

Oscar J. Naumann
The Making of a President

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How do you pay tribute to someone without everyone noticing? Better yet, how do you praise a man without looking a bit foolish? This paper is meant to review the presidency of Oscar J. Naumann and every now and then words of praise, admiration and respect will find their way onto the page. The problem--we don't do that. I wouldn't go so far to say that such tribute is forbidden, its just doesn't happen very often. Maybe that is good. The members of WELS pride themselves in acknowledging that all praise and adoration for work completed belongs to the Lord and rightly so. But at the same time why not praise and thank our Lord for sending President Naumann to us? Why not praise God for supplying our president with the particular "tools" needed to carry on and carry out the Lord's work? No one among us would argue that tribute and praise begins and ends with our Triune God. I submit that if in the process a few flakes of praise should fall President Naumann's way, well, that would be OK too.

Instead of writing a biography of President Naumann's life, I was more interested in how he became president in the first place. Why this man and not someone else? What particular gifts did this man have that singled him out from others? In essence, how did the Lord move to make Oscar J. Naumann the president of our synod and what were the results?

Parents

Oscar Naumann was born to Justus Henry and Maria

(nee Scherf) Naumann on June 24, 1909, in Woodlake, Yellow Medicine County, Minnesota. Justus had been born in Dresden, Germany, the son of a prominent book publisher. Justus came to America at the age of thirteen. He graduated from Fort Wayne Concordia College and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After a year spent in Germany, Justus returned to America where he served as a missionary to Harold, Hughes County, South Dakota. His official title was that of Reiseprediger which might be called a circuit rider or traveling missionary. After five years of serving in the rugged plains of South Dakota, Justus Naumann accepted a call to Gibbon, Minnesota. Nine years later he accepted a call to Woodlake, Minnesota, where Oscar was born. During this time Justus served as the superintendent of missions for Minnesota and South Dakota. And in 1912, he was elected president of the Minnesota Synod. In 1915, the Minnesota Synod elected to make the presidency a full-time position so Justus gave up his parish and took on the responsibilities of his office and moved his family to St. Paul, Minnesota. Justus died of a heart attack on Monday morning February 5, 1917, after having walked to church for Sunday services through deep snow and a driving snowstorm. He was 51 years old.¹

Oscar's mother was born in Saxony, Germany, and came to America when she was eighteen years old. She accompanied a brother who wanted to enter the seminary at Springfield. She stayed with an older brother who had already graduated from the seminary at Springfield and was serving a congregation near Chicago. After several years, Maria was persuaded to

join Pastor Dick Ehlen's family in Scotland, South Dakota, and helped provide assistance in the home to Mrs. Ehlen and her daughters.²

Justus and Maria met when Justus was persuaded by a fellow pastor to visit Scotland, South Dakota. In three days Justus and Maria were engaged, married six weeks later. Their marriage was blessed with eight children, Oscar was seventh in line. Maria Naumann passed away in 1975 at the age of 102.

While Oscar's early years were spent at Woodlake, the majority of his childhood was spent in St. Paul. He attended the preparatory department of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. After high school, Oscar enrolled at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, graduating in 1931. After college, he entered our seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin, graduating in 1934. His first call led him back to Northwestern College where he served as a tutor for two years. He then accepted a call to serve Arlington Avenue Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio. He faithfully served this congregation from 1936-1940, whereupon he received and accepted a call to serve as a professor at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota. It was said that he enjoyed these years immensely but he still considered the parish work his true calling. In 1946, Professor Naumann received a call to serve a large congregation in St. Paul, St. John's Lutheran Church. He remained at this congregation until 1959 when he accepted the call to serve our synod as its first full-time president.³

The information for this biographical sketch was gathered

in part by scanning through copies of the Northwestern Lutheran and biographical information gathered from a notebook compiled by Oscar Naumann's son, Martin. This notebook, In Memoriam, is available in the seminary library. It was most beneficial in providing a wide view of President Naumann's life and work. The rest of this paper will try to narrow the focus a bit and try to visualize or rationalize how and why Oscar Naumann became president. Since nothing has ever been written on this subject, the only source of written information turned out to be articles from the Northwestern Lutheran and Synodical Proceedings. And yet this written material was not able to fully answer my questions as to how the Lord moved to make Oscar Naumann president. Therefore, I turned to the people who knew him best. I interviewed men who worked with Oscar Naumann while he was a member of the Michigan District. I spoke with delegates of district and prominent synodical conventions. I interviewed men who worked under his administration at synod headquarters, his secretary, his family, and men whom President Naumann was said to have turned to for advice. I cannot claim that I spoke with every person possible, but I do feel that I have gained information from a strong cross section of those who lived, worked with and for President Oscar J. Naumann.

Historical Setting

When investigating the life and contributions of an individual it is best to put that person in his or her historical setting. When Oscar Naumann began his ministry

our country was just emerging from the hardships imposed by the Great Depression. Our country would soon be involved in the second world war. These two events did play a significant role in the history of our church body. These were days when money ran short.

The shortage of money was no more evident to anyone than the man whom Oscar Naumann succeeded as president, John Brenner. Pastor Brenner became president of the Wisconsin Synod in 1933. He seemed to be the right man at the right time; our synod was in debt. And Pastor Brenner possessed the necessary administrative skills to see us through such a period. So, if you wanted to characterize his administration, it would be his focus on getting our debt paid off. The fact that this was done during a depression era is a blessing from God and points to President Brenner's tight reign on the synod's purse strings.

It was also during President Brenner's administration that the Synodical Conference saw factions working within it that if left unexposed threatened the foundation upon which it was built, Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. President Brenner was not about to let scriptural truth take a back seat to anyone. E.E. Kowalke sums up President Brenner's position when he writes,

His outspokenness, called a "sharp tongue" by some of his opponents, was sometimes said to have aggravated the growing tension between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod; but it will be noted that he did not force the issue or attempt to press his conviction on people who had not had the opportunities which had come his way to see in what direction

Missouri's policies were leading that synod. He knew what was bound to come and wanted to have it come as a result of conviction, not as an unwilling surrender to force.

There were people who neither liked nor admired Pastor Brenner. His direct manner irritated some people. But whether people liked him or not, they all respected him. 4

The growing tension within the Synodical Conference definitely must be taken into consideration when reviewing the historical setting of Oscar Naumann's ministry. You can not escape it. Nor could the pastors in his day. Each year the tension would grow stronger. The perceptive ones, such as President Brenner, were able to see through the differences of opinion and pinpoint the core of the problem. These few could also foresee the inevitable--a break up of the Synodical Conference. As the tension mounted, more and more pastors chose sides and the number of "seers" grew. Was Oscar Naumann one of them? Could he see the inevitable coming? I'm sure he did. But he was also one of the scores of pastors who did not want to see that split come until everything had been done to ease the tension and prevent it.

President of Minnesota District 1948-1953

When Oscar Naumann arrived at St. John's Lutheran Church in St. Paul in 1946, he was already aware of the tensions within the Synodical Conference. In fact, the churches within the St. Croix Conference (Twin Cities) comprised one of the major hotbeds of Lutheran liberalism. There were accusations of unionism. There were congregations with severe Lodge problems. Many pastors devoted great amounts of

time to careful and patient instruction within their ranks to rid themselves of this problem. We are to be most thankful that even this trying time the Lord allowed for his word to be kept pure.

The man who was in charge of overseeing the doctrinal position of the Minnesota District was its president, Adolph Ackermann. President Ackermann was born in Germany. He came to America in his early teens. He attended Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. After two years of teaching he enrolled at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1894 he returned to DMLC and became a member of the staff. He became the school's president in 1908 and held this position until 1918. After serving two small congregations in Minnesota, he received and accepted a call to serve Immanuel Church in Mankato, Minnesota. He served this congregation until his death in 1950.⁵

President Ackermann has received much of the blame for the liberal unionistic tendencies found within his district. I do not wish to try and separate fact from fiction or stand in judgment of his ministry. Yet, it should be noted that unionistic tendencies within the Synodical Conference were not found just in Minnesota. They were everywhere. Then again, in his twelve years as president of the district, Adolph Ackermann did show signs of supporting the liberal theologians.

Now before we point our fingers at Pastor Ackermann, we must again refer back to the historical setting. Adolph Ackermann was a member of the Wisconsin Synod but had deep

personal ties with those from the Missouri Synod. Adolph Ackermann studied at Concordia, St. Louis and was taught by the same professors (ie. Franz Pieper) as Missouri's men were. The problem came when these men drifted away from the truth of Scripture. Ackermann lived near and served with many of these same men. The temptation to follow their lead must have been great. No wonder there was tension.

We can not condone any swaying from God's inerrant word. Nor can we excuse any compromising of confessional principals. By the grace of God, there were men who were willing to make a confessional stand. One of the men who did was Oscar Naumann.

The confrontation between those who saw no harm in unionistic tendencies and those who sought a confessional stance came to a head at the district convention June 21-25, 1948, at DMLC in New Ulm. The two opposing sides met to decide the future course of the Minnesota District, but without the knowledge of its two principal players, President Adolph Ackermann and Pastor Oscar Naumann. It seems that before the convention started, the two opposing sides engaged in a bit of political lobbying. Oscar Naumann had not arrived yet and did not until late that night. If he had, he surely would have put an end to the politicking. One pastor who knew him said that Pastor Naumann would have withdrawn his name from the ballot if he had known what was going on. So, without his knowledge, several pastors were making it known that a strong confessional stand was needed and Pastor Oscar Naumann was the man who could provide it. When Oscar Naumann did arrive late that night, he was told, in his

dormitory room, that he should prepare himself to be elected. When that did occur, he should accept. There was no mention of what had happened earlier around the registration tables and grounds of Dr. Martin Luther College.

Adolph Ackermann arrived at DMLC fully expecting to be re-elected for another term as president. There was no reason to suggest otherwise. And so, in keeping with his presidential duties, he chaired the first two sessions of the convention. When the vote was announced and Oscar Naumann declared the new president, Ackermann was visibly shaken. He admonished the delegates for not re-electing him. He then left the chair and the convention. Oscar Naumann was called upon to chair the remaining sessions, which he did, with the exception of one.

One man who was at that convention admitted that what they did (making the election a political issue) was probably wrong but was a step that had to be taken to insure that God's word would be kept in its truth and purity.

Oscar Naumann was not elected president of the Minnesota District purely on a whim. He was well known. When I say that he was well known does not mean to imply that the election was purely a popularity contest. His integrity and confessional stance was never in question. His father had served their district (then known as the Minnesota Synod) as president beginning in 1912, and was elected its first full-time president in 1915. He held that office until his death in 1917.⁶

Pastor Naumann was also well known for having served DMLC from 1940-1946 as a professor. He was well respected by

those outside of the college as well as by his colleagues. And finally, Oscar Naumann was the pastor of a large congregation in St. Paul. If you add all of these factors up and couple them with his strong confessional stance in the face of unionism, his election is not surprising.

President Naumann dealt with many of the union problems throughout the district. Fellow pastors were encouraged to deal with the lodge problems within their own memberships. They were also encouraged to regain the confessional stand that may have been slipping in their own congregations and conferences.

These next few years after the 1948 convention in New Elm were very busy. Pastor Naumann's congregation required a great deal of attention but that was something he looked forward to. He was very much the parish pastor. He enjoyed being with his people and sharing the Gospel Promise whenever possible. This aspect of his ministry would later prove hard for him to give up.

These were busy times. It soon got even busier. At the 1951 Synod Convention held in New Ulm, Pastor Naumann was elected the Second Vice-President of the Wisconsin Evangelical Joint Synod and Other States.⁷ True, the district presidents and synod vice-presidents did not have the same amount of work or authority as they do today, but there was still plenty of work to be done. Much of that work consisted of meetings held in Milwaukee. Pastor Naumann dutifully juggled the responsibilities of each office: parish pastor, district president, and synod vice-president. The Lord had chosen a man who had the capability to do a large amount of

work. More and more we see the ground work being laid, the experience attained, the confessional stance never more confident, as the Lord moves and prepares his servant for the days ahead.

Synod Convention August 5-12, 1953 Watertown

The tension among the members of the Synodical Conference had been growing year by year. The Wisconsin Synod had objected to the Missouri Synod's "Brief Statement" in 1938 as well as Missouri's fellowship talks with the American Lutheran Church. There were differences on prayer fellowship and other union tendencies.

The more the controversies grew, the more congregations and fellow pastors began to look to their leaders for advice and explanations. Many times questions or related problems could be solved through correspondence. Many other times greater involvement was needed by district and synod officials. The men who were either elected or appointed to office were glad to lend a hand whenever they were asked. But this also placed added strain on the official's already heavy workloads in their own parishes.

This scenerio brings us to the Synod Convention held in Watertown from August 5-12, 1953. President Brenner presided over the convention, he was 79 years old. He was the pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. The duties required at his parish, his duties as president of the synod, his age, and the growing tension within the Synodical Conference as well as his own synod, led President Brenner to announce

at the end of his presidential report that he would not seek reelection. He said,

With this report I desire to end my service as the president of the Synod, though this may appear to be an inopportune time to do this. I am sure that the Synod will be better served and will be more satisfied if the duties of my office would rest on younger and stronger shoulders. 8

President Brenner's resignation added a great deal of pressure on the delegates in Watertown. President Brenner may not have been well liked by everyone. He may have lacked diplomacy and tact.⁹ But he was a strong president. He saw the problems that were coming and he refused to allow himself or his synod to be swept up in them. The delegates now had the task of electing a man who would follow Brenner's lead. They needed to elect a man who would strive to keep God's word pure and a man who was a strong confessional Lutheran. If the delegates failed in picking the right man, much would be lost because much was at stake.

Thank goodness our calling process does not rest on man's ability to pick and choose, to analyze and deduce. If it was totally up to man, could we as a church body have fully foreseen the dangers that lie ahead? Who would have wanted to chance it? A special man was needed; a man with unique abilities and gifts. How comforting it is to know that the man who was chosen was the one the Lord wanted. He guided the delegates in their choices every step of the way.

It is agreed, a special man was needed. Who were the leading candidates? If you had taken a poll (done a little politicking of your own) during the last few years of

President Brenner's administration, one name would definitely have been repeated, Sieghard E. Westendorf. Pastor Westendorf was born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan, where his father was a pastor. He graduated from Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Northwestern College, and our siminary in Thiensville. He served congregations in Mequon and Milwaukee, Wisconsin before accepting a call to Zion Lutheran Church in Monroe, Michigan. He was a very gifted man whose abilities did not go unnoticed. He was elected the president of the Michigan District in 1950.¹⁰

As we all know a district president has many duties and serves on many boards and committees on behalf of the synod. One such committee that Pastor Westendorf served on was the Standing Committee on Church Union which later became known as the Commission on Doctrinal Matters. Today this committee is the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR). This committee had originally been appointed to study the Missouri Synod's 1938 resolutions accepting the "Brief Statement" and the American Lutheran Church's Declaration as a basis for future fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. In 1941 this committee was made a standing committee to analyze and report on doctrinal matters involving other church bodies. It became known as the Union Committee. This committee consisted of the seminary faculty and the Conference of Presidents.¹¹

When we remember our historical setting, the Union Committee would be discussing and planning our synod's course of action against the growing concern of liberalism and

unionism which had been plaguing our synod for a number of years. One of the most vocal members of that committee was Pastor Sieghard E. Westendorf. He urged the committee to reject attempts at unionism and to cling to God's word and a strong confessional stand. Because of his strong confessional stance, Pastor Westendorf, was thought by many to be the logical choice to replace President Brenner when he should step down. But Pastor Westendorf was removed from consideration when he suffered a stroke while attending the Synodical Conference Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota in August of 1952. He never recovered. He was called home to live with his Lord in 1955.¹²

Another man who deserved strong consideration for the office of the presidency was Pastor Irwin Habeck. Pastor Habeck had served as president of the Northern Wisconsin District from 1946-1950. He also was serving as first vice-president of the synod at the time of the convention.¹³ Many observers thought Pastor Habeck would be the logical choice to succeed President Brenner. He had all of the qualifications. He certainly was aware of our synod's state of affairs.

The other candidate whom many thought to be qualified for the vacant position, Pastor Oscar J. Naumann. It has already been shown that his qualifications were second to none. With Pastor Sieghard Westendorf out of the running, the presidency was narrowed to either Pastor Habeck or Pastor Naumann.

No one needs to be reminded that Oscar Naumann won the election; he was elected on the fourth ballot. But what is interesting is that Naumann was elected over the first vice-president, Pastor Habeck. Why? At first an investigation led back to the Standing Committee on Church Union. As districts presidents, Pastors Westendorf, Habeck, and Naumann all served on the committee at the same time. Pastor Westendorf was known for his position against unionism, but resigned his position in 1952. Pastor Habeck had been president of the Northern Wisconsin District from 1946-1950. He resigned from this position when he accepted a call to a congregation in Milwaukee and transferred his membership to the Southeastern Wisconsin District. Yet, as a member of the synod's Praesidium, he remained an ex officio member of the committee. Pastor Naumann was then recognized as the chief spokesman among the district presidents on this committee. He was recognized for his strong confessional stand and was acknowledged as having experience dealing with the liberal unionistic tendencies in his own district of Minnesota. The other men on the Standing Committee on Church Union were not surprised that Pastor Naumann was elected president. They had supported him. In fact, Pastor Habeck was said to have supported Pastor Naumann's election.

The members of the Standing Committee on Church Union, fellow district presidents and members of the seminary faculty may not have been surprised Pastor Naumann was elected but what about delegates to that convention who were not aware of the committee's work? This question was posed to delegates

and guests of that convention. Were they surprised Pastor Naumann was elected? The unanimous response was that they were not surprised. Pastor Naumann was a very well known man. He was able to draw support from three main districts; Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota, having served in each.

When Oscar Nauman graduated from the seminary in 1934, he returned to Northwestern College where he served as a tutor for two years. He was a member of the Western Wisconsin District. When Pastor Naumann received his first call into the parish ministry, he served Arlington Avenue Lutheran Church of Toledo, Ohio. Here he was a member of the Michigan District. And when Oscar Naumann returned to teach at DMLC and later accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran in St. Paul, Pastor Naumann was a member and later president of the Minnesota District. Pastor Naumann had made many friends and acquaintances along the way. He was said to have the full support of Presidents E.E. Kowalke (NWC) and Carl Schweppe (DMLC), having worked with both men. Was Pastor Naumann a dark horse candidate? Not by any means. He was a well known man upon which a great deal responsibility had already been entrusted. He possessed the tact and diplomacy that seemed missing from the present administration and was thought to be genuinely evangelical, possibly more so than Pastor Habeck. This was not a popularity contest nor was there open campaigning for candidates. The delegates, after prayerful consideration, chose Pastor Oscar J. Naumann to succeed President Brenner and to lead our synod into the murky waters ahead. A vote was taken. A man was chosen.

By the grace of God the Lord provided for us all, once again.

A short time after the election results were announced, Pastor Naumann was "evangelically kidnapped." A few close associates took Pastor Naumann for a car ride around the city of Watertown and gently urged him to accept the office of the presidency. This was not an easy decision. It would prove difficult for him again in 1959 when his position was made full-time. It was a difficult decision for Naumann because he was well aware of the demands that would be placed upon him. He wasn't sure if he could accept this momentous assignment and still carry out the duties required of his parish, which was his first love. It also must have been very stressful because a breakup of the Synodical Conference seemed to be unavoidable. He did not seek this position, the call sought the man. We thank the Lord for leading Pastor Naumann to accept.

Synod President

Parish Pastor

Husband

Father

When we hear of someone who carries the title of president in front of his name stereotypical images come to mind. We might think of presidents of universities, corporations, foundation, and of course, our country. We envision these men and women as people who operate from a position of strength. They have formed a power structure which allows them to carry out what they believe needs to be done. We envision presidents as having large support staffs. They are financially well taken care of, and usually rule their domains with an iron fist. What a contrast this would make with the newly elected

president of the Wisconsin Synod.

The 1953 Convention in Watertown had elected Oscar Naumann. He would now return to his parish in St. Paul, Minnesota and attempt the delicate task of juggling two jobs at once.

The demands placed upon a parish pastor are no great secret. He is to serve his congregation to the best of his abilities, never losing sight of his primary job, preach the Gospel. It is a demanding, time consuming job. At the same time, Pastor Naumann was the president of a church body which was about to enter uncharted waters.

The controversies and tensions within the Synodical Conference were once again coming to a boil. The main issue of difference concerned the doctrine of fellowship but there were other controversies as well. These differences led many within our own synod to call for our withdrawal from the Synodical Conference. There were also many who urged patience while others really didn't see a problem at all. You can easily imagine the problems this created. A great deal of time and patience was needed to respond to the three different factions.

Time did play a large role for President Naumann; there wasn't enough of it. The synod headquarters were located in Milwaukee; he was in St. Paul. He didn't have the luxury of a separate office for the president. He didn't have a secretary. He organized and maintained his own office. He answered the correspondence himself. He was required to make the frequent trips to Milwaukee and other cities.

He had to leave the duties of his parish behind and attend board meetings, conferences, and conventions. The fact that he was away a great deal called for an understanding and patient parish, wife, and family. He got all three.

St. John's congregation has been mentioned. The Naumann family has not. President Naumann was married to Dorothy Schwartz in 1936. Mrs. Naumann was originally from La Crosse, Wisconsin. She graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College in 1929 and taught at St. John's Wauwatosa, Wisconsin and later at St. John's in St. Paul. When the family would later move on to Milwaukee, she taught for a year at Mt. Lebanon.¹⁴

Mrs. Naumann has been described as a perfect helpmeet. She understood and accepted the time demanded of her husband. When her husband informed her that he had to leave for another meeting, she would calmly ask, "Where are you off to this time?" She endured the time her husband was gone by getting involved with teaching and absorbing herself into her family. The Naumann family was blessed with seven children, one daughter and six sons. They are: Myrna, Philip, Thomas, Martin, Peter, James, and Paul.

The demands placed upon Oscar Naumann did have its effect on the Naumann household. The family could expect President Naumann to be gone quite a bit but there were also times when their home was open to many a guest. Dorothy Naumann always seemed prepared for such events while the children were never quite sure what to expect.

The demands of such a job could easily place a great

deal of strain upon a family but the Naumann household seemed to adapt. Yes, there were times when the family members could sense their father carried the weight of his office with him. When beset with a particular problem he would channel all of his energy and concentration into that one project. He was a serious man. The children knew when something really upset him because he threw himself into housework. By lending a hand with vaccuming and other daily chores, President Naumann was able to work out some of the tensions within him.

Although the demands placed upon President Naumann often took him away from his family, these times away helped to make the times together much more special. There were occasional fishing trips, a garden to be taken care of, and some simple wood working projects which drew the family together.

Presidency: A Full-Time Job

The demands placed upon President Naumann and his family did not go unnoticed. A committee was appointed at the 1957 Synod Convention to ascertain whether the position of president should be made into a full-time job. This committee was to bring its suggestions to the 1959 Synod Convention at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, ~~August 5-12~~, in Saginaw, Michigan.

The Committee on Full-Time President Of The Synod cites that they did recognize the workload the presidency placed upon both the pastor and his congregation. They

admitted that there was a problem. They roughly estimated the president spent two months away from home each year plus approximately thirty hours of desk work was required each month. The president was expected to prepare for and conduct meetings of the General Synodical Committee, Church Union Committee, Conference of Presidents, and the biennial conventions of the synod. All of this, not to mention the mental and emotional stress the president was faced with, trying to do two jobs at once.

The committee also pointed out some advantages to having a full-time president. He would be able to do all of the above with greater efficiency. But when the committee came forward with their recommendation, they did not feel a full-time president was needed at this time. They were concerned that by removing a pastor from his congregation for full-time work would cause the man to "lose touch with the day to day work in Christ's Church." They also thought a full-time president would concentrate too much power in one man and would hamper the synod from electing whomever it chose for the office.¹⁵

This resolution might have been expected to pass except that memorials from the Committee on Constitutional Matters, Floor Committee #22, and one from the Pastor/Teacher Conference of the Michigan District (Benton Harbor, 6/16-18/1959), all called for a full-time president. The Synod Convention adopted the resolution for a full-time president.¹⁶

The upcoming events would soon prove the convention's foresight correct. The demands that would soon be placed

upon President Naumann would only get more time consuming. President Naumann accepted the outcome of the vote, albeit with hesitation. It wasn't the stepping into murky waters and the move to Milwaukee that bothered him. His new position would mean resigning from full-time parish work. This was a tremendous struggle for him. Those who knew him, from family to co-workers to acquaintances, all remembered what a difficult time he had with this decision. Yet, by the grace of God, the Lord moved into position the man he wanted to lead the Wisconsin Synod through the trying times ahead. He chose a man who would not allow anyone to take the gospel from him nor allow anyone to keep him from sharing it with others.

The Naumann family moved to the city of Milwaukee and resided at 4933 N. 67th St. They became members at Mt. Lebanon Lutheran Church.¹⁷ He was now in place.

Problems in the Synodical Conference

Up to this point references have been made to the ongoing problems within the Synodical Conference. The disagreements over church fellowship, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's growing interest with the American Lutheran Church, the question of Scouting, etc. have all been well documented. But what is not so well known are the struggles occurring within the Wisconsin Synod itself. There were factions within our synod who by 1959 had already been clamoring for us to split with the Missouri Synod. In contrast, there were those who

did not want to break, at least not until every attempt was made at reconciliation.

The faction who urged for a split maintained that our synod had no business remaining in fellowship with those who did not believe and practice as we did. They were tired of what they saw as our synod's indecisiveness in dealing with Missouri. This group should not be judged too harshly or considered to be totally without an evangelical spirit. The problems they did have do not fit our purposes here. Suffice it to say that they were ones ready to put their foot down and call for action. Their shouts reached a climax when Professor Reim, the seminary president, resigned his position.

Those who were not as quick to call for a split were made up of those who did not want to break until in their estimation everything had been done to solve the differences. This group clung just as strongly to scriptural principles and doctrine as the others. They would not compromise these principles for the sake of keeping the Synodical Conference together. But it must be understood that ties to the past go very deep. Some of our pastors had been taught by LCMS men. Many of our people had relatives who were members of the LCMS (just as true today). There were legitimate questions whether our very small synod could make it on its own should a split occur. These were times that called for a very special man.

President Naumann proved himself to be such a man. As president he of course chaired many conferences and conventions where heated debates occurred. Such adversity could easily

have brought a man down. President Naumann on the other hand, was at his best. During such conferences and conventions, he was known for the pastoral attitude he displayed. It was so much a part of his life. He had been a parish pastor, now he was a synod's pastor. If he felt something needed to be said during a particular debate, he would often leave the chair and address the convention, not as their highest ranking official, but as a pastor. When the discussions began to depart from Scripture, he was the one who often (with Bible in hand) led them back. He also had the uncanny ability to say the right thing at the right time.

President Naumann was not a scholar in the strict sense of the word. When doctrinal issues became matter of debate, he often would lean on Professor Carl Lawrenz from the seminary. This is not to imply that President Naumann was an intellectual lightweight. He knew his Bible and was quite comfortable in referring to it. He preferred to interpret Scripture in a simple way, "If that's what the Bible says, then that is what it means, and that is what we're going to do."

President Naumann provided patient leadership during these trying years. He did not want to see our synod break from Missouri until everything had been done to prevent a split. He was willing to wait. He was willing to meet with representatives from the other church bodies. He was willing to speak with anyone within our own synod who might be having difficulties understanding the doctrinal issues involved in the controversy. He was willing to go to great lengths to

accommodate someone else's position. But he was not willing to compromise the truth of Scripture. He wasn't willing to play the role of a vacillating politician; someone willing to say anything or go along with anything in order to win your support. Although those outside our circles might have considered him an "unsophisticated farmer" because he didn't play the prescribed role, he had the respect of everyone none the same. Here was a man who would not go along with the changing times. He refused to soften his beliefs to benefit someone else. Here was a man who either agreed or disagreed with you on the basis of one thing, the same thing he kept referring to over and over--Scripture.

The Split

In 1961, after a great deal of prayerful consideration and consultation with those whose advice he respected (Lawrenz, Siegler, vice-presidents), President Naumann knew the time had come. The Wisconsin Synod could no longer remain in fellowship with those who did not believe, confess, and practice the same things we did. This wasn't an easy decision to come to. The Synodical Conference had been around for a long time. The Missouri Synod had established itself as the haven for true orthodox confessional Lutherans for over 100 years. Our ties with Missouri went back to the beginning but now the gulf had grown too wide. It was time for the Wisconsin Synod to make a stand.

When the Wisconsin Synod broke from Missouri in 1961, Missouri barely felt the effect. Many within the LCMS

thought we would slowly fizzle out as a church body or come running back to them with our tails between our legs. Those opinions did have a bit of creditability to them. Our relationship with the LCMS was like a little boy struggling to hang on to the shirttails of an older brother. We depended on Missouri. Whenever the LCMS announced a policy of some sort, the Wisconsin Synod yapped at her heels and begged to be included. Times had changed. By withdrawing from the Synodical Conference and renouncing our fellowship with the LCMS, we could no longer include ourselves in Missouri's policies. We were now on our own.

A point could be made that a sign of leadership is getting others to follow you along a path they normally wouldn't take. True leadership involves bringing them safely to their destination. President Naumann had kept the synod together during this trying period. He had also led the synod to cut away the safety netting underneath when we finally broke with the LCMS. But the true test of his leadership lay in the months and years ahead. Could he keep this church body from collapse?

The picture painted for President Naumann wasn't a particularly rosey one. The Wisconsin Synod at this time had churches in sixteen states, based primarily in the Midwest. If one of our members decided to move away, we no longer had the luxury of just transferring them to a "sister" congregation. What about foreign missions? In 1961 we had mission fields in Zambia, Japan, Germany and among the Arizona Apaches.¹⁸ Could we meet these needs head on?

Expansion

When future generations review the history of the Wisconsin Synod, the event which may well be recognized as providing the largest impact on us as a church body, will be the break with the Missouri Synod in 1961. As a result, President Naumann's name will always be remembered because this event occurred during his presidency and it was his office that led the way. But President Naumann will also be remembered for the leading role he played in our synod's expansion.

As was mentioned before, because we had churches in only sixteen states, because we virtually depended on Missouri to accept our transferring members, and because our foreign mission work relied upon Missouri's strength and resources, a break would naturally place a burden on our church body. As a result, we needed to reorganize and shift our priorities.

The Naumann Administration began the expansion process by focusing its attention in three vital areas: foreign missions, home missions, and the improvement of our worker training facilities. All three divisions fit together like the pieces of a puzzle, each as important as the other.

Our synod's expansion in the mission fields was slow going in the 30's, 40's, and 50's. President Brenner has received some criticism for not advocating mission work during his tenure in office. While this claim is not totally without merit, it does not give justice to the whole picture. We must take into consideration the historical perspective. It wasn't so much that President Brenner refused to expand

as it was a role he was forced to play. He was the one who struggled to rid the debt our synod had incurred during the depression era. Yet, the concern for mission expansion was growing. The Synod Convention of 1947 authorized the search for foreign mission expansion. In 1949, mission expansion into Japan was authorized.¹⁹ Africa was added two years later. Surely President Brenner must be recognized for this.

When President Naumann took office, the debt was gone and a tidy little surplus was in deposit ready to be put to use. Our synod had commissioned men to Japan and Africa. President Naumann made sure these men and their families were not forgotten. In the May 20th, 1962, edition of the Northwestern Lutheran, President Naumann wrote two articles which told of his personal visit (along with Professor Carl Lawrenz) to churches in Australia and how they deserved our prayers.²⁰ In the following article, President Naumann described the work our missionaries were conducting in N. Rhodesia (present Zambia). He and Professor Lawrenz were bound and determined to let our memberships know that their prayers and financial support were needed so that the Gospel message could be proclaimed to those who had never heard it.²¹ This was a vital ministry and it has been blessed.

He continued his personal interest, accompanying two members of the World Board to Japan and Hong Kong in 1960 and 1964 to help in strengthening the work in Japan and to give his advice in responding to the plea to open work in Hong Kong.²²

The ground work laid under the Naumann administration

has seen us expand into other countries. Today our mission fields reach out to those already mentioned as well as Malawi, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Columbia, Puerto Rico, Cameroon, and Brazil. The Lord has indeed blessed our efforts.

President Naumann was genuinely interested in foreign mission expansion. His enthusiasm played a major role in their development. But President Naumann's enthusiasm didn't stop there. He was equally enthused to expand our home missions. Our transient population had placed a rush order on the development and expansion of our home mission program. As early as 1960, the effects of not having enough churches (or any for that matter) in parts of our country was being recognized. President Naumann called upon the members of our synod and especially those in outlying regions to bear with the problem until we could adequately meet their needs.²³

The development of our home mission program started out slowly, but by the grace of God, it soon blossomed. We began to focus our attention on starting our mission congregations in metropolitan areas. This tactic soon caught on. We started our home mission expansion in 16 states; soon the cry called out, "In all the states by '78." We made it.

The final piece to the puzzle was the improvement of our worker training facilities. If we wanted to expand into other countries and the home front, pastors would be needed. Our schools would need teachers. And so the call went out. President Naumann reminded the congregations of the shortages

and said, "It would be well for each congregation to ask: 'Have we encouraged or assisted any of our gifted young people to study for full-time work in the church? Have we assisted or could we assist a worthy student from another congregation?'"²⁴

President Naumann cited the fact that, "Our schools, especially Dr. Martin Luther College and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, are compelled to deny admittance to prospective students, because the buildings and facilities are already filled beyond capacity."²⁵ This was a call for workers as well as a call for much needed building expansion. By 1975, the transformation of Northwestern College campus in a twenty year span was complete. Only one building from another generation is still standing. In the late 60's, DMLC's transformation was completed.²⁶ The pieces were all working together.

President Naumann must be looked at as being responsible for putting all of those pieces together. His administration ~~facilitated~~ this expansion. His office allowed it to happen. For that he must be recognized. But President Naumann never suggested that he deserved the credit. He was fully aware of those around him who played significant roles. Because he often felt the weight of his office, President Naumann would often turn to others for advice. He leaned heavily on Professors Carl Lawrenz and Oscar Siegler in Doctrinal matters. He was at ease with delegating responsibility to his vice-presidents. He trusted those who worked under him.

Trust was a major component in President Naumann's

makeup. He trusted that everyone had the same goals as he did. He wanted to serve the Lord. In fact, he was known as a man who "knew no guile."

Working hand in hand with President Naumann's sense of trust was his devout loyalty to those who worked for him. When asked to comment on that, one man said, "He simply let us do our job."

During the early stages of our synod's break with Missouri, our future existence depended on those who were called to lead us. Qualified men were called into such areas of service. They were men who realized that they were about to lead us into uncharted waters. These were the men who served as divisional heads: foreign and home missions, publications and our synodical schools. They were also district presidents, vice-presidents, and committees appointed by the president.

The decisions these men made, their new ideas and concepts were not always readily received by our members. Yet they held the trust of President Naumann. He would let it be known in no uncertain terms that he not only trusted these men but also agreed with them. Anyone who would doubt their creditability would be opposed to him. Due to the fact that President Naumann held the respect of almost everyone in or outside circles, doubt was held to a minimum. This was a significant factor because it gave these fellow leaders room to move and try many different things. This one factor brought undying loyalty to President Naumann.

As the years progressed and President Naumann continued to be re-elected, the pieces to the puzzle solidified. Our

synod, once thought to be close to disbanding, was now growing. Our foreign missions were showing great progress as more and more souls were won for Christ. Our home missions grew as well. Our enrollment in synodical schools continued to climb and new buildings began to dot the campuses. As our country continued to reap financial benefits, our congregational giving reflected the upswing. Oh how we have been blessed! Through all of this, President Naumann remained as humble as ever, never losing sight or grip of his role in it all. He never lost his pastoral attitude. He continued to accept preaching engagements across the country whenever his already busy schedule would allow. He always answered his phone as, "Pastor Naumann" and not "President Naumann." He was indeed a man who knew no guile.

As the years progressed, President Naumann's busy schedule finally began to catch up with him. The loss of his wife, Dorothy, and his mother in 1975, also took a great deal out of him. Heart problems, which were diagnosed during his school days, were getting worse. He was hospitalized for a time in 1978. His health was such a concern that in his last presidential newsletter he wrote,

It is only right and proper to inform you--and all our members through you--that a new day will be dawning for our beloved Synod this summer. I feel I should inform you that I am asking the convention to elect someone else as their president this summer. My health is such that I could be stopped from functioning properly at any time, and I wouldn't want the Synod to suffer in any way or to be hindered or delayed in carrying out its God-given work by an unexpected inability of its executive officer to function. I want to assure every one of you that it has been a genuine joy, but a wholly

undeserved privilege to work with you and our Synod's congregations these many years. I thank my God and Savior for that great privilege daily! 27

Before this newsletter reached its people, President Naumann suffered a major stroke on Saturday June 16, 1979. He was called home to live with his Lord Monday night June 18. He was faithful until the end.

No one can argue Oscar J. Naumann's effect on our synod. He was a man who would not compromise the truth of Scripture nor would he allow anyone to keep us from sharing that simple truth with others. He patiently and humbly guided our synod through a tremendously difficult period and saw a small church body spread its wings. No, President Naumann does not deserve all the credit, numerous individuals supplied their time and talents as well. Yet, it was his office that guided and allowed these great things to happen. The Lord had a reason for making Oscar J. Naumann our president. "The results are manifest."²⁸

ENDNOTES

1. "From the Life of Pastor Justus N. Naumann," prepared by: Mrs. Maria E. Naumann and Oscar J. Naumann, upon request of Pastor Richard P. Albrecht for the 75th Anniversary of St. John's Lutheran Church of Wolsey, South Dakota, June 12, 1960, p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Milwaukee Sentinel, Wednesday, June 20, 1979.
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5. Northwestern Lutheran, Volume 37, 1950, p. 237.
6. Northwestern Lutheran, February 21, 1917, p. 31.
7. Proceedings of the 31st Convention, Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN, August 8-15, 1951.
8. Proceedings of the 32nd Convention, Northwestern College, Watertown, WI, August 5, 1953, p. 11.
9. Northwestern Lutheran, Volume 49, November 4, 1962, p. 346.
10. Northwestern Lutheran, Volume 43, January 22, 1956, p. 29.
11. Gawrisch, Wilbert, "Commission on Inter-Church Relations-Part I-History and Organizational Form," April 10, 1989, p. 1.
12. Op. Cite., p. 29.
13. Northwestern Lutheran, Volume 71, August 1, 1984.
14. Northwestern Lutheran, Volume 62, July, 1975.
15. Proceedings, 1959, p. 24-28.
16. Ibid., p. 35-37.
17. Taken from the biographical sketch printed on the service folder celebrating Pastor Naumann's 40th Anniversary in the ministry. Mt. Lebanon Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, April 27, 1975.
18. Schaefer, James, "Some-Reflections on the 125th Anniversary of The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod," Essay to the Metro-North Pastoral Conference, May 19, 1975, p. 7.
19. Proceedings, 1947, 1949.
20. Northwestern Lutheran, May 20, 1962, p. 153-155.

ENDNOTES

21. Northwestern Lutheran, June 3, 1962, p. 165-172.
22. Excerpt from personal letter from Pastor Edgar Hoenecke
(Executive Secretary to the Board for World Missions)
to Martin Naumann, April 25, 1980.
23. Northwestern Lutheran, April, 1960, p. 1-3.
224. Ibid., p. 3.
25. Ibid., p. 3.
26. Schaefer, p. 27.
27. President's Newsletter, June, 1979.
28. Northwestern Lutheran, August 5, 1979, p. 251.

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the Metro-North Pastoral Conference, May 19, 1975.

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Numerous Northwestern Lutheran and Newspaper articles;
excerpts from personal letters, as found on endnote
page as well as many others recorded in In Memoriam.

Interviews

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|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rev. Norman Berg | - Former: Executive Secretary
of the Board for Home Missions |
| Myrna Borgwardt | - Daughter of Oscar J. Naumann |
| Rev. William Fischer | - Father was Associate Pastor
with Rev. A. Ackermann |
| Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch | - Professor at Wisconsin Lutheran
Seminary. Chairman of CICR |
| Rev. Karl Gurgel | - Former: Member of St. Croix
Conference |
| Rev. Winfred Koelpin | - Delegate to the 1953 Synodical
Convention |
| Prof. Carl Lawrenz | - Former: Professor at WLS
Former: Chairman of CICR |
| Rev. Carl Mishcke | - Former: 1st Vice-President of WELS |

INTERVIEWS

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|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rev. Winfred Nommenson | - Delegate to the 1953 Synodical Convention |
| Rev. James Schaefer | - Former: Director of Public Relations for the WELS |
| Ruth Stern | - First full-time secretary to President Naumann |
| Robert J. Voss | - Former: Executive Secretary of the Board for Worker Training |

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