

“ Stories for the Savior”

A Brief History of the Ministry of Manfred Lenz.

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There are certain people who are blessed with the ability of telling stories well. They can spin a tale that captures the attention of those who listen to them so that the hearer thinks he must have been there himself. A good storyteller can make the ordinary events in life something extraordinary. And a good story will help to teach or to make a point that the storyteller wants to convey.

Manfred Lenz was a wonderful storyteller. The last time I saw him was at his apartment in New Ulm, Minnesota in the late summer of 1995. I had married his granddaughter a few weeks prior, and before we moved off to Wisconsin, my wife and I visited him and his wife Jonette over brunch. We sat down to eat, and before we really recognized what had happened, over three hours had quickly gone by. Grandpa was telling stories, and they were fascinating stories. He spoke of his days at the Seminary in the early 1930's. He spoke of his experiences as a young pastor in small towns in Minnesota. He spoke of the joys of ministry, and also some of the heartaches. Through it all, several things were very evident-- his amazing memory, his love for people, his zest for life, and his joy in knowing Christ Jesus as his Savior.

I have chosen "Manfred Lenz: Stories for the Savior" as the title for this paper, but I feel that I should explain a little bit my reason for doing so. There are several other aspects of his life or personality that I felt would adequately serve as a theme for this paper-- his love for people, his rock- steady presence as District President of the Minnesota District for eighteen years, or his interest in Christian Education. All of these were important areas of his ministry. But I feel that the stories that he told were the most outstanding contribution that he gave to the Wisconsin Synod.

That may sound a bit strange, until I explain myself. By using the word "story" I do not mean fairy-tale or fantasy or fiction. I mean the stories that he told in his duties as a pastor of his congregation, as pastor of the Minnesota District, and as a retired pastor

for many years-- his sermons, his devotions, his homilies, his letters, his addresses. He was a great- storyteller about secular things, but even greater were the stories that he told to teach others about the Savior.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he gave certain qualities that the overseer of the church should have. One distinction that he stresses is that the pastor should be “able to teach.” Manfred Lenz taught officially as a pastor for 42 years, and for many more years both before he was ordained and after he had retired. He was a very gifted man. He played the organ. He was a skilled painter. He even tinkered with inventing toys and gadgets. But his greatest gifts and contributions were as a story-teller- - telling the story to all he served that they have a Savior from sin. In researching this paper I was able to examine his sermons reaching all the way back to about 1944. I was able to read several collections of his devotional materials. In all, the message was always the same-- focusing on the Savior. It was the message that “Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.”¹

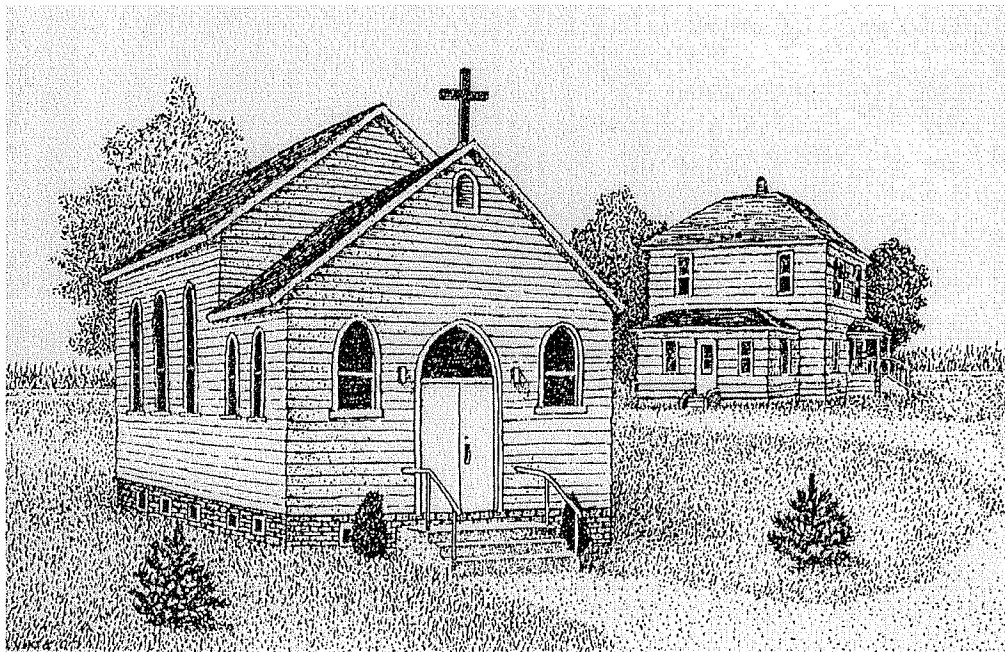
In 1989, Manfred Lenz wrote about the careers he had considered while he was a young boy in a devotion entitled, “My Secret Ambitions.” He concluded by saying, “No, I never became a mechanic, doctor, or artist, and when I am gone no monument will mark the spot saying, ‘Here lies a great man.’ My secret ambitions are history now, but I hope someone, someday will say, ‘You have helped me to see Christ.’”² That he certainly did-- through his teaching and preaching, through his stories for the Savior. His life was dedicated to that pursuit. This paper is an attempt on my part to tell the story of his life-- the life of Manfred Lenz.

¹ Ephesians 2: 4,5

² From “My Secret Ambitions,” in Homespun Homilies.

The Early Years 1913-1919

Manfred Jacob Julius Lenz was born on December 15, 1913, in Sheraton Township, Minnesota, near the town of Belview, north of Rochester, Minnesota. He was the second son, and the second child of twelve children that were born to Reverend Julius F. and Mrs. Hedwig (Muller) Lenz. His father, Julius, was the pastor of German Lutheran Church of Sheridan Township. Manfred's beginnings were very modest, as was typical of a large pastor's family in the Depression era. The pastor's wage was paid in hay brought for the cows, in chickens and eggs, and whatever else the 25 families of the congregation could spare.



St. John's Lutheran Church and Parsonage at Belview (Sheridan Township), MN, the early childhood home of Manfred Lenz, whose father, Rev. Julius Lenz, served as pastor from 1911- 1920.

When Manfred was six years old, the family moved to nearby Bremen, Minnesota. The nearest city with a post office was Elgin, but they were still in the

general area north of Rochester, Minnesota. It was here that Manfred grew up, and had the earliest memories of which he often wrote about in later years for the publication Link-Age, a publication of the OWLS of the Wisconsin Synod. The situation was much the same as that of Sheraton Township. The congregation was small and the area rural. The pastor and family lived modestly, but happily.

Years later, Manfred would reflect on his youth:

Memory takes me back to the time when I was a young boy in a country parsonage. We washed our face in an open sink below a mirror on the wall. No faucets, no running water. A pail, also used for drinking water, stood on a shelf next to the sink. We would dip some of it into a basin. The wash water would be ported down the drain that emptied into a large bucket on the floor. We combed our hair and brushed our teeth in front of the only mirror. We watched Dad lather his face and shave there. Mother would brush her soft hair in its reflection. Lacking hair on his scalp, Dad didn't need a brush or comb. A quick sweep over the top with a washcloth took care of his grooming.

Everything was in the open-- no privacy. Actually it was along the kitchen wall near an outside door where traffic was often the heaviest. We were a family of probably twelve at the time. More came later. Imagine if you can: one sink, one mirror for all!³

In 1992 he reflected on his youth in Bremen:

(On seeing some Amish farmers)... It made me think about my boyhood days, what it was like growing up in a country parsonage on eleven acres of land, some of which was set aside for a cemetery and steepled church in the center. The rest was reserved for a pasture to feed the pastor's cows and horses, except for sections near the road where the hitching posts were set and where a large garden was laid out for the family's table needs...

During the summer all six of us boys teamed up with Dad in hoeing the large garden and picking the bugs from the potato and cucumber plants. Insecticides were not allowed. The beetles and their clusters of eggs were tossed into a can of kerosene and later burned to make sure that

³ From "Mirror on the Wall," in Homespun Homilies.

none survived. We always looked forward to this procedure. It was our reward for a job well done.

There were other chores, too. Sometimes we helped feed the chickens, our two cows and team of horses, often before we went to school and again after we came home. We gathered the eggs and did many other little things like trimming the wicks of the lamps and lanterns. Water for the animals came from a well and had to be pumped every time it was needed. A long pipe carried it to the other side of a fence into a wash tub from which the animals drank.

We did not have a refrigerator so some of the perishable foods were lowered into the well. In summer we also had a rack built with shelves which was covered with a heavy sack. This had thick wicks hanging from a basin of water which kept the sack wet and the milk and butter fresh. We set it near a stiff breeze which speeded up the evaporation and lowered the temperature inside.

Bath time was always a ritual. First the rainwater was warmed up in a boiler on the stove and carried to the church school next door. The boys would take turns pouring it from a sprinkling can as we stood in a wash tub. After we had "showered," the girls repeated the process--usually later in the evening with a fresh supply of water. Sometimes, if the nights were cold, we started a wood fire in the space heater.⁴

By all his accounts, despite the fact that modern conveniences were lacking, he felt that he and the family lacked for nothing that was essential, and they were very happy days. Although there were not many store-bought games, Manfred and his siblings amused themselves with what they had. One of his favorite games was to play pastor--he would gather his brothers and sisters around him, and "preach" to them. No doubt he already had developed a few good stories by that time. He related also in later years that while playing one day, he and some other of his siblings "cheated death" when a team of runaway mules ran over them while pulling a hayrack.⁵ Certainly, there was plenty to keep their lives interesting at play and at work.

⁴ From "Boyhood Memories," in Homespun Homilies.

⁵ From "Private Holidays" in Homespun Homilies.

Education 1919-1935

Grade school 1919-1926

It was in Bremen that Manfred began his schooling, and it soon became apparent that school was something in which he excelled. Although his brother Gilbert was a year and a half older than he was, Manfred soon joined him in the same grade at the church school. It was not that Gilbert was slow, but rather that Manfred did very well. He remembered fondly winning a copy of Treasure Island for taking first place in a wood-building project in the sixth grade. He made a scale-model birdhouse in the shape of their school and was very pleased when the teacher mounted it on a post by the road to the school.⁶

To be admitted to high school in those days, every student had to take and pass in the eighth grade the state board examination for the state of Minnesota. When the time came for him to take his test, it turned out that Manfred passed, but his older brother Gilbert did not. His mother and father had planned on sending the oldest to Martin Luther Academy, but as long as Manfred was the one who passed first, they sent him instead. It was in that set of circumstances that Manfred headed off to New Ulm in the fall of 1926 to begin high school at the age of twelve.⁷

Martin Luther Academy: 1926-1930

Although New Ulm was by no means a big city in 1926, Manfred must have walked around a bit wide-eyed at first. There were new things to see and do. For example, he had traveled to New Ulm via the train, which was something a small town pastor's kid did not get to do very often. Sadly, though, he was still lacking a bit in

⁶ From "It Can Be Fun" in Homespun Homilies.

⁷ Information taken from interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz on March 9, 1998.

worldly wisdom at the time he went off to New Ulm. When he got off at the train station in New Ulm, he was on his own. He somehow had to get himself and his luggage from the train station and up the big hill to the campus of Martin Luther Academy. As he was gathering his luggage, a man came along in a car and asked if he would like a ride to the school. "How nice," young Manfred must have thought to himself. What he did not realize was that this ride would prove to be very costly. Unknowingly, the nice man giving him the ride was a taxi driver. When he arrived at the school, he was forced to hand over most of the spending money that his father had given him for using the rest of the semester. In a hurry, he discovered what a taxi was, and also that he needed to watch out for himself.⁸

Thankfully, there were many pleasant experiences for Manfred in New Ulm too. Since he was only twelve years old at the time he started high school, he still had not been confirmed. One of his high school professors became his confirmation teacher. Once a week, he would go to the professor's home for his confirmation lesson, and then afterwards was treated to supper at the home of the professor. Coming from a large family, one can assume that Manfred enjoyed being able to sit down and dine with another family.⁹

The tight budget that Manfred and his family lived on soon became even tighter in the fall of 1929. The Great Depression began in October of that year with the crash of the Wall Street financial market. Years later, the retired Pastor Lenz reminisced about the market collapse: "(After the crash) the country did not recover until a generation later. I was a senior in DMLC Academy when panic hit Wall Street that October. My father, a country preacher, soon let me know that money would be scarce. I earned enough the previous summer to buy a pair of shoes and to save a little extra for spending

⁸ From interview with Mark Lenz on March 12, 1998.

⁹ *ibid.*

money. Help from home would be now limited, he reminded me.”¹⁰

At the young age of sixteen, Manfred graduated from Martin Luther Academy in the spring of 1930. He now had a dilemma-- what would he do for a profession. Since he was a youngster, he had “played pastor” with his brothers and sisters. But he also, like everyone making a career choice, thought of other possibilities as well. He could work on a farm with all the big machinery-- he always thought that seemed somewhat interesting-- and better yet, during the depression it was a steady job that was available and paid a pretty good ten cents per hour. Another possibility might be to become a doctor. He wrote:

As I grew older my mind turned to other channels, and I thought I would like to be a doctor. A distant relative visited us often while his son underwent corrective surgery for a hare-lip in a Rochester hospital. I thought how wonderful it would be to help other people look beautiful again. Another experience that directed my interest was how mother could tell that we were sick by looking at our tongue. If it was too red, we would have one type of illness. When it was yellow, we could have another sickness. If it was spotted, this would tell her that something else was wrong. She was Dr. Mom to us, yet she insisted that only a real doctor knew how to read our tongue for certain. In my imagination I would try to read the symptoms and pretend that I knew when they described measles, chicken pox, or a malfunction of the liver...

My desire to be a doctor was sidetracked when I realized that my parents could never afford to send me to college-- not on a country preacher’s meager salary. Even the ten cents an hour I was earning from my job with the threshing crew would not help much!

For a while I even thought of becoming an artist. I was probably influenced by some of my mother’s artwork which she had saved from her school years, some burnt wood etchings and painted flowers. However, my knowledge of drawing was so scanty that when I drew a tree I would have to tell people it was a tree and not a scarecrow.¹¹

¹⁰ From “Remember the Depression,” in Homespun Homilies.

¹¹ From “My Secret Ambitions,” in Homespun Homilies.

He finally decided that the ministry was his choice and his calling. He decided that being a pastor was something that was very important. While all of the other occupations were God-pleasing too, the pastoral ministry provided the greatest opportunity to share the message of Christ, which was able to change lives.

Concordia College 1930-1932

Manfred was presented with a choice that he had to make. Since it was the days of the Synodical Conference, he could receive his pre- theological training either at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, or at Concordia College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Simply because it was much closer to home, he decided to attend Concordia in Saint Paul. He began his studies there in the fall of 1930.

Somehow, despite the Great Depression, Manfred through his summer work, and his parents with the little help that they could give, were able to put him through the years of college. The times were lean, but they survived. As Pastor Lenz reflected later: “No matter if that coat, scarf, gloves, and hat all clashed wildly-- if they fit and were clean, one was grateful to have them. After all, wasn’t there a depression?”¹²

It was at college that Manfred picked up a nickname that would stick with him throughout his life. It happened that some of his friends enjoyed playing cards, and in particular, they liked to play bridge. Manfred knew nothing about the game, so his friends decided to teach him. About the same time there was a big bridge tournament that was being held in a city, and one of the players involved was a man by the name of Sid Lenz (no relation to Manfred). Sid did very poorly in the tournament and lost game after game. Manfred’s friends decided that his bridge game closely matched the game of Sid Lenz at that time, and of course, they teasingly referred to him as Sid. It was a nickname that stuck with Manfred throughout his life, and was a moniker that his wife

¹² From “Remember the Depression,” in Homespun Homilies.

also affectionately used for him.¹³

Manfred passed quickly through college, because at his time, the seminaries required only two years of pre- theological training. Incidentally, his graduating class was the last one allowed into the seminary with only the two years of college training. At the age of eighteen, he completed his course at Concordia and received his two-year degree in the spring of 1932.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1932- 1935

Upon graduation, once again Manfred and his parents were faced with a dilemma. Where would he go for his seminary training? There were two options from which to choose-- either he could travel south to Saint Louis and attend Concordia, or head east and study at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin. He chose Thiensville for his seminary training for the same reason that he chose Concordia for college-- and that was distance. It just seemed too far from home to go all the way to Saint Louis, even though it was not really that much further to go there instead of Wisconsin. At an age when most students today begin college, Manfred Lenz began his seminary training. He was eighteen years old.

Since money is always needed to pay for books, room and board, and school supplies, Manfred worked during his seminary years off- campus at various places. One of the ways that he picked up extra cash was to work at the local bowling alley. In the days before the automatic pin-setters, the pins had to be set by hand, and that is what he did. He wrote many years later, "In my seminary days I often served as a pin-setter for a local bowling alley. The job paid only 15 cents a line but one could easily make a dollar an evening. Several other students earned pocket money in that way."¹⁴

Since there was not a vicar year as part of the school curriculum in his day,

¹³ From interviews with Mark Lenz and Mrs. Jonette Lenz, March 1998.

¹⁴ From "Bowling," in Homespun Homilies.

Manfred passed through the seminary program in only three years. He graduated from the Seminary in the spring of 1935 at the young age of twenty-one.

Years of Waiting 1935-1939

At the Seminary today we think of graduation and receiving a divine call really in the same thought. When someone graduates, it is assumed that he will receive a call. That certainly was not the case when Manfred Lenz graduated from the Seminary in the spring of 1935. There were men to be sent, and there were even places to send them. The problem was that the nation, and therefore also the Wisconsin Synod, was firmly in the grasp of the Great Depression. There was no money to pay the young graduates, so they were forced to wait and hope that someday they would receive a call. Manfred reflected on the time following his graduation: "The Great Depression was still in effect when I graduated from the Seminary. Veteran preachers couldn't afford to retire, and new mission openings were curtailed for lack of funds, so very few received calls- at most one or two- because candidates from previous years were still unassigned. Five from my class finally went into secular work."¹⁵

Following his graduation, Manfred returned to his home. Since there were no calls available, he searched for other ways to support himself during the Depression. One of his jobs was selling insurance policies for Aid Associations for Lutherans. He did not actually sell the policies, however. He was the one who did the legwork for the insurance salesman. Manfred would go door-to-door and find possible buyers, and the agent would follow later and try to sell the actual policy. He also worked as a salesman for a book concern, and for several months he worked with a highway construction crew.¹⁶

After several months at home, Manfred was contacted by Immanuel Lutheran

¹⁵ From "Remember the Depression," in Homespun Homilies.

¹⁶ From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz.

Church of Mankato, Minnesota and asked whether he would help them and provide preaching help and also work with the youth. He accepted their offer. Adolph Ackermann was pastor at the congregation at that time, and had been elected President of the Minnesota District at the 1936 District Convention. Perhaps Manfred was asked to help because of the new responsibilities that Pastor Ackermann would have as president of the District.

Whatever the case, Manfred was eager to serve. In 1989, Pastor Lenz reflected upon his time in Mankato:

When the Lord did send a call to me after a brief stint as a book salesman, months with a highway construction crew, and part-time solicitor for an insurance company, I could now look forward to a regular paycheck. By today's standard it looked rather puny-- \$50 a month without housing or car allowance! One of the members opened his home to me and rented a room for \$14 a month (laundry service was extra). A cafeteria sold coupon books for \$5 which I learned to make last for a week of meals. A "super special" with mashed potatoes at 2 cents a serving, 23 cents for most meat entrees, and 5 cents for a cup of coffee, with a relish tray and fruit cup or soup, all in generous portions, cost a mere 40 cents. If I ran out of meal tickets before the end of the week, I could get a real extravaganza at the dime store: a hot dog for 5 cents, a huge mug of iced rootbeer for another nickel, and a piece of pie for 7 cents. Oh yes, haircuts were a quarter, and if you wanted only a neck trim, the barber charged 15 cents.¹⁷

Manfred spent quite some time serving Immanuel congregation-- roughly around three years. While he never had an official vicar year as part of his Seminary training, he more than made up for it in the time that he spent in Mankato waiting for a more permanent situation. He had received a call to serve the congregation in Mankato, but he still was not an installed or ordained minister.

¹⁷ From "Remember the Depression," in Homespun Homilies.

While his chief responsibilities were preaching and youth work, there was one experience that happened in Mankato that he would remember for the rest of his life. He wrote:

It was late evening when the telephone rang. I had just showered and was getting ready for bed. The hospital was calling. "Please hurry," said the nurse on duty. "we have a baby born too early and the parents want it baptized as soon as possible. Can you come right away?"

I was not ordained at the time, nor had I ever performed a baptism before. The pastor whom I was assisting on a temporary basis was also an officer of the Synod and out of town on church business. That's why I was called. I had not yet acquired my own book of pastoral acts with the forms for baptism, private communion, etc. My library did have a hymnal, a Bible, a few commentaries, and other theological books. There was no time to research them. I thought about what to do as I hurriedly dressed. I grabbed my hymnal and left for the hospital just two blocks away. A man met me at the entrance, introduced himself as the father of the child, and led me to the elevator. As we were lifted to the top floor, I asked if they had chosen a name. "No, we haven't had time to think of one. It all happened so fast," he replied. "Do you have any other children?" I inquired. "Yes, a boy named Benjamin."

I had glanced at the "short form" for emergency baptism on the last page of the hymnal before I left the apartment. There I read: "In urgent cases, take water, call the child by name..." Name the child, it directed, before sprinkling water on its head. We had to come up with a name, I thought. It hadn't been made clear to me in my training that naming the child was not required for a valid baptism. We talked about several names. Then I remembered that his other son had a Biblical name, Benjamin, so I suggested, "Why not call this one David." "David is fine," he agreed...

I hurried down the deserted corridor. A nurse saw me and quickly ushered me into the nursery. There was only one child, cradled in an incubator with a respirator-- a tiny baby scarcely an hour old. A nursing assistant was holding a basin filled with warm water. She had been expecting me. I dipped my hand into the basin, leaned over the incubator, reached inside and gently sprinkled a few drops on the infant's head, saying: "David, I baptize thee

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Not only did Manfred get to name and baptize the child, but several years later as a pastor he was able to see the family again, and he was able to meet again the little boy he had named.¹⁸

Monticello, Minnesota 1939-1944

During the summer of 1939, Manfred Lenz was called to serve Saint Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Monticello, Minnesota. He was ordained and installed on September 3, 1939.

Saint Peter’s was a small congregation with its fair share of difficulties. They had struggled for some time to stay ahead financially. But there was one problem that the young Pastor Lenz had to deal with immediately, and that was that the former pastor of the church was still in the area. Many in the church felt that the old pastor was still their pastor, and that the new pastor was lacking the authority that the older pastor had, even though the elder was no longer called to serve that congregation.

It was a situation that caused a number of problems at first. It left open the question: Who’s in charge? It was a situation that could have caused great difficulty, but Pastor Lenz showed some Christian wisdom that would serve him well throughout his ministry. Rather than getting into a shouting match over who was in charge, and rather than letting bitterness and ill will destroy the congregation, he chose a different tact. He befriended the older man. He put him at ease, and soon the dispute was over, and there was no doubt who was in charge. Very quickly the issue became a non- issue and the whole congregation put their support behind their new pastor.¹⁹

¹⁸ Account taken from “A New Life,” in Homespun Homilies.

¹⁹ From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz in March 1998.

Since Monticello was a small town, it was somewhat difficult to find a place to rent immediately. Pastor Lenz felt blessed then when the congregation told him that they had a place for him to stay in right away. Only later, after a very disturbing night, did he find out the history behind his house. One night, after meeting with several pastors in the area for a social gathering, Pastor Lenz returned to his home. People did not lock the doors in those days, so he entered his home and reached out as he normally did to pull the string to turn on the light in his house. As he did so, he felt someone brush by him quickly, and then charge out his front door. Pastor Lenz, not knowing what else to do, gave chase. Although a young man, he was not able to run the man down in the dark and the intruder escaped through the poorly lit streets. Only later did he find out that the man who was in his home that night had escaped from a nearby mental hospital. The man who escaped also was the former resident of the home in which Pastor Lenz lived. That man also had beaten his wife to death in that home years earlier, and because they could not get the bloodstains out of the wall, they had simply put a couple of coats of paint over the stained walls. The townspeople were aware of this, but the new pastor was not. Soon, Pastor Lenz found a new place to stay.²⁰

The year 1941 was a very important one for Pastor Lenz, for it was in that year that he met and married his wife, Jonette Minerva Quill, a young lady of Norwegian heritage from Albert Lea, Minnesota. Early in the spring of 1941, she and Pastor Lenz met at the home of Miss Quill's cousin in Montrose. The husband of Jonette Quill's cousin was the Lutheran pastor in Montrose, Minnesota which was near Monticello, the home of Pastor Lenz. Miss Quill was home visiting relatives before she took a new employment opportunity in Waukegan, Illinois. After Miss Quill and Pastor Lenz met, they began to correspond, and in June they were engaged to be married. On October 19, 1941 they were married in Monticello, and officially became Pastor and Mrs. Manfred

²⁰ Related to me in July 1995 by Pastor Lenz.

Lenz.

After a honeymoon in Duluth, Minnesota they returned to their home in Monticello on October 31, 1941. The new Mrs. Lenz was welcomed to her new hometown the first morning by finding that the outhouse had been toppled over by some local youngsters as a Halloween prank. There were more hardships in getting married in 1941 than just having the outhouse tipped over, however. It was the middle of World War II, and many commodities were rationed very carefully.



Gas, tires, sugar, and coffee all had to be used sparingly. Pastor Lenz wrote:

During the war we used all kinds of substitutes. Store shelves went empty as goods ranging from facial tissues and hairpins to cameras and alarm clocks disappeared. The ration stamp was the necessity of life. It was used for meats, butter, sugar, coffee, almost all canned and frozen foods-- yes, even for gasoline and shoes. Men's trousers went cuffless to save cloth, and an old toothpaste tube had to be turned in when buying a new one. We found substitutes for many of these things. For instance, we added condensed milk to a pound of melted butter, and mixed oatmeal with chopped meat to make them go farther. Shoe soles were a layer of cardboard under a veneer of leather which peeled off after a walk on wet ground. Factories used cheap alloys for much needed steel. We tried substitutes for coffee. Some people learned to roll their own cigarettes with a mixture of shredded tobacco and dried lettuce leaves when the tailored ones became scarce.²¹

Mrs. Lenz recalled for me that about that time also, their car had its four tires

²¹ From "No Substitutes," in Homespun Homilies.

stolen during the night. They got up in the morning to find that their car was up on blocks. Tires were a precious commodity, so much so that people had taken to stealing them. This presented a difficulty in that a person could not just go and buy new tires. They, along with many other essentials, were rationed. If you used up your rations, or even if they were stolen, you were out of luck. The only thing that you could do was wait until your turn came up again to receive that particular ration. For a pastor, that was unacceptable. He had to go out and visit shut-ins and make hospital visits, and attend to his pastoral duties. Mrs. Lenz said that she remembers her husband spending much time in trying to keep the retread tires that they were able to obtain in passable working order.²²

At the Minnesota District Convention in the summer of 1942, Manfred Lenz was elected to his first District position, a trend of serving the Minnesota District that would continue for the next thirty years. He was elected to be the Assistant Secretary of the District.

The following year, the Lenz family experienced their first addition. A son, Mark Joel, was born to Manfred and Jonette on August 21, 1943. He is currently a professor teaching social studies and religion at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Alma City, Minnesota 1944-1948

In 1944, Pastor Lenz received and accepted a call to serve another congregation in southern Minnesota. They moved to the small town of Alma City, which is near Janesville, Minnesota. It was a two gas pump town with not much else for a local economy. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church had been founded in 1910 by German

²² From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz in March 1998.

residents of Alma City who wanted a church of their own without having to travel to neighboring towns for worship. Services were regularly conducted in German when Pastor Lenz arrived there in 1944, and continued to be until the mid- 1950's.²³

It is apparent that Pastor Lenz was very interested in Christian Education from early on. Mrs. Lenz shared with me that part of what excited Pastor Lenz about the congregation in Alma City was the possibility that the church would begin a Christian Day School. Plans were made by the congregation to establish the school during the tenure of Pastor Lenz, but disappointingly, the proper time had not yet come. The plans for building fell through and the project was set aside for a time. Some years later, in 1954, the Saint John's Christian Day School was established.²⁴

Whatever disappointments that Pastor Lenz may have felt surely were forgotten with the next addition to the Lenz family. Their second child, Gregory Paul, was born in August of 1947. Greg is currently a pastor at Christ Lutheran Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, and serves on the Administrative Committee for Latin American Missions for the World Mission Board.

At the Minnesota District Convention in the summer of 1948, Pastor Lenz was elected to serve as the Secretary for the Minnesota District. It was a position that he would hold for the next six years.

Delano, Minnesota 1948- 1973

After about three and a half years, Pastor Lenz accepted a call to another rural congregation in Minnesota. He and his wife packed up their family and moved north to the town of Delano. Delano was very near to where Pastor Lenz had first served in

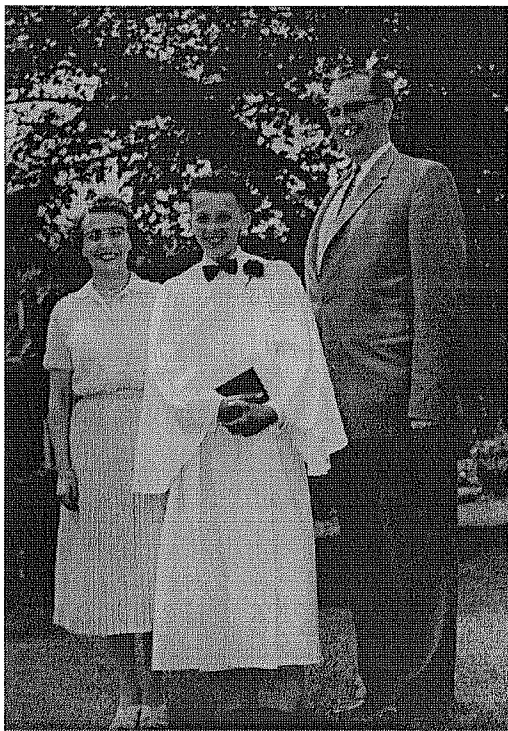
²³ Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History, p.167, 168.

²⁴ From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz in March, 1998 and Golden Jubilee History, p. 167.

Monticello nine years earlier. Pastor Lenz was installed at Mount Olive Lutheran Church on November 7, 1948.

As in Alma City, the congregation which Pastor Lenz now served showed interest in Christian Education. But it was in Delano that positive steps were taken to begin a school. In 1950, a survey was taken of the congregation to obtain information as to whether the church was interested in starting a Christian Day School or not. Following a positive response by a majority of the congregation, initial steps were taken for opening the school. An off- street parking area was cleared, and nearby lots were purchased on which the new school would rest.²⁵

Certainly, with his concern for Christian Education, Pastor Lenz was pleased at



The Lenzes at Mark's confirmation.

the positive steps that were taken. He also ensured that his children would receive a Christian Day School education. Until the school was built later, for six years Manfred or his wife Jonette drove their children to and from school in Loretto, which was several miles distant. Throughout his life, it was something that he was interested in, and something which he very strongly supported.²⁶

Mrs. Lenz remembers fondly the time that they spent in Delano. She said that they were very busy years, but also pleasant years, and Delano was a good area to raise a family. One of her favorite memories was the routine that she and

her husband followed on Saturday evenings. Pastor Lenz would study his sermon for

²⁵ From the Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History, p. 116.

²⁶ From interview with Mark Lenz in March, 1998.

Sunday, and Mrs. Lenz would prepare a snack for them. Then he would sit down and practice his sermon-- he would preach it to her first. It was a practice that they followed for years.²⁷

Four years after Mount Olive congregation completed the initial study, the congregation approved the plans for their Christian Day School. They decided to build a two- room, brick school, and on August 28, 1955, the new school was dedicated. The cost of the project for the building without equipment was \$30,000. By opening day, enrollment stood at 30 students, which was very good for the first year of the two-room school.²⁸

Pastor Lenz's years at Delano were marked by continued growth both in the congregation, and in particular, in the area of Christian Education. The school at Mount Olive flourished throughout the years that Pastor Lenz served. By the grace of God, they were blessed to have a growing enrollment and also the financial blessings from God in order to grow and expand. A principal was added in 1957, and a teacherage was built for the principal in that same year. Pastor Lenz wrote in the Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History book in 1968, "Interest in Christian education continued at so high a pitch that the school was soon overcrowded. In 1962 the members realized that not only the staff but also the facilities would have to be enlarged. A third teacher was called. The addition of two classrooms, gymnasium, kitchen, and storage rooms were ordered built for an estimated \$75,000. The playgrounds, classrooms, principal's home, and duplex for the women teachers represent an investment of some \$135,000. Four full-time teachers are on the staff. Enrollment stands at 104." God certainly blessed the efforts of pastor, teachers, school, and congregation in Delano at this time. They were able to meet the continued growth of the church and school by physically adding to the size of the

²⁷ From interview with Jonette Lenz in March, 1998.

²⁸ From the Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History, p. 116.

buildings. In addition to those building projects, a modern parsonage was built in 1972.²⁹

District Service

Assistant Secretary and Secretary 1942- 1953

Pastor Lenz began his service to the District at quite a young age. He was elected to be the Assistant Secretary of the Minnesota District in 1942 at the age of 31, which is all the more remarkable in the fact that he had only been a parish pastor for three years when he assumed that position. In 1947, Pastor Lenz was elected the Secretary of the Minnesota District.

His widow, Mrs. Jonette Lenz, shared with me in an interview that administration was really something that Pastor Lenz enjoyed doing. Certainly, it became apparent quickly not only that he was interested in doing it, but also that he had the proper gifts to be an organizer, an administrator-- a leader in the District.³⁰

Vice President 1953- 1954

In 1953, Pastor Lenz became the Vice- President of the Minnesota District. Oscar J. Naumann had been the President of the District, but resigned in the summer of 1953 to become President of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. George A. Barthels was the Vice- President in the Minnesota District, and assumed the presidency of the District until the semi- annual convention of the Minnesota District could be held the following summer. Pastor Lenz, who had been Secretary, also then assumed the position of Vice-President that had been vacated in the district until a vote could be held at the 1954 Minnesota District Convention.

At the Minnesota District Convention in July of 1954, George A. Barthels was

²⁹ Ibid. p. 116

³⁰ From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz, April, 1998.

elected President, and Manfred Lenz was elected Vice- President of the Minnesota District.

President 1954- 1972

Pastor Lenz served in his officially elected position of Vice- President for only a very short time, however. Only four months after he had been elected Vice- President, Pastor Lenz became the President of the Minnesota District. George A. Barthels, who had been elected President of the District, resigned from his position in November for “conscience reasons.”³¹ The Minnesota District then asked Pastor Lenz to fill the position of President until the next District Convention in 1956. Manfred Lenz became President of the Minnesota District of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States in 1954 at the age of 41.

The mid- 1950’s and the next several years were years of great turmoil in the Wisconsin Synod at large, but also in the Minnesota District as well. The cause of the turmoil was the on-going discussion of fellowship between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. The Wisconsin Synod over these years was undergoing the process of recognizing that the two synods were walking down different doctrinal paths that would finally end in termination of fellowship between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. It would take several years for the break to occur, and in the meanwhile there were strong opinions both to work with Missouri as long as possible, and to terminate ties with them as soon as practically possible. A great deal of discussion revolved around Mark 16:17, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (KJV)” Discussion swirled around whether “mark and avoid” was a simultaneous act, or if a period of time naturally needed to elapse-- “marking” first, and then “avoiding” later.

³¹ From 1956 Minnesota District Proceedings.

This was the storm that Pastor Lenz faced when he became District President in 1954. The Synod was in turmoil over the on-going relations with Missouri. The Districts worked with individual congregations that were struggling through this time. It certainly must have made Pastor Lenz tremble a bit to witness the dissension in the Synod, and his own District, where he was to be the pastor to the rest of the pastors-- of whom a great many had more experience in the ministry. Not to be forgotten is that he also had 600 souls whom he was to pastor himself in Delano, Minnesota. They were very conscious of the strain that the position would have on Pastor Lenz. He stated before the vote for President at the 1956 convention:

In this connection your chairman must bring to your attention a resolution of his congregation pleading that he be spared the responsibility of serving in a District office. It was only after several meetings with an advisory committee proposed by the General President, to whom they had appealed, that the congregation reluctantly permitted him to complete the unexpired term of the office vacated by the resignation of Pastor Geo. A. Barthels only a few months after he had been duly elected president of the District. It is a matter that should not be forgotten when the elections begin this afternoon.³²

Nevertheless, Pastor Lenz was elected into the district presidency during the Minnesota District Convention in the summer of 1956.

The Immanuel, Mankato conflict

There were several problems that Pastor Lenz had to immediately face as the new District President that were the direct result of the on-going discussions with the Missouri Synod. One had to deal with the Immanuel congregation in Mankato, Minnesota. In the early 1950's, Immanuel congregation of the Wisconsin Synod had lodged a complaint against Our Savior's congregation of the Missouri Synod, and also located in Mankato,

³² From the 1956 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 20.



PASTOR MANFRED J. LENZ
President
1954-

because that congregation had accepted members from Immanuel without a transfer letter. The difficulties soon went to the District level, as then- President Naumann of the Wisconsin Synod protested to the President of the Minnesota District of the Missouri Synod for Our Savior's refusal to repent and stop their practice. The Minnesota District of the Missouri Synod then rejected the protest of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod. In response to the non-action taken by the Missouri Synod, on October 2, 1952, President Naumann declared that Our Savior's congregation had "severed the bonds of fraternal relations" with the Wisconsin Synod.³³

The dispute was already long and heated when Pastor Lenz became President of the Minnesota District in late 1954 after the resignation of President Barthels. The Immanuel congregation waited for action on the part of the Wisconsin Synod at its 1955 convention. They hoped that a solution would be found between Missouri and Wisconsin that would solve their problem very quickly-- either there would be a break between Missouri and Wisconsin, or Missouri would break off their relationships with heterodox churches. The Wisconsin Synod at convention in 1955 in Saginaw, Michigan declared that the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod had created division and offense by its doctrine and practice, but a vote to terminate fellowship was postponed until the next convention. Frustrated by this, Immanuel congregation, on October 17, 1955 decided to "abstain from active fellowship with, and support of, the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States" while they "prayerfully await faithful, obedient action in accord with the Word of Romans 16:17..."³⁴

³³ From the 1954 Minnesota District Proceedings, p.68.

³⁴ From the 1956 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 20.

Pastor Lenz and the Minnesota presidium decided it was a matter to be dealt with at the District level, so they attempted to meet with the congregation. They failed in their attempt to meet with the congregation, but were able to meet with one of the pastors at his home sometime before the District met at convention in 1956. At that convention, Pastor Lenz (now elected President for his first term, but functioning as President for nearly two years) asked the body for guidance in the case with Immanuel. At the convention, it was proposed that a Committee of Five be appointed to review the entire case history and then recommend action for the 1958 District Convention. The Committee was approved, but before the Committee could complete their work, Immanuel congregation left the Synod on October 30, 1956. The minutes of the Committee of Five reported at the 1958 Minnesota District Convention read: "However, before the committee could continue its work, it was notified by the officials of the District that the Immanuel Congregation of Mankato, with its pastors, had withdrawn from membership with the Wisconsin Synod."³⁵

One can only imagine how hard it was for President Lenz to lose one of the largest congregations of the Minnesota District. The District lost two pastors, 1,302 baptized members, a church with a proud history which had been served by District President Ackermann from 1936-1948, and the church that had offered a position to a young Manfred Lenz during the Great Depression.

Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod and Church of the Lutheran Confession losses

It certainly did not take President Lenz long to realize that until the conflict was solved with the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod at the Synodical level, life would be difficult in dealing with the protesters at the District level. The road was long and filled with many potholes for the next four years after Immanuel left the District and the Synod.

³⁵ From the 1958 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 30.

President Lenz had to deal with people who had problems on both sides of the issue. There were those who were upset with the Wisconsin Synod for what they perceived as foot-dragging in their dealings with the Missouri Synod, and there were those who felt that the Wisconsin Synod owed a great debt to the Missouri Synod, and therefore should not break. Many also had very close personal ties with the Missouri Synod which made them feel that a break in fellowship would be like tearing apart family-- which is what it did in some cases.

If one looks down the list at the Minnesota District Proceedings for the years from 1956- 1960, it might appear to be nothing but a string of disappointments and failures. On November 7, 1956, only eight days after Immanuel and their 1302 souls left the Synod, Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Mason City, Iowa, their pastor and 750 souls, also left the Wisconsin Synod. This group joined the Missouri Synod.

The years between the 1958 and 1960 conventions had to be frustrating for President Lenz. More and more there was opposition to the fact that the Wisconsin Synod had not severed relations with the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod. After the expected split did not materialize at the 1959 Synod Convention, the number of defections increased. Consider the letters of resignation and withdrawal from the Wisconsin Synod that passed the desk of President Lenz from July, 1958 to April 1960:

- 1) Pastor George Barthels, former President of the Minnesota District, withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on July 24, 1958 along with 90 members of the St. John's, Red Wing, congregation.
- 2) Teacher Alvin Sieg, St. John's, Red Wing, withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on August 15, 1958.
- 3) Teacher Walmar R. Voigt, St. John's, Red Wing, withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on August 18, 1958.
- 4) Professor Martin Galstad withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on August 24, 1959.

- 5) Pastor Rollin A. Reim withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on August 25, 1959.
- 6) Pastor Roland A. Gurgel withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on September 11, 1959.
- 7) Pastor Egb. Schaller withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on October 23, 1959.
- 8) Pastor Paul F. Nolting withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on December 3, 1959.
- 9) Pastor H. C. Duehlmeier withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on April 20, 1960.
- 10) Pastor L. W. Schierenbeck withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on April, 24, 1960.
- 11) The majority of the 578 members of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Austin, Minnesota, voted on April 24, 1960 to withdraw from membership in and fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, and
- 12) Pastor Elton Hallauer withdrew from membership for conscience reasons on April 25, 1960.³⁶

By the July 1960 District Convention, the on-going dispute with the Missouri Synod had caused much dissension in the Minnesota District. Pastor Lenz had been President of the Minnesota District for less than six years and had witnessed the departure of twelve pastors, one professor, two teachers, parts or all of five churches, and at least 2500 members. It had to be heartbreaking for him to witness this tide of resignations and departures-- all of which were under his care as the President of the District, and some of which were very dear to his heart on a personal level.

One can only assume that these events weighed heavily on his soul. His wife,

³⁶ From the 1960 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 18,19.

Jonette Lenz, and his son Mark shared with me that there were certainly times when the stress was evident. He was human. He was running all over the state trying to settle disputes and heal festering doctrinal wounds. He had all the District concerns, a church of 600 in Montrose to pastor, and a young family under his care. At times, they recalled, he made it home totally exhausted. His son Mark shared with me that one evening President Lenz had to drive about an hour away to meet with a church that was having problems. He was too tired to go alone, and so even though Mark was only twelve or thirteen, his father asked him to ride along to keep him awake on the trip that night.³⁷

Professor Edward C. Fredrich, who wrote the Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District, commented in 1968 on the effect in the District of the years of turmoil with the Missouri Synod. His words certainly apply to what has been recounted in this paper as well: "The factual recitation of these events does not convey the difficulties and distresses they brought the District then, nor does that recitation have the power to connote the regrets and sorrows that have been occasioned since. Old fellowship ties were broken. Congregations were split. A score of workers, whose loss we could not spare, no longer labored with us. The ranks of the celebrants at this anniversary (in 1968) have gaps and the joy is dampened."³⁸

While the problems from 1956-1962 were huge, President Lenz encouraged the flock under his care with the message that what still was most important in those trying times was the message of Christ crucified and risen for sinners. That was the message of the most vital importance. In 1958, in the presidential report that opened the troubled 1958 District Convention, President Lenz spoke these words of encouragement:

We are met to consider, discuss, and deliberate upon things pertaining to the work of His church. These things may be grouped into two classes: doctrinal discussions and discussions of the work which is being carried on jointly.

³⁷ From interviews in March, 1998.

³⁸ From the Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History, p. 27 Parentheses mine.

Each of us is privileged to have a part in these discussions and in this work. How can we be assured of having a fruitful convention? How best can we promote the cause of Christ in our congregations, on our mission fields, and in our educational institutions? How can we resolve the burning issues which confront our church? How can we employ the gifts and opportunities which our Lord has entrusted to us? Let Christ have pre-eminence in all our thoughts, and plans, and actions! If there is to be evidence of His pre-eminence over His Church, collectively, He must have the pre-eminence in the individual hearts of His followers within His Church, in the hearts of every pastor who proclaims His Gospel, of every teacher who tells His little lambs that Jesus loves them, and of every layman filled with the love of Christ. May this be our greatest concern in that part of the kingdom work that God has granted to us...³⁹

Once the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod formally split in 1961, the problems that followed in the Minnesota District for the rest of President Lenz's terms must have seemed like few and far between. There were, of course, still problems over the next several years. For example, in 1962, the St. John's congregation of Buffalo, Minnesota and her 724 souls left for the Missouri Synod due to the break between Wisconsin and Missouri. In 1966, the pastor at Grace in Hutchinson, Minnesota was asked to step down after he excommunicated many members for what he perceived as communist activity. Also in 1966, the pastor and majority of 374 members at Redeemer in Amery, Wisconsin suddenly broke from the Wisconsin Synod and joined the Missouri Synod without explanation.⁴⁰ These and other cases were representative of what Pastor Lenz had to deal with over the next several years, but nowhere as many or painful as what he experienced during the years leading up to the break with the Missouri Synod when many congregations left and joined the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

³⁹ From the 1958 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 12,13.

⁴⁰ Figures taken from Minnesota District Proceedings and Synodical Reports for years mentioned.

Christian Education

One topic that President Lenz addressed many times and showed great interest in during his presidency and throughout his life was the area of Christian Education. One contributing factor most likely was that his home district was the district in which the synodical teacher- training college was located in New Ulm, Minnesota. During the presidency of Pastor Lenz, particularly in the mid- 1960's, there was a great deal of synodical discussion over what to do with the teacher training system. In some respects, the campus in New Ulm was very shabby. It was over-populated with too many students, and there was not much money that had been invested by the synod in the up-keep of the school. As early as the 1950's the quality of the teachers that came out from Doctor Martin Luther College was called into question.

Professor Fredrich wrote, "During the Fifties there developed in certain areas of the Synod a loss of confidence in D.M.L.C. The lack of teacher candidates was a nagging worry. The quality of the training was brought in to question; this was no doubt a misjudgment brought about by the fact that too many students were plucked from college classrooms and sent inadequately prepared into the classrooms of our day schools. The D.M.L.C. thinking seems to have been slow in adjusting to increased post-war demands in the number of candidates needed; in their defense be it said that the sponsoring body never even satisfied their modest requests expressed in terms of a 500 enrollment."⁴¹

In 1962, President Lenz strongly supported a proposal that a building project be begun at D.M.L.C., and at the 1964 District Convention he drew attention to the fact that the Minnesota District had undertaken a study of the poor facilities in New Ulm. He stated,

A special convention was called on October 24,

⁴¹ From the Minnesota District's Golden Jubilee History, p. 25

1962, at St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, Arlington. Committee No. 16... was asked to meet prior to that day for preliminary work on the subject. They did valiant service and saved us much time. Their report called attention to the cramped facilities of Dr. Martin Luther College, to the critical and pressing need for a comprehensive building program here, to the sad fact that many applicants could not be accepted- despite a critical shortage of teachers- and recommended that the Synod now give priority to supplying the needs as recognized and resolved already in 1959. A Memorial was addressed to the Synod reflecting these thoughts."⁴²

There was a flurry of activity at subsequent Minnesota District Conventions as the Wisconsin Synod decided what path they were going to take in regard to D.M.L.C. President Lenz was always a strong proponent that the Synod needed to invest effort and finances into the worker training schools and make them strong, and this included support of Northwestern College as well. All too often as the District President he had to fill out call sheets for congregations. There were far too many vacancies of pastors and teachers in the District and in the Synod at large. Smaller congregations were often forced into sharing a pastor between them where it had not been necessary in the past.

It was obvious that changes needed to be made in the training of called workers in the Synod. In his presidential activity report at the 1960 District Convention, President Lenz reported that he wrote over 100 call lists of pastors and teachers.⁴³ At Convention in 1964 he wrote, "A high of 17 pastoral vacancies and 25 teacher vacancies was recorded at one time. The search for suitable names and the matter of providing lists for this record number often consumed many precious hours."⁴⁴ At the 1966 convention he said, "It must be noted that never in the history of our District have there been so many vacancies in our congregations, and some of these have extended over a long period of

⁴² From the 1964 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 15.

⁴³ From the 1960 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 13.

⁴⁴ From the 1964 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 15.

time.”⁴⁵ And then in 1970 he reported, “The task of giving advice to congregations in the matter of providing lists for the calling of pastors by vacant congregations deserves some mention. There has been almost no let-up in this time-consuming responsibility. If it were not for confidence in the guiding presence of God’s Holy Spirit, it could have been a frustrating experience. In this respect we have much reason to be thankful for the Lord’s goodness...”⁴⁶

Obviously as a District President he saw the great need to stress Christian Education for the good of the District and of the Synod. President Lenz felt all along that God had blessed the Wisconsin Synod with bright young men-- they just needed to be encouraged and supported to become pastors. In a portion of his address to the District Convention in 1966, he said, “Well, we have the boys. I do not know that other churches have brighter boys than God has given us... All we need is to devote more of them to the work!”⁴⁷

President Lenz was very concerned that the Synod and the District strive very hard to support the kind of schools that they needed to produce the right number and also well-trained candidates for the teaching and preaching ministries. Against the desires of the Minnesota District, the Synod voted to open a second teacher training school in Milwaukee. Professor Fredrich candidly remarked, “This venture seems to have been fostered in part by two dubious suppositions: one, an educational version of the old saying, believed only by lovers and lunatics in the fiscal field, that two can live as cheaply as one and secondly, the notion that the best way to cure an educational problem is build another school. By 1964 a special committee recommended that D.M.L.C. be converted into a junior college and a new senior college be erected in Milwaukee.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ From the 1966 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 16.

⁴⁶ From the 1970 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 18.

⁴⁷ From the 1966 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 14.

⁴⁸ From the Essay, “The Minnesota District’s First Fifty Years” by Edward C. Fredrich. Given at D.M.L.C. on July 29- August 1, 1968, p. 25.

Rather than scrapping the college at D.M.L.C. and moving elsewhere, President Lenz and the Minnesota District were in favor of just improving the campus that they already had. Certainly too some regional pride would have been involved in wanting to keep the college in the District, but more than that, the campus in New Ulm was still capable of producing solid teachers-- as future years would bear out-- but it just needed recruitment and support from the Synod. Professor Fredrich wrote, "The school and the District were relieved when in 1965 the Synod voted to retain D.M.L.C. as a four-year college and erect a junior college in Milwaukee. In 1967 this decision was re-affirmed."⁴⁹

The District was also very pleased in the following years as the Synod improved the campus in New Ulm with the addition of several new buildings-- the Music Hall, Hillview Hall (a dormitory), Luther Memorial Union, and an enlargement of the Administration Building. With his own interest in Christian education, President Lenz must have been pleased that the Synod showed renewed interest in the support and upkeep of the teacher training school.⁵⁰

Later years of Presidency

The final three terms of President that Pastor Lenz served appear to be just as busy as the earlier terms during the dispute with the Missouri Synod. His District correspondence reached such a high level that over five hundred letters were written every year. He reported that over 10,000 miles were logged annually on the road in District business, and that he was away from home in the final few years for roughly 80 days per year. There were also, of course, the call lists to draw up and disputes and problems that had to be settled on occasion in the district. Added to his District responsibilities was the fact that he was elected Second Vice- President of the Wisconsin

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 25

⁵⁰ From interview in March, 1998.

Synod in 1969. Much time and energy was also spent by President Lenz as the Minnesota District celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1968. He also still was the Pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Delano, Minnesota.⁵¹

Despite the break between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod, and also that many churches left the District to become part of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the Minnesota District experienced by God's grace a steady growth in membership during the years that Pastor Lenz was President. When he became President in 1954 there were 57,345 souls in the Minnesota District. When he left in 1972, there were roughly 59,500 souls in the District. In spite of all the disputes and departures, despite all the concerns over teacher and pastor shortages, God blessed the Minnesota



Pres. M. J. Lenz concluded 18 years of service as District President.

District through the capable leadership of President Lenz.

In 1972, the Minnesota District as incorporated in the reorganized Joint Synod in 1918, was 54 years old. For fully one third of those 54 years, for 18 years, Manfred Lenz had served as the District President. In fact, 1972 marked the thirtieth year of District service for Pastor Lenz. In 1942 he had first served as the Assistant Secretary of the Minnesota District, and continued to faithfully serve for the next thirty years. By 1972, President Lenz decided that he had served as President for long enough. Before the vote was to take place for the Presidency of the District that year, Pastor Lenz spoke these words:

Before the nominating ballots for the election of the president are passed out, permit me to make a statement. I sincerely hope that I will not be misunderstood. I do not

⁵¹ Information for this paragraph taken from Minnesota District Proceedings for the years 1968, 1970, and 1972.

mean to be so presumptuous as to imagine that the district would elect me to the presidency for another biennium. The Lord has permitted me to serve Him and His church as district chairman for nine terms... He has graciously granted me health during these many years of service. For this I am deeply and humbly grateful. However, I shall be pleased if you were now to elect another man to this office.⁵²

The District complied, and for the first time in nearly twenty years the Minnesota District had a new President-- Pastor Gerhard Horn was elected to succeed Pastor Lenz.

The California Years 1973- 1985

Shortly after his retirement from the Presidency of the Minnesota District, Pastor Lenz received a call to serve a small mission congregation in California. After all the years in a District office, and all the administration and pressure of being District President, and all the years of serving a pretty large congregation and school, Pastor Lenz and his wife Jonette decided it was time for a change. Even though he had enjoyed very much what he had done and considered it a privilege to serve, he was eager to get out and, in a sense, start over. Mrs. Jonette Lenz shared with me that they were very excited to go to a totally new area like California. Pastor Lenz wanted to focus on just being a full- time parish pastor once again. He wanted to preach every Sunday. He wanted to do outreach in the mission setting. Pastor Lenz accepted the call to serve in Thousand Oaks, California and he and his wife moved there in 1973. The church was a small mission that had begun in 1968 and counted 82 souls on its roster.⁵³

Two years later, Pastor Lenz received another call to another mission in California and he accepted it. This time Pastor and Mrs. Lenz packed up and moved to La Mesa, California. The mission congregation there had been organized in 1966, and

⁵² From the 1972 Minnesota District Proceedings, p. 32.

⁵³ From interview with Mrs. Jonette Lenz in March, 1998.

there were 141 souls in the congregation when Pastor and Mrs. Lenz arrived there in 1975. Mrs. Lenz shared with me that the next six years that they stayed in La Mesa were some of the most enjoyable years that they spent together in the ministry. By God's grace, there were very few problems, which had to be very welcome for a former District President who had weathered the storm of the break with the Missouri Synod. They made wonderful friends and thoroughly enjoyed the time that they were there. Pastor Lenz was able to do what he had hoped for-- to preach every Sunday and to conduct mission work in the area.⁵⁴

In 1981, at the age of 68, Pastor Lenz retired from the pastoral ministry. He had faithfully served his congregations, his District, and his Synod for 42 years as a pastor, Secretary and District President. He and his wife, Jonette, remained in California for the next five years before they returned "home" to Minnesota to be near their family in May of 1985.⁵⁵

Reflecting on the years that Pastor Lenz spent as District President, a couple of things are very clear. First of all, he inherited the District Presidency during the most difficult period of time in the history of the Minnesota District and the Wisconsin Synod and served faithfully and well. Secondly, he had the faith in God and the strength of personality to carry on in these trying circumstances. I interviewed three people-- his widow, Jonette Lenz; his son, Mark Lenz; and Rev. Gerhard Horn, who served as Vice-President under Pastor Lenz, and then was his successor as President of the Minnesota District-- and asked them to comment on the qualities or characteristics in Pastor Lenz that helped him as he served Christ in congregations and in the District offices.

Several things stood out from the interviews. One was that Pastor Lenz was a faithful proclaimer of the Word of God. He knew the Word of God well, and was able to preach it and teach it equally well. His sermons were good solid Law and Gospel. One

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

of his strengths was in the area of homiletics in that he was an excellent preacher. He had a wonderful pulpit presence, a good sense of drama, and a natural ability to tell stories. He was blessed with a powerful memory and a booming voice that all were helpful in his sermon delivery. He was animated and innovative in the pulpit. He had a special gift of preaching in that he could really hold an audience spellbound by his message. His son Mark shared with me that he would ask questions of people during his sermons. He would stop, ask a question, and call on someone by name. It was something for which he became fairly well-known. Mark also shared with me that once while preaching in Saint Peter congregation in Saint Peter, Minnesota, Pastor Lenz became so animated that the pulpit he was preaching in began to tip over. Some of the elders that were seated there had to catch him and right him again, or he and the pulpit would have fallen completely over.⁵⁶

As a pastor he was very proactive-- willing to try out new ideas. He was an excellent teacher and sought out ways to help convey the message of Christ crucified. He used Easter Lilies in the form of a cross on Easter Sunday before it became popular to do so. He used palm branches on Palm Sunday, and on Ash Wednesdays it was common for him to give a gift like a cross to everyone. People came to expect that there would always be something special going on during Holy Week.⁵⁷

One very valuable attribute that Pastor Lenz possessed was that he simply loved people. He was curious and loved to talk to people. That attribute was augmented with the fact that Pastor Lenz had a very good sense of humor. He was able to put people at ease in his conversations, and make them smile. In his later years, Pastor Lenz was a member at St. John's Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minnesota. He loved to get to church at least a half an hour early so that he could greet people and speak with them

⁵⁶ From interviews with Prof. Mark Lenz, Mrs. Jonette Lenz, and Pastor Gerhard Horn in March of 1998.

⁵⁷ From interview with Mark Lenz in March, 1998.

when they came to church in the morning. His pastor, David Kolander, was very appreciative of this, since he was not always able to speak with and greet everyone as they came in and sat down. He even referred to what Pastor Lenz did as his “ministry” at Saint John’s church. Pastor Lenz was a man who thoroughly enjoyed people.⁵⁸

I was able to ask Pastor Gerhard Horn about Pastor Lenz’s gifts and strengths on a more professional level as one who had worked with Pastor Lenz in the Minnesota District for a number of years. He mentioned many of the same things that Mark and Mrs. Jonette Lenz did. Pastor Horn shared with me that President Lenz had a wonderful way of defusing tense situations when they arose. He was an excellent troubleshooter who put people at ease, and at the same time would never side- step the issue at hand. He dealt fairly with people and evangelically sought to heal whatever wounds had been made. Pastor Lenz was “sound in doctrine and practice” and had a touch with handling congregations and pastors in times of trouble. Pastor Horn said that he considered the example of President Lenz as a good source for his own term as president, and that he was able to learn a great deal from working with him.⁵⁹

There was another gift that Pastor Horn mentioned that belonged to Pastor Lenz that really had nothing to do with spiritual gifts at all, but was more of a physical gift. Pastor Horn told me that President Lenz was a very imposing figure and that he simply “looked like a District President.” President Lenz was a big man physically, and also very handsome. He had dark wavy hair, and with his presence, his big voice, and friendly personality, he just naturally seemed like someone you could trust, someone who was “what a District President was supposed to look like.”⁶⁰

Maybe the best way to summarize the gifts and strengths of Pastor Lenz is to say that he was a very talented man. He had an incredible memory that was able to recount

⁵⁸ From interviews with Mrs. Jonette Lenz and Mark Lenz in March, 1998.

⁵⁹ From interview with Pastor Gerhard Horn in March of 1998.

⁶⁰ From interview with Pastor Gerhard Horn in March 1998.

small details from decades earlier. He was handsome, and had a great love for people. He loved the work he did and the people that he served. He was a diligent worker. He had a relaxed and steady personality. He was an excellent teacher and preacher of the truth of God's Word. The Lord richly blessed Pastor Lenz with many gifts that served him well in the preaching ministry, and Pastor Lenz put those talents into good use for the glory of God's kingdom.

Retirement Writings

Pastor Lenz once wrote about the different ambitions and goals that he had while growing up as a young man in rural Minnesota. He wanted to work a combine or other farm equipment, or be a mechanic, or a doctor. He wrote that story as a 76-year-old man looking back on life. His ambitions had changed while growing up-- he had become a pastor instead. He then closed that paragraph with a passage that was quoted in the introduction of this paper: "No, I never became a mechanic, doctor or artist, and when I am gone no monument will mark the spot saying, 'Here lies a great man.' My secret ambitions are history now, but I hope someone, someday, will say, 'You have helped me to see Christ.'"⁶¹

Only God knows for how many people that is the truth. Only He knows how many people were strengthened or brought to faith through his servant, Manfred Lenz. In researching this paper, Mrs. Jonette Lenz handed to me three files full of sermons that dated all the way from 1944 to 1993. After spending some time in them, it is easy to see that Pastor Lenz was an excellent writer who brought out the truth of God's Word in an interesting and timely fashion. I was very impressed at how well the sermons were constructed, and how well the illustrations and applications were presented. Certainly

⁶¹ From "My Secret Ambitions" in Homespun Homilies.

thousands of people were blessed through the written and spoken words of Pastor Lenz throughout his ministry.

I would like to focus, though, on the writing that Pastor Lenz did while he was retired. He liked to say that he was “still active in retirement,” and that is especially true of the writing that he did. He still wrote sermons in his retirements, because he preached fairly often in fact until about 1993. But in his retirement, Pastor Lenz also became involved in writing for the publication Link-Age, which was the newsletter of the Lutheran Home in Belle Plaine, Minnesota; and he wrote also for the prison ministry and the OWLS.

In his later writings one can see some of the aspects of his personality come out more clearly. This is true because the writing of Pastor Lenz in his retirement years was of a much more personal nature than in his years as Pastor and District Officer. The reason for this is that he now had a different audience and had a different purpose. He still wanted to convey the truth of God’s Word to the people-- that did not change. But in Link- Age for example, he was also trying to relate the past and help his peers recall some of the fond memories of the world in which they grew up. His stories were of a more personal nature, and there was less expounding on a text like in a sermon. His writings were to bring a smile to the faces of the elderly because he was one who could relate with their own experiences. He had been there with them, and used these shared experiences to share God’s Word with them. His writing for the prison ministry was more devotional, but he showed an amazing capacity for keeping his applications fresh and modern.

As I mentioned earlier, the personality of Pastor Lenz comes through in his writings in the later years very well. He had a wry sense of humor and his capacity for remembering the events of the past was astounding. As his sons, Mark and Greg, wrote in the introduction of Homespun Homilies, “In this small book some of the gems of wisdom our father imparted may be found. Written with a quick wit, a facile memory

and a deep grasp of Scripture, these true- life stories preserve timeless yet timely truths. The alert observations and modern applications belie the age of the author, perhaps. He is not living in the past to bemoan the present; rather, learning from the past to better the future. At any age, we can learn from him.”⁶²

One of my favorite selections from Pastor Lenz’s writing is a piece entitled, “Cow-ology.” While it is a bit long, I have decided to print it in its entirety because I think it is a good example of the writing he did in his later years. It calls up stories of the past, it shows his quick wit and sense of humor, his powerful memory, and his ability to make modern- day applications. It was originally printed in Link-Age in March of 1995:

My memory takes me back some sixty years to time spent at our seminary. The prescribed course of study included two strange branches of theology-- dogmatics and catechetics. These dealt with interpreting the teachings of our church and learning how to instruct our youth in the form of questions and answers. As students we cut from these words all but the first syllables and called these studies “dog” and “cat.” Dogmatics became just plain “dog” and catechetics became “cat.”

Recalling these abbreviations I would like to add another word to this farmyard group-- the cow. This word, plus the last part of theology which describes the school that prepared us for our religious vocation, quickly changes to “cow-ology.” I respectfully suggest that you add the study of it to your lives as members of the church. What do I mean by “cow-ology?” Be patient and you shall see.

We begin by going back a few more years to the place where I spent my youth. My father, a country pastor, also had other farm animals besides a dog and a cat. On the eleven acre church property was a small barn, just large enough for two cows and a team of horses. It also had a hay loft and a room for storing grain. One section of the lower level provided space for a buggy (later a car). There were two stalls for the cows. Each was occupied by either a Holstein or a Guernsey-- whichever he bought at an auction. I don’t remember ever seeing two of the same breed.

Dad would deposit a forkful of hay in front of each hungry cow before milking it. By the way, the hay was part of his salary contributed by the agricultural members. Not all of the hay was of top quality! Even as today, some gave grudgingly what they could spare-- often very little. We had our cheapskates then, too. Many a load contained a goodly

⁶² From Dedication page of Homespun Homilies.

portion of weed fodder-- thistles and burdocks with their prickly bracts. The pastor wouldn't know the difference, they thought. Not so the cow; she couldn't be fooled.

Let us concentrate upon just one cow-- that black and white Holstein in the first stall. She is beginning to eat. She takes a big mouthful of clover and you watch it disappear. She reaches for another helping. A thistle head happens to be in it. Carefully she noses it to one side, separating it from the good hay. A little later she disposes of a bit of burdock in the same way. And if you watch long enough, you will see her clear her crib of all but the weeds. Wise animal-- for from the good hay she devoured she produced the creamy milk that also provided wonderful butter and cheese for our large family. But if she refused to eat, sulking because she didn't like the weeds mixed with the hay, she wouldn't have been worth much.

By now you may begin to see how "cow-ology" is important in our lives. Let's apply a few of its lessons when we go to hear the preaching of God's Word. God has given that Word that it may bring food to the soul. It would be foolish to reject it because at times it comes mixed with weeds-- human weeds. And what are they?

Like a burdock it may be the person who stands in the pulpit. His voice, his gestures or lack of them, or even the way he builds his sermons may not be to their liking, and so they stay away from church and stop hearing the Word. How foolish! What if the hungry five thousand had refused the bread and fish which Christ miraculously provided because they didn't like the table manners of the disciples who served them-- no plates, no napkins, no chairs to sit on, no wet towel to wash their hands.

Another weed may be the unkind feelings people harbor in their heart against him whose call is to preach the word to them. He may have stepped on their toes- and some toes deserve to be stepped on- so they quit the church and look for a more liberal one. Would on who is dangerously ill refuse the medical help of a hospital because the doctor in charge had at some time offended him? How foolish.

A thistle may be a person's bitter feeling against a fellow member of his church. A family quarrel, an unkind word, or some trivial grievance may have made him dislike the member. He will not go to that church as long as his enemy does. How foolish! Will he someday refuse to enter heaven should the two meet at the pearly gates?

The cow shows more sense. She does not reject the hay because a few weeds come with it. She simply separates the weeds from the good food and gets along just fine. And a wise Christian will not allow any "weeds" to rob him of the food his soul needs. All weeds will be pushed aside so that his soul may feed upon God's Holy Word and that he may grow in faith.

And that is what we mean by cow-ology." Maybe some of us need to take a special course in it.

Rev. Manfred J. Lenz

New Ulm, Minnesota
“Still active in retirement.”

Pastor Lenz actively continued to write throughout his retirement years for Link-Age, for The Living Water, a publication for institutional ministries, and for Not by Bread Alone, a publication of the OWLS. He also became a favored speaker at OWLS Conventions.

By the middle of the 1990's, Pastor Lenz, while still doing a good share of writing and even preaching, began to have difficulties with his health. He informed his wife on June 5, 1993, that he felt very tired. The following day, a Sunday, he preached in Fairfax, Minnesota. After he got home, he had problems catching his breath, and decided to go to the hospital. Doctors diagnosed that he had suffered a heart attack, probably on the day before. At the end of the month, he underwent a successful quadruple bypass in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He recovered completely over the next several months.

Over time, Pastor Lenz also began to have knee problems. He moved around with more and more difficulty. Following medical advice, it was decided that he needed to have both of his knees replaced. His first surgery was in September of 1994, and he recovered from that surgery in time to have some surgery on his nose for skin cancer two months later. He recovered from both procedures very well.

The second knee replacement surgery was performed in early August of 1995. While recovering from the second knee surgery, Pastor Lenz suffered a heart attack and the Lord called him to his eternal home on the night of August 9, 1995. He was 82 years old. Pastor Jeffrey Bovee of Saint John's Lutheran Church preached the funeral sermon based on the text of 2 Timothy 4:6-8, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (NIV)

After the busy time of his surgery, and then unexpected heart attack, it was soon discovered that Pastor Lenz had just written a devotion for The Living Water, and the completed manuscript still lay on the desk of his study-- ready to be mailed off. His final "story" of many hundreds that he wrote throughout his ministry, was based on the Gospel of John 1:29, "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'" Pastor Lenz spoke in that devotion about the Passover lamb and its significance, and then how Jesus was the Passover Lamb for the sins of the world. He wrote these wonderful words of comfort, "Yes, John meant all of these things when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. He would become the Lamb that would suffer and die as a sacrifice for our sins. His death on the cross was no accident. God, in love, planned it that way. It would take away the sins of the world. O what goodness and grace are shown here. All sins of the world- past, present, and future- without exception, are paid for by the Lamb of God, Jesus, our Savior." And then, almost as if he knew this would be the last devotion that he would pen, he concluded: "May we look to him in faith as our own Savior and say,

Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Amen."⁶³

As a servant does, Pastor Lenz followed the command of his Lord-- Jesus bid him come, and he followed to eternal life.

It is without a doubt that God blessed Manfred Lenz with a tremendous amount of talents. I don't know if there are too many District Presidents who could preach the opening sermon and then play the organ for the singing of the hymns. There is also no

⁶³ From The Living Water, vol.II, No.1, Fall 1995.

doubt that Pastor Lenz was a faithful steward of those gifts- not perfectly, of course- but one who used the many gifts that God gave him for service to his Lord. His greatest gifts were probably the gifts of communication that God gave to him-- his excellent preaching, and his enriching writing that he did for his sermons and many devotions.

It was his ambition in life to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and through that message to touch the hearts of people that they may “see Christ”. How fitting that the last devotion he wrote was such a beautiful exposition of the grace of God—that he gave up his one and only Son for the sins of the world. How fitting that his final writing was the same message that he proclaimed for over four decades as a servant of Christ. How many hearts he touched is for God to know, but certainly the legacy that Manfred Lenz left behind is still living in the hearts of very many in the Minnesota District and in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Many are better off, myself included, for the wonderful stories that he told of his Savior Jesus.

Pastor Lenz said, “...I hope someone, someday, will say, ‘You have helped me to see Christ...’” That, Pastor Lenz, you certainly did.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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