt from military service:

At a time when the graduates of other schools can be expected to be called into the service of our country to do military duty our graduates are exempt from such duties. Such a privilege is not provided by the constitution of the United States but has been given to us by a special act of Congress. It can also be taken away from us by an act of Congress. This fact ought to make us realize that we are enjoying a right and a privilege. Nor does this privilege demand a special obligation on our part; we give nothing in return. The reason for this grant is that we are ambassadors for Christ. This may not have been in the minds of the legislators, but that is the reason for the exemption non the less. We are stewards of the mysteries of God; thence comes the privilege. This great fact that we ought, <sup>4</sup> especially at this time, ever bear in mind.

The war was causing difficulties for the students at Northwestern. People quite naturally looked down on the older students when they would appear on the streets in Watertown. Many wondered why they were not in the service of their country. The College students were admonished to "conduct themselves quietly at all times and not to attract

unfavorable attention to themselves in any way!"<sup>5</sup>

During the first part of the war, the Seminary was also affected by the Selective Service. The Seminary student body was exempt from military service, but due to the fact that many of the country's young men were being called into military service for the defence of the country, there was a serious disturbance of labor. Professor Meyer announced in the Northwestern Lutheran this information in August of 1942:

Among the announcements for school openings the readers of the Northwestern Lutheran will find that the new year in the Seminary at Thiensville is to begin two weeks latter than ordinarily. This change is caused by the conditions of the times through which we are passing...The harvest must be brought in, and the perishable fruits must be preserved if they are not to be wasted. Since Seminary students, including now pre-theological students after their sophomore year in college, are exempt by the Selective Service Act from military service, they should serve their country in other ways as far as is consistent with the letter and the spirit of the draft law. For that reason the opening of new school year was postponed for two weeks, till the end of the corn canning season.<sup>6</sup>

To make up for the lost time caused by the late opening, afternoon classes were held from New Year to Easter. It was noted in the Seminary Notes of the Northwestern Lutheran on April 18, 1943, that everybody was relieved when the extra classes were over.

1943 was a bad year for Northwestern College. The graduating class numbered 24 of which 23 were intending to enter the Seminary. There were 26 Juniors, all of whom were preparing for the ministry. These two large classes were exempt from military service in connection with the special Selective Service Act. A total of 243 students registered for the 1942-1943, 208 were still in school at graduation in May of 1943. Enlistments, the draft, defence and farm labor claimed most of the 35 who were lost. Two students,

who were definitely preparing for the ministry, were drafted. Both of them were freshmen. They were drafted by the Arizona State Board in spite of an appeal registered by their fathers.<sup>7</sup>

Work during the school year was somewhat disturbed by the unrest which the draft board and the urge to enlist worked on the students. Many of the students were torn between the desire to enter the service or to complete their schooling.

In September of 1943, Professor Kowalke, at the opening service of the 1943-1944 school year at Northwestern College, gave this address:

In these trying times in which our country has "gone all out" for victory and needs and demands everyone's efforts, our young men at our colleges may be troubled in mind about the part they are playing toward this end. People may look askance and with suspicion at them and may even call them slakers and say so openly. There is a danger in this. The Spirit might be quenched: the Spirit who moved them to enroll in this school established to prepare men for the ministry. Our nation and the world that will survive this war will need them and their services after the war. The world and our nation will need the gospel of Jesus Christ. This they will be prepared to bring them. This they ought ever to bear in mind, lest by undue worry over what people might think of them and say, they be tempted to quench the Spirit that prompted them to seek their education at this school and for the very purpose of becoming a messenger of the Peace of God. They may have to suffer now to play their part latter.<sup>8</sup>

The National Headquarters of the Selective Service System in Washington D.C., issued a directive in January, 1944. It amended former regulations governing deferment of men in pre-theological schools. This directive was to become effective on March 1, 1944. It states:

Students preparing for the ministry should not expect to enjoy an exemption from training and service and at the same time to devote no more

time and effort to their training then they would in peace time. Theological and divinity schools should accelerate their courses and place their training on the same twelve-month year-round basis as is necessary in other fields of education during this critical period in our national history.<sup>9</sup>

This directive was received at Northwestern College in January of 1944. This was not an order directed at the college as a whole because it was not considered a divinity school totally. Only the upper classes were considered under that classification. It was very plain however, that if the Seminary had to accelerate its program, the College would also have to accelerate its program. The following two summers (1944 and 1945) there were no summer vacations at the Seminary and the College. Instead, all students were required to attend a hastily arranged summer course. For the duration of the war the school year was comprised of three quarters instead of two. The academic "year" covered nine months.

The following is the Collegiate Department Calendar from 1944 through 1946.

### Calendar for the Year 1944-1945

#### COLLEGIATE DEPARTMENT

1944

June	19, Monday,	First Quarter (Summer Session) begins with opening exercises at 2:00 P. M.
July	4, Tuesday,	Legal holiday.
September	1, Friday,	First Quarter ends.
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October	2, Monday,	Second Quarter (Autumn Session) begins with opening exercises at 2:00 P. M.
November	30, Thursday,	Thanksgiving Day, legal holiday.
December	15, Friday,	Second Quarter ends, Christmas recess begins.

1945

January	4, Thursday,	Third Quarter (Winter Session) begins.
March	23, Friday,	Commencement Day.

### Calendar for the Year 1945-1946

#### COLLEGIATE DEPARTMENT

1945

April	3, Tuesday,	Spring Quarter begins.
June	15, Friday,	Spring Quarter ends.
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June	25, Monday,	Summer Quarter begins.
July	4, Wednesday,	Legal Holiday.
September	7, Friday,	Summer Quarter ends.
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October	1, Monday,	Fall Quarter begins.
November	29, Thursday,	Thanksgiving Day.
December	14, Friday,	Commencement Day.
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1946		
January	3, Thursday,	Winter Quarter begins.
March	23, Saturday,	Winter Quarter ends.
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March	25, Monday,	Spring Quarter begins.
April	12, Friday,	Easter Recess.
April	23, Tuesday,	Recitations resumed.
June	14, Friday,	Spring Quarter ends.
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June	24, Monday,	Summer Quarter begins.
September	6, Friday,	Commencement Day.

The first summer session came to a close at Northwestern College on September 1, 1944. Eight-three students were in attendance. Nine of the students were from New Ulm, who were preparing for parochial school teaching. They returned to Dr. Martin Luther College for the regular school year that started there in the middle of September.

Classes were held only during the morning hours since the weather made it uniformly unpleasant, except for a few days.

There was also opportunity for the students to work in the afternoon and earn at least part of the money needed for the year's expenses. Jobs were not hard to find. Students were permitted to work four hours a day and five days a week.<sup>10</sup>

The accelerated program and the war weighed heavy not only on the students but also the faculty. War stamps, rationing, suspense--when a student was classified 1A instead of 4D and had to wait until the president could clear the matter with some distant draft board--made steady application to work the order of the day.<sup>11</sup>

On March 23, 1945, twenty Seniors graduated from Northwestern College. There were seventeen students who went on to study at the Seminary. This class was the one that suffered heavy losses by the way of enlistments at the beginning of the war. It was also sadly noted in the Synodical report on May 31, 1945, that four of the men who, but for the war would still have been students at Northwestern College, were casualties of the war. The school sent their sympathies and their prayers to the parents of Arthur Nordbly, Carl Upleger, Tom Nichols and John Masch.<sup>12</sup>

The Seminary was also affected by the accelerated program. It also had a Senior class that graduated in March of 1945. That would explain why there is one class composite from 1945, yet as was stated earlier in this paper, there are two class composites that have the graduating year 1945. The accelerated program holds the answer to the mystery.

Because of the accelerated program, Northwestern College had three different opening dates in 1945. The three upper classes began their year on April 3rd, the Freshmen entered the college department on June 25th, and the preparatory department had their opening day on September 24th.

There were 270 students enrolled that year, of whom 99 were new students. The dormitory population was 202. It was not easy to find room for this number, since the dormitory normally accommodated 185. It was necessary also, because of the size of the enrollment to divide up the lower classes and to call additional professors.

December 14th was set as graduation day for the Senior class. The two summer sessions that this class put in, advanced the date of their graduation by one semester.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the accelerated program the Seminary had a strange exercise on December 13, 1945. It was the second graduation service of 1945. It was and perhaps will be the last time it will happen. Eighteen members of the Senior class were graduated and fifteen entered the service of our Synod. The accelerated program explains why the Seminary has two class composites for 1945.

In October of 1945 the Selective Service System relaxed the requirements that the divinity students pursue their course on an accelerated basis in order to qualify for exemption. The summer sessions were discontinued at Northwestern and the Seminary and they returned to their normal academic year plan as it was before the war.



## Endnotes

1. H.K.M., "Clergyman in War", NWL, Vol. 2, p. 29.
2. Erwin Kowalke, Centennial Story, p. 196.
3. Ibid.
4. Erwin Kowalke, "Commencement at Northwestern College", NWL  
Vol. 29, p. 203.
5. Centennial Story, p. 196.
6. Jon P. Meyer, "Postponement of the Seminary Opening", NWL  
Vol. 29, p. 269.
7. J. Klingmann, "Report of the Northwestern College Board"  
Synodical Report of WELS, 1943-1944, p. 38
8. Erwin Kowalke, "Opening Day at Northwestern College", NWL  
Vol. 30, p. 311.
9. "Seminaries and Colleges", Synodical Report of LCMS,  
1944-1945, p. 5.
10. Erwin Kowalke, "Northwestern College", NWL, Vol. 31, p. 198.
11. Centennial Story, p. 197.
12. K. Timmel, "Northwestern College", Synodical Report of WELS  
1944-1945, p. 23.
13. Erwin Kowalke, "Northwestern College", NWL, Vol. 32, p. 260.

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