

THE DIFFERENT METHODS USED  
IN TRAINING  
OUR SYNOD'S WORLD MISSIONARIES

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HOW THE EMPHASIS HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

Church History

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As we look back in our Synod's history to 1883 when President Bading appointed a committee of five men, "that was to look over the existing mission societies for one of the true faith and successfully operating and lend it our support."<sup>1</sup> The committee consisted of Pastors Brenner, Ph. Koehler, J. Brockman, Dowidat, and Dammann. The committee was unable to find an existing mission society that met these requirements. They were then instructed "to look for young men of true piety, willing, and according to human judgement able, to devote themselves to the service of the mission among the heathen. These are to be trained in our educational institutions for the mission service, and the moneys available to us for mission work devoted to that purpose."<sup>2</sup>

We can notice already in this statement that the selecting of the world missionaries would be entirely different from what we are accustomed to thinking. These men were to be trained in our educational institutions for their mission service. By 1889 three men had been chosen--Johann Plocher, from Wuerttemberg, G. Adascheck from Austria, and Paul Mayerhoff. Plocher and Adascheck were enrolled at Northwestern after they were chosen and Mayerhoff volunteered for this task after his junior year at Northwestern. We would think that these men were given many years of special training for this work among the Apache Indians. However, that is not the case. The only thing that distinguished these

men from their classmates in their preparation was the fact that they did not pay for their schooling or their room and board. The feeling was that preparing for heathen-mission work required special sacrifice and consecration.

One glaring flaw that we should note was the pietistic attitude present at this time toward mission work. It was widely thought that we were not really carrying out the Great Commission unless we were engaged in some heathen mission work. The zeal of our forefathers to spread the Gospel to the Apache Indians long before Arizona was even a state--yes, even before the Indian uprising problem was completely eliminated--must be admired. We also have to agree with Dr. Hoenecke's objection to this idea of heathen mission work. We can surely fulfill the Great Commission in many ways. That it has to be done among totally heathen groups or areas is not a part of the Commission. Nevertheless, the Lord blessed the efforts of these early men and used them to great advantage in spreading His Word among the Apache Indians..

In 1893 Plocher and Adascheck completed their schooling and, after a brief tutoring by the church extension superintendent, Mayerhoff (Sr.), they went to the San Carlos (Southern) Apache Reservation. Adascheck left Arizona to return to Iron Ridge, Wisconsin in 1896. He had still acquired very little knowledge of English and had no desire to learn Apache. Plocher lasted somewhat longer--until 1899.

He had to leave because of his wife's health.

In 1893 Mayerhoff was called to Fort Apache (Northern) Reservation from his first parish at Savannah, Illinois. This quiet, reserved man proved to be a great success among the Indians. He made his camp on the east fork of the White River and began his work at the government school. He had an unusual knack for picking up the Apache language--a language many men have never been able to master after many years. Before long he was able to speak both Apache dialects--something the Indians themselves could not do. It took Mayerhoff three week-long journeys to cover his entire field. He was trusted as no other white man at that time. The United States government also recognized this and recognized him as THE expert in Apache culture and language. He became disheartened after ten years of working all alone in this desolate mission field, however, and went back east. It was suggested by J. P. Koehler that Mayerhoff's linguistic abilities be put to use in tutoring missionaries in Apache and translating portions of Scripture. This idea was rejected because of its impracticality at this time.

Meanwhile other men came to Apache land for various lengths of time. Most did not last long. One entered the government service, one moved North for his health, one came back east, and one was killed by a runaway horse. In spite of these setbacks, when Pastor Bergeman went on an

inspection tour of the mission about this time he found things all right and encouraging.

In 1904 J. F. G. A. Harders went to Arizona to seek relief from his sore throat. His work surely proved to be a blessing among the Apaches! He wrote three Indian novels. Pastor Harders made a special trip to the Seminary in November 1916 and "pleaded with the third class students for some volunteers, because he himself was not well, a teacher at the Mission School in Globe, where Harders lived, suffered a nervous breakdown, and at Peridot was a vacancy when Pastor Carl Toepel accepted a call to Wisconsin."<sup>3</sup> Third year student Alfred M. Uplegger was one of the four volunteers and was called to be Harders' assistant. This seems, at first sight, to be a natural, quick and easy way to learn this new culture of the Apache. However, it was not to be. Harders "got worse with throat tuberculosis...I was with him from January 9th to April 13th only, when he passed away. And he gave me no pointers or advice nor warnings."<sup>4</sup>

Pastor Uplegger also relates the other missionaries who arrived at some of the various Apache stations at this time did not receive any special training or tips, either. They were only told to learn the language. Pastor Uplegger agrees this was very important and many of the missionaries did make efforts to do this, but it was entirely on their own. "There were no books, Indians did not write their own language, they knew nothing about grammar, nothing about

the conjugation of verbs; their own understanding of the English language was so very meager."<sup>5</sup> The Indians often did not know the meaning of the words they were trying to use. This made the missionaries' jobs all the more difficult. They were trying so hard to understand them and making every effort to bring the Gospel to the Apaches. Pastor Uplegger relates how they were "thrown into the sea of mankind, and forced to swim, even against the current! But Isaiah 55 became true here also."<sup>6</sup>

It was this situation that the father of the above mentioned Missionary Uplegger, Doctor Francis Uplegger, walked into in 1920. Dr. Uplegger came to Apacheland with a great wealth of experience. He had graduated from Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, in 1891 after studying under Walther, Stoeckhardt, and Franz Pieper. "But even there he did not have any special studies or preparation for the foreign mission activity. I believe it was generally thought that the Gospel would find its way to the hearts of the heathen as long as it was presented in love and above all in full confidence of the truth of it."<sup>7</sup> He vicared for two years in the northern woods of Wisconsin near Auburndale and Stevens Point. It is reported he often tramped twenty miles through knee-deep snow to bring the Gospel to these scattered settlers. He was ordained at Hermanfort, Wisconsin in 1891 and served congregations near Gillette, Shawano, and Gresham, Wisconsin. Here he made acquaintance

with the Potawatome Indians and testified of Christ's love for them. Leading members of the LAST OF THE MOHICANS (also called Stockbridge Indians from the Gresham area were frequent callers at his home. His son Alfred states, "But my father did not learn their language, except a little from conversation."<sup>8</sup> He learned to preach in Norwegian and was called to a congregation at Elsinore, Denmark. From there he was called to Hayes, Wisconsin; then Hamburg, Germany; Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan; Greenville, Wisconsin; Newtonburg, Wisconsin; and in 1916 to the Lutheran High School at Milwaukee to serve as its director. After all these years of varied experience and acquaintance with all kinds of people, the Lord caused him to accept a call to Apache-land in November 1919 at the age of 52 years to be missionary at large.

Pastor Uplegger did as all the missionaries had been admonished: he studied the language. "He studied daily-- on horseback, in the Indian camps, at home, in the church, with various interpreters, held meetings with them, taught them to see the evangelical doctrine in the Word, and became an authority on the Apache language, even by the Indians own testimony, so much so that he formed Apache terms for spiritual terms of Scripture, like Justification, Sanctification, etc. The Apache lends itself to agglutination. Concrete words are built up on word stems with prefixes, suffixes, insertions, so that Apache is in some respects

like Greek and German. He showed me and others the God-given logic and beauty of their grammar."<sup>9</sup> He tried very hard to get all the other missionaries to meet regularly for the study of the language, but most of them gave up. It was just too difficult. The Indians were becoming more and more learned English, though, and the need of learning Apache decreased to the point where now the missionaries try to encourage the Apache to hold on to their language so the Indians do not forget it altogether. At the time Dr. Uplegger came it was a welcome relief for the Apache to hear someone in their native tongue. They were seeing Spanish and English terms creep into their language--really watching their language be destroyed--when Dr Uplegger came and preached to them in "classical Apache".

Dr. Uplegger was known as IVNASHOOD HASTIVHN--the old gentleman missionary. He surely was that. His Apaches were so dear to him. When he received news that an Indean was sick or hurt he would climb on his spirited bay mare and go through river bottoms, mesquite thickets, rocky hills, and stony canyons to get to them with the Water of Life. He simplified and translated Luther's Small Catechism and made a simple hymnal and liturgy book that the Apache could understand. He wrote twenty-five Apache Christian hymns and printed many on large charts placed in the front of the church so all could read them during the service.<sup>10</sup> He gathered twenty-eight hymns into a hymnal called Red Man



and White Man in Harmony--Songs in Apache and English by Francis J. Uplegger.<sup>11</sup> He also compiled a large dictionary of the Apache language.

We have seen quite a change in the emphasis used in training our world missionaries. From that first beginning of choosing men as they entered Northwestern College we now call men from the field or assign candidates on Call Day. There is not much time for advance preparation or special training for this field, but if we have the basic principles of Law and Gospel firmly in hand we can build from there. We must not forget all the other training we have received, either, as this all is very helpful in some way no matter where we are called to spread the Word. This change in emphasis or method of choosing men is a great improvement. It is terribly difficult to choose freshmen in college for this task. When we think of the temptations that must have confronted these men during their studies: "If I quit I will be turning my back to the plow", "I must be pretty special to be picked for this task years before my classmates have any idea where they will go", and countless other temptations had to make this situation not the most desireable. We must also be careful how harsh we are on these men in their first world mission efforts. Their zeal must be admired. Even today we should not try to blame "the system". As Pastor Alfred Uplegger states, "our seminary must not be blamed for lack of mission training for those called into the mission

fields."<sup>12</sup> I am sure Pastor Uplegger would agree with me in saying it is much better now than ever before. While we do not want to rest on our laurels, we have so much to be thankful for. May we all appreciate the fine, well-rounded training we receive at our synod's schools. It has given us that solid foundation preparing us for whatever field we may find ourselves.

<sup>1</sup>John P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, (St. Cloud, MN: The Protestant Conference, 1970), p. 198

<sup>2</sup>ibid, p. 198

<sup>3</sup>Alfred M. Uplegger, letter of March 4, 1975 to myself, p.2

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p.2

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p.2

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 2

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 2

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 2

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 3

<sup>10</sup>Alfred M. Uplegger, The Apache Lutheran, Vol XXXII, No. 10 October 1964, p. 7

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 7

<sup>12</sup>Uplegger, letter, p.3

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