

INTERVIEWS REGARDING THE INFLUENCE OF PASTOR WALTER STROHSCHNEIN'S  
MINISTRY

By

Peter Kesting

CH3031

Professor Korthals

December 12, 2005

Pastor Walter Strohschein was loved; Pastor Walter Strohschein was hated. This pastor of a small community in Central Wisconsin certainly saw many problems: controversies, rivalries and building projects. He also saw God's word working in the hearts of many. As difficult as things may have been for him and as tempting as it might have been to give in and take the path of least resistance, he stuck with what he knew was right from God's Word. It was with this attitude that he had an influence on many people and the following interviews emphasize that fact.

Pastor Strohschein was actually called to St. John's well into his ministry yet he was their pastor for 33 years. When he entered he was immediately presented with some problems. The largest problem that he encountered was scouting. When he arrived, he discovered that Philip Lehner, the president of the congregation and the mayor of the town, was also the Boy Scout's troop leader. This conflict ultimately led to the excommunication of Mr. Lehner.

Philip Lehner has passed away and hence was not available for interview. Yet, his wife Ruth Lehner is still alive at the age of 92. One thing that was discovered during the interview is that some wounds heal very slowly and sometimes don't even heal after more than 50 years. When Ruth was interviewed she had many difficulties talking about that particular issue and even talking about Pastor Strohschein in general. The interview itself was not as beneficial as had been hoped. Yet some information was gained from this interview, that it was a very difficult thing. So difficult that even after 50 years the subject was sensitive and brought back unpleasant memories for Ruth, memories of a split from her husband and having to go to a different church than him.

Even though Mrs. Lehner had received the questions for this interview through the mail beforehand she admitted to not having reviewed them. When the questions had been reviewed

with her before the taping, it became obvious that they were painful questions. As it is recorded in the tape, even before the interview formally began she apologized for not being able to give what was wanted. So it was agreed that the questions would not involve the problems that happened between Mr. Lehner and Pastor Strohschein. When asked about Pastor Strohschein's personality she basically related that he was not very tactful and quite blunt. She was able to relate that her relationship with Pastor Strohschein was not very personal and she was not very close to him. Also it was her belief that many in the congregation had mixed feelings for him. Once again, it may seem like this interview was not very fruitful, but one thing became evident, this was a difficult thing and very real for the people involved. It seems everywhere he went he did leave an impression, even though for some it was a negative one.

The second interview took place with Pastor Strohschein's wife, Bernice Strohschein, age 96. This interview provided many details that gave great insight into the life of Pastor Strohschein. The greatest insight into the feelings, the hopes and the fears of Pastor Strohschein were given in great detail by Bernice through personal experience. When she was asked about his personality she responded by saying that he was quite a comedian. Even when his mind started to go he was still able to joke with people. Also it is interesting to note that even when his mind started to go the Scriptures still remained with him and daily prayer was always an essential part of his life.

It was this personality of joking and being minded to God's Word that Mrs. Strohschein attributes to being his greatest attribute. Yet, she attributes his soft-heartedness as his greatest weakness. Yet, at the same time that was probably the most endearing character to Pastor Strohschein. He was very rugged and gruff in his outward appearances, yet problems could get to him and as much as he did not reveal his emotions he certainly was emotional in the privacy

of his own house. That is most likely the reason why he was so liked in the congregation, which numbered over 1000 souls, and also the reason for those who never saw his soft side why they disliked him.

Over a thousand souls and there was only one pastor. At this time that would be hard to think of, but this sort of job and situation seemed to suit him well. Mrs. Strohschein made it very evident that Pastor Strohschein did not know the definition of the word, delegate. He did everything by himself with the help of his wife.

After that discussion Mrs. Strohschein told some stories about Pastor Strohschein's decision to go to Princeton. It was very interesting to hear about the personal struggle that it was for them to leave the congregation in Dundee, Wisconsin. This was a congregation that they had built from the ground up and had known for nineteen years. Mrs. Strohschein said that they were not entirely aware of exactly what they were getting into. Yet, it was obvious that Pastor Strohschein was known as someone who had a hard skin and was not easily bullied. He would hold fast to what he knew was right from God's Word. It seems that this was the reason that he was called, and as Mrs. Strohschein said a delegation of pastors came and told him that he had to go to Princeton. St. John's, Princeton would have been a very different congregation than what he had served. St. John's was a large congregation and he must have known that this call would involve big church problems. The delegation of pastors itself must have been a warning to him that his strong presence was needed in this congregation and that problems were awaiting him there.

It's at this point that Mrs. Strohschein began to talk about the problem that was awaiting him in Princeton when he got there. As she puts it, Princeton was full of Scouts. They had encountered this problem already in Dundee so the problem with the Scouts was not entirely

new. The problem was that the previous pastor let this problem of the Scouts go unhindered. The other issue that was prevalent in his early ministry in Princeton was the building of a school. As Mrs. Strohschein succinctly put it, "As a whole the school was built, the scouts were dropped." In other words, Pastor Strohschein came in and took care of business.

Mrs. Strohschein related that the most difficult part of Pastor Strohschein's ministry was the difficulty with the Scouts. This problem was very big in this little town as later Pastor Pless identifies. Mrs. Strohschein remembers people coming over to their house and shouting at her husband. The end result of this dispute was that the president of the congregation, Mr. Philip Lehner would be excommunicated for his refusal to resign his position as the local Scout leader. As well as Mr. Lehner several other members left the church. Reportedly this dispute never got to the personal level between Pastor Strohschein and Mr. Lehner, there was no hatred between them but they were both determined individuals who refused to back down from their positions. The difference between them was that Pastor Strohschein's position was based on Scripture and God's Word. It is very interesting also to note the difficulty that this had on both Pastor Strohschein and his wife. As it was noted earlier, Pastor Strohschein really was softhearted. This issue required a very hard shell and it took its toll on him. It was so difficult for them that it caused them to have to go to Fond du Lac to receive medical shots to calm their nerves.

The scouting incident was not the only noteworthy event that happened in Pastor Strohschein's ministry. Next Mrs. Strohschein commented on what he enjoyed most about his ministry. Simply it was spreading God's word. It is really quite amazing to see this driving force of sharing God's Word influence and direct his life. Even as a youth just beginning high school he was determined that this is what he wanted to do. Even though his parents encouraged him to be a blacksmith due to his physical stature, he could not be deterred from studying to

entire the ministry. Even the lack of financial support was not able to stop him from reaching his goals. He had a goal in mind and could not be dissuaded and that goal was the sharing of the gospel.

Even when he became elderly and he retired, the gospel ministry was still an important part of his life. He visited shut-ins and preached once a month. Yet once again due to his tender-heartedness, which perhaps only Mrs. Strohschein saw completely, he was not able to bring himself to preach his final sermon. He could not bear to say good-bye for the last time.

Mrs. Strohschein commented briefly on the lasting effects of her husband that are evident in the church and in the community. She said that basically he was very well liked. She commented on how this would make it very difficult for another pastor to follow him. This is true, years and years after Pastor Strohschein stopped being their fulltime pastor his members still remembered him. The negative side to this was that Pastor Pless, his successor, was under constant scrutiny and comparison. This was noticed even by the author during his vicarship, people would constantly refer to the different ways that Pastor Strohschein conducted ministry and would tell stories about his exploits. Certainly his ministry has had a large impact on many people in that small community of Princeton whether it is his strong preaching of the unalterable truth of God's word or through his sportsmanship.

The interview that was held with Mrs. Strohschein was highly productive. She was able to give an insight that no one else would be able to give, especially the anguish that resulted from the difficulties with scouting earlier in his ministry. At the age of 96 she was very capable of talking about her husband and retelling the major events of Pastor Strohschein's ministry. She gave a very interesting insight into the personal life of Pastor Strohschein.

Perhaps the next qualified person to talk about Pastor Strohschein was his long time partner in the ministry of sorts, Pastor Pless. As Mrs. Strohschein was able to give insight about the personal life of Pastor Strohschein, so Pastor Pless was able to give insights into the ministry of Pastor Strohschein. It is interesting to hear some of the same things that Mrs. Strohschein spoke of but only from a pastor's perspective.

One thing that Pastor Pless noticed about Pastor Strohschein's personality was that he was very direct. He 'called a spade a spade.' It is true that this is very important characteristic for someone who wishes to share God's Word. Sometimes it may be difficult because you have to say things that people do not like and do not want to hear; yet that is often the job of a minister of the Word. Of course that often made it difficult to work with Pastor Strohschein. Pastor Pless spoke of some anxiety about going to Princeton to follow in his footsteps and to work with him in his retirement.

While commentating on Pastor Strohschein's greatest weakness Pastor Pless basically said the same thing that Mrs. Lehner said, one of his weaknesses was that he wasn't always very tactful. Yet Pastor Pless also regarded as perhaps his greatest weakness his inability to delegate work and responsibility. Here Pastor Pless told a story about how Pastor Strohschein had over 21 church council members when he began and in a short period of time had whittled that down to 12 (one through excommunication). Now of course there is nothing really wrong with having only 12 council members, even with having over 1000 souls to take care of. Yet it was his personality to want to do things by himself. With such a large congregation this is really putting a lot of extra work and stress upon oneself. Having members more active would have made thing easier for him throughout the controversy with the Boy Scouts and might have alleviated

the need for him and his wife to go and get shots for their nerves. This would of course also get more members active and interesting the gospel ministry.

It was also very interesting to note how Pastor Pless saw his very bombastic personality. Even how he treated his wife in public was a reflection of his personality. Yet even though he was gruff, people could tell that that was not always his personality and that he had a pastor's heart. Pastor Pless recognized that at home some of the roles would be reversed and at home his wife would call some of the shots. It is interesting to note that his personality as gruff as it could be one could see that he was compassionate with people when compassion is needed. In that sense members did not avoid him when it came to sensitive issues, they recognized that he could be compassionate with them as well.

Pastor Pless expressed in this interview that Christian education was important to Pastor Strohschein. When he arrived there was a school, but it was a two-room building and there were over one hundred students. Rather than wait awhile for things to settle he made it a high priority to build a new school right away. This school still stands today and is being used by the congregation. Unfortunately the enrollment is at thirty students. Yet, when Pastor Strohschein saw a need for the sharing of the gospel he made sure it was done, and done in short order. This zeal for the Lord and for Christian education surely influenced the members of this congregation and in large part the members picked up on that zeal.

Perhaps one of the best ways that he led by example though was once again through his strong stand against the Boy Scouts. Once again the zeal that he showed for keeping God's Word and his strong respect for that word made an impression on that congregation. Even despite sever hardships, having people come to his house and yell at him, even though members dropped out he was not willing to budge on God's Word. Pastor Pless said that this had a large



impact on his members. When they saw his passion for God's Word they could not help but follow him in their zeal for the Word. Not only was his passion for God's Word evident to his members, but even to the whole community. They realized that Pastor Strohschein and St. John's Lutheran Church is a Biblical church that stands up for what they know is right and do not back down. Whether everyone saw this as a positive thing or not, it is not for sure, but that was impressed upon them.

Now as far as him being a sportsman he really did have a large influence in the community. Pastor Pless as a pastor was able to see how Pastor Strohschein would use something like fishing or hunting as a way of reaching out to people with the gospel. The Princeton community is situated near many good fishing areas such as Green Lake and outdoorsmanship is a large part of the community. This played well into his type of ministry outreach. He reached out to where the community was and he used that to reach out to them with the gospel and also to bring them into membership with St. John's. This is a very basic way of reaching out to people, coming to them where they are and sharing with them the gospel message and then let God's Word do its work in their hearts.

Pastor Strohschein's efforts and ministry are still seen today. His adherence to God's Word no matter how difficult it was is still evident in the members of this congregation. The members have strong convictions for keeping God's word. As far as the Scouting issue is concerned much of that controversy has died down over the expanse of over 50 years. Most people have forgotten the details of the excommunication and members leaving. Yet it is clear to the Boy Scouts in that community that the WELS and St. John's are against scouting. Pastor Pless made reference to an event that happened while the author was vicaring in Princeton. Boy Scouts were hanging empty bags on doors for a food drive that they would later come back and

pick up. Whether the Boy Scouts had sinister motives what they were doing or not is unsure, but the bag that they hung on the parsonage door was filled with garbage. Even after 50 years the Boy Scouts are aware of WELS standing and resent them for it. Certainly, Pastor Strohschein's ministry and his stance played a part in this.

Pastor Pless commented on really how big of a deal this was with the scouting. As this exact event is related in the book, "A Tale of Two Synods,"<sup>1</sup> the timing for this controversy was bad. It was the McCarthy era and the loyalty of many Americans was being brought into question. At this time the Boy Scouts were closely associated with American patriotism. When the WELS objected to their members being scouts many American's saw this as unpatriotic. When St. John's removed the Scouts from their congregation this was received as being very unpatriotic. It even got so bad that the local paper made wild accusations of communism. Unfortunately, the Milwaukee newspapers picked some of these articles up and what St. John's and Pastor Strohschein did in the little sleepy town of Princeton was soon statewide news. Pastor Pless states that this publicity that Pastor Strohschein got was probably the reason why he became the Northern Wisconsin District President.

Pastor Pless commentated on what was the most difficult part of Pastor Strohschein's ministry. He certainly acknowledged that the scouting issue was one of the most difficult parts of Pastor Strohschein's ministry, yet he thought that his leaving the ministry was also one of the most difficult things for him. Mrs. Strohschein commented on this also. For him to preach his officially last sermon was very difficult, in fact it was never done. It was also difficult for him to leave behind the ministry. He still preached and made visits. He had a hard time letting go of doing funerals for his members as Pastor Pless supposed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark E Braun, A Tale of Two Synods (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003)

Throughout these interviews many interesting things were seen concerning Pastor Strohschein. It was impressive to see how one person could make such a difference in so many people's lives and leave such a lasting impression on a church and community through his ministry. It is even more impressive what that impression was, an adherence to God's Word as the guide for life and a high priority for Christian education. There is so much that one can learn about the do's of ministry and even some of the don'ts from Pastor Strohschein. His rock hard perseverance and strong stand for the gospel is a model for Christians everywhere. His almost self inflicted wounds that he endured because he refused to let other do the work shows us the importance of finding help to avoid getting burned out. Everywhere he went he certainly was remembered for one reason or another. Pastor Strohschein certainly did have an influence on many people through his ministry.

## Transcripts

Interview with Mrs. Ruth Lehner.

Ruth Lehner: I'd like to help you out but its a touchy subject but as I say it is over and done with and I'd like to drop it because I have a very good relationship with everyone here at church and that is how I would like to keep it.

Interviewer: I'm sure at the time it must have been very difficult.

R: Yes it was.

I: Lets start our interview, I'm here with Mrs. Lehner and I here to talk about Pr. Strohschein and his ministry here in Princeton.

I: Could you briefly describe Pastor Strohschein's ministry?

R: He was very out going he was, its hard to describe it, he was not tactful.

I: How do you think that people responded to the way he was, not very tactful.

R: You are asking some hard questions, I think you better ask someone else that.

I: How was your relationship with Pastor Strohschein?

R: We got along, it could have been better.

I: Would you say he was a very caring person, or was it more that he didn't let it show.

R: You have some hard question. I couldn't really tell.

I: How do you think Pastor Strohschein affected this community?

R: He was not tactful, very much in the other way.

I: Do you think people were afraid of him in the community?

R: He was well known, but how they liked him I don't know. He wasn't a person you could really get close to.

I: So people were mixed in the community, so what would you say about in the church where the members mixed about him or were most of the people behind him?

R: He was our pastor, they accepted him, what else can you say.

I: Sometimes the members may not always enjoy their pastor, but everyone backed him?

R: Sure, he was their pastor and they backed him.

I: Well, I think this is about all, do you have any...

R: I'm sorry I can't give you what you would like to hear I just don't feel comfortable about it.

I: I can see where you are coming from.

R: Now with both you and Justin I get along just beautifully I'm so glad you are both here. I would like to have both of you, you are both good people, it has been a good relationship.

I: Maybe before we conclude the interview I was wondering if you had any stories about Pastor Strohschein funny stories that come to mind?

R: No, because I wasn't that close to him after this disruption.

I: Ok.

R: But I did not drop the church I stayed right with it. My girls and Mike followed their father, they went to the little white church here.

I: The Methodist church

R: It's now called the Terra Shores on the Lake.

I: Its ELCA.

R: Anyway, that's the church, they all went there then.

I: OK.

R: I'm glad I saw you but I can't give you what you want to hear.

## Interview with Mrs. Bernice Strohschein

Interviewer: Could you please describe Pastor Strohschein's personality briefly. Maybe you could talk a little how he was with people, his personality?

Bernice Strohschein: He liked to joke, he liked to sorta pull things over someone you know, that was really funny. They knew that, up until his dying day, we have a neighbor they moved to Florida they were on their way to go and he came in September, they left at the end of September and at the end of October he died. He kept his mind pretty well, as far as knowing people, he was never diagnosed with Alzheimer's but he showed traits of it. Except that he always knew everyone he never forgot. He never forgot his Scriptures, everynight we would have our prayers and he would end up with the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well this fellow said, "oh yeah you are the same old bluffer you always were."

I: Up to the end.

B: That's just the way he was. He loved... he was outgoing, he loved people.

I: That's good.

I: What was his greatest strength and his greatest weakness? Would you say his greatest strength was with Scriptures or with working with people?

B: That way, yeah.

I: Was it is personality

B: Yes it was his personality. He could get around people.

I: What was his greatest weakness?

B: He was very softhearted, he was outwardly he would be really a rough man he was not a pantywaist, he was rugged he was brought up on the farm, there were 12 in the family.

I: Where did he grow up.

B: Buffalo, Minnesota.

B: That's where he ended up, it was called Maple Lake. His weakness, he was very softhearted. Outwardly he was rough, but very soft hearted when it came down to it.

I: So things could really hit him. How would you describe the way he conducted ministry at St. John's, how was he like as a ministry?

B: He was very well liked. We had a big congregation, we had over a 1043 souls.

I: It was just him, that is a lot of people.

B: Yes.

I: Did he do a lot of work himself or did he delegate?

B: NO, he did not delegate at all.

I: He was very busy doing teaching youth and catechism, he did everything.

B: Yes the young people, he did everything he went roller-skating with them. He was all around. We didn't have a secretary or anything I was the secretary I kept the records and did the bulletin.

I: It's a different time now.

B: Oh yes.

I: What was his relationship with his members like?

B: In every congregation you have some people who are touchy they don't like this or don't like that, but overall I think he got along with everyone pretty well. We had a tough time when we came to Princeton he didn't want to come. They sent him the first call he sent it back, then they came with a delegation and talked him into it, and the president said, "You have to go to Princeton." So it was a very very hard go of it.

I: Why didn't he want to come?

B: He liked it where he was. We were there for 19 years and he liked it very much, we both did. And this was quite a challenge because this was a larger congregation and they wanted to build a school and some didn't want it and some did. Then he ran into the Scouts, oh they were awful there were Scouts all over the place and of course he stepped on that. And then he did make some enemies probably. I think we lost the president of the congregation, that was Mr. Lehner, Ruth's husband and maybe there were 4 or 5 who dropped out. As a whole the school was built, the scouts were dropped.

I: What was the most difficult part of Pr. Strohschein's ministry?

B: It was that struggle.

I: I have some more questions about that is that ok?

B: Sure you can question me.

- I: What were Pr. Strohschein's feelings toward the events in the 50's, did he take it personally?
- B: That started already in Dundee that issue came up in a conference among the pastors, but Princeton was full of Scouts and that pastor evidently thought it was alright.
- I: So he when he got here he had a lot of work ahead for him?
- B: He had to explain and explain and explain they would come to the house and holler and yell and everything but he stood his ground. And all the pastors around here they all agreed it had come up in conference and they also knew this congregation was full of Scouts and that was part of the reason they wanted him to come to Princeton.
- I: Maybe that was part of the reason why he was hesitant to come?
- B: I don't think he realized it; he had built a little church in Campbellsport and we were happy there.
- I: What were his personal feelings for Philip Lehner?
- B: He didn't hate him and I don't think Phil hated him either, they didn't agree.
- I: That's what it came down to and neither was willing to back down.
- B: Ruth never did quit, his children either, except young Lehner, he was brought up by his father, he had to do as his father said, he was a good kid.
- I: What do you think was the greatest impact of this conflict with the boy scouts? Maybe you already answered this, some members left, in the community was this very well known?
- B: Oh yes, Princeton was full of them, it was an upheaval.
- I: Did he receive a lot of criticism for this?
- B: He had broad shoulders, it would make him sick and it would make me sick. Once in a while we would go to Fond du Lac and get a shot for our nerves. They keep on and keep on, but he fought it through.
- I: Ok maybe we can talk about something else, what do you think he enjoyed most about the ministry?
- B: Well, he liked to spread the word of God, he was not suppose to be a minister his parents thought he should be a blacksmith. He was built sturdy that's what they thought he should do. He went to New Ulm, and stayed there probably a whole year or half a year and there was a mission festival and it was that pastor talking at that mission festival that



did the trick. The Lord must have put that thought into him that that is where he belonged and that is what he told his parents he was going to go to... I said New Ulm, I meant high school, then he told them he was going to go to New Ulm. They couldn't talk him out of it, he simply went they said if you go you are going to, his parents weren't wealthy, and he would have to fight his way through. And he said he will, which he did, and he didn't get any money from home. His mother would send him lots of bakery to eat and in the summer he would come home and work on the farm for his brothers and sisters he earned his own money. The first gift he got from his parents was his gown. So, that's what it was that mission festival.

- I: And really that's what he enjoyed most about the ministry, sharing the gospel.
- B: And he had a good way of doing it he would let some people take their time, if they would only come to church, just come just come and finally they would hear enough that they would take instructions.
- I: The gospel message did its job, would you say that the congregation grew when he was a minister
- B: Oh it grew.
- I: He was there for 30 years?
- B: 33 years then Pr. Pless came but he stayed on until he was 80 years old. He would make visits to the sick and shut-ins. He would preach once a month, but he never did preach his last sermon, Pr. Pless said, "you can preach in a chair," but he never did preach his last sermon, he was too soft hearted for that. All of a sudden he just said he can't anymore he had leg trouble he hurt all over and he finally just gave up.
- I: What do you think is the greatest lasting influence he had on the congregation, still seen today.
- B: I don't know what it was, I wish they wouldn't do it, but people always compare. 'Rev. Strohschein did it this way,' I don't like to hear that but they do.
- I: To this day this its been almost 30 years since he was their fulltime pastor so he did have a lasting influence they remember how he did this and that with the service.
- B: When he died they had a picture of him on the memorial card that you get. A picture on the front with his gown on and people tell me that they have that picture in their bedroom or someplace. It isn't fair but they keep on doing that and I don't like to hear that. I love Bob and I knew him since he was a baby and its not easy for him to run into things like that but he's pretty good about that. He shrugs it off but he and Bob's father were good friend.

I: Ok I have one last question, what do you think is the greatest lasting influence he has on Princeton, what influence on the community do you see still today?

B: Well, they just liked him.

I: They like his personality, it just sticks out.

B: He loved fishing and hunting, that was his second joy. He got a lot of sermon thoughts when he would fish by himself 'I just have to go out.' And when you have a lot of trouble when people are drinking and having family troubles and finally he got filled up and he said 'I just have to go out and fish' and he loved hunting

I: Well, thank you very much for answering these question.

B: Are you satisfied?

I: I have everything I need.

## Interview with Pastor Robert Pless

- I: We are here today with Pr. Pless, pastor at St. John's in Princeton and we are here to talk about Pr. Strohschein.
- I: What was the strongest characteristic of Pastor Strohschein's personality?
- P: He definitely had a personality. When you met him you remember him. Even when I had a call to Princeton people said, 'oh,' some people even offered me sympathy because he was such a strong willed person. And I think the pastors that knew him better than I did wondered if anyone could minister with him, because he was going to retire but still help out. He called a spade a spade. You know just where he stood.
- I: What was Pr. Strohschein's greatest strength for the ministry?
- P: Love for the gospel and you knew where he stood they didn't question that. He certainly had a love for the gospel and was a good preacher.
- I: Its good to be clear, what would you say is his greatest weakness?
- P: We all have weakness. Maybe he wasn't tactful all the time. He was more dependent on himself then what he should have been. He and my dad were good friends I think he had 21 members on the church council when he first got here. And when my dad talked to him he said that he gotten it down to 12 members and was still working on getting lower yet. So obviously there is nothing wrong with that but how much you use them, he was more do it himself and that obviously you have to get your counsel involved. He was one to do almost everything.
- I: Could you describe the preaching style and the way he ministered to people.
- P: He was very bombastic, fire and brimstone, a fist pounder. He was very compassionate with people sometimes that may not come out because of his personality. Sometimes he would be very gruff even with his wife sometimes he called her the old battle axe and she would just sit there like a little church mouse but I think when she got home the roles were reversed, he was very yes dear. That would show itself in his ministry especially when compassion was needed.
- I: What was Pr. Strohschein's greatest influence for the church?
- P: Shortly after he came, this all flows together, they were interested in building a new school. I don't know who it was involved with the call, they say don't go in there right way and change things, he was going to wait, but I guess, Christian education was important for him. And he had that church built in a blink of an eye. And we still use that church and it was built in '50 or '51 and just his stand on the gospel on the word. Once again the conflict he had when he got here and realized the Scouts were prominent in the congregation along with leaders. And I can't believe with his stand that didn't

have an influence on the members we stand by God's Word. We aren't going to let the world influence us. That was a big issue it hit the Milwaukee newspaper that was probably the reason he was elected the president of northern the Wisconsin district.

I: He took a stand when a lot of pastors turned a blind eye.

P: And that can't help but show itself to the members and once again say our guide is God's Word and that had an influence on the congregation.

I: How did his ministry influence the community?

P: Going back to the scouting, that showed the community that we are a Biblical church whether that influenced them or not it tells them something. A lot of his contact was, he was quite a sportsman as far as hunting goes. I don't know what his total kill would have been at one time he told me he had 50 by gun and 50 by bow and arrow and that would be a low number, they weren't all tagged.

I: Life total.

P: He was just saying that not only gun hunting but bow hunting, but he was very good, not only deer but also bear. I don't know how old he was, but he went hunting with a 20-year-old. I don't know who shot the bear, but like any wildlife you go over slowly and he tapped it with his bow, and the bear went "grr" and they both took off and he said, 'the young kid was ahead of me, but it wasn't long before I passed him.' Fishing and sometimes maybe he wasn't good at counting how many fish they had.

I: He was well known hunter here?

P: An archer, his daughter too.

I: What impact on this congregation is evident today?

P: Even to this day, I don't know how long its been 7 years, toward the end he wasn't ministering, but when I came he was helping on a part time basis. But you could tell there was people he had an influence on. Like adult confirmation maybe the wife was a member but the husband wasn't, we talked about his sportsman prowess, he worked though and would say 'lets go fishing lets go hunting' and that led to an information class, I guess a BIC class, I called them adult instruction. You still have some of those older people who recall 'yeah, he got my husband to join the church,' there are definitely some people too who still remember him.

I: Now in reference to the excommunication of Philip Lehner in the '50s have you witnessed any lasting influences of that to this day?

P: Not really, I'm out of that. I knew Mr. Lehner was involved, I didn't know he was excommunicated. His wife is still an active member of the church Mr. Lehner was an

attorney his son is an attorney in town and well I'm sure you experienced that too when you had an opportunity to minister to Mrs. Lehner. The only thing you have to be careful with the Scouting issue, I had a member come up to me and say he wasn't aware we were against the Scouts. Not a real active member, I gave him catechism. And, of course, we had that incident when you vicared here when they had a food drive and they put a bag with garbage in it and hung it on my door. Somehow that got back to them and we had a bunch of people here at my door apologizing. Some people realize that the WELS had this stand for scouting, as far as Mrs. Lehner, I think its just ignorance they just forget. I'm guessing 95% don't even know about the Lehner incident.

I: Maybe this ties in with the scouting thing, but what would have been the most difficult part of his life?

P: That had to be when he was going through the scouting issue because he hadn't been there too long. Here is where a strong personality helps out. I'm sure he didn't mince any words but when you are in a community with 1500 people I would guess back in those days the scouts were quite prominent and I imagine that would not be too easy.

I: Anything toward the ends of his ministry?

P: Well, not his ministry but he did lose a daughter early, 59 years old the one that took after him. I think simply bowing out of the ministry was tough for him. He was in his lower 70's when I came here I don't know how happy he was to have me come, because now he would have to relinquish the reigns. That was not easy for him or for me, I love the guy dearly I love the guy like peaches and creams but sometimes I would go home and pull my hair out. Sometimes I'd get a call from the funeral home when someone died, and Pr. Strohschein was there, who's the pastor here. His daughter was married to the undertaker and as soon as someone died she would call her dad and I wouldn't find out for 30 minutes later. We were almost opposites, personality-wise, I'm easy going, and he was just the opposite and that probably works because it seems when you have two guys of the same personality that problems come out. Still, even as gracious as I was, it sure was difficult for him because he certainly had a love for the ministry.

I: Ok.

P: Amen?

I: Thank you for helping me out.

Summary

Addenda A – Interview Transcripts

Addenda B – Various biographies and photos

Taken from the back of the bulletin celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ordination for Pastor Strohschein.

PASTOR WALTER L. STROHSCHHEIN

**Highlights of his Personal Life**

Pastor Strohschein was born in the town of Albion, Wright County, Minnesota, on March 2, 1905. After completing his grade school education at Immanuel Lutheran Christian Day School, he attended Dr. Martin Luther College at New Ulm, Minnesota, for his high school training; Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, for his college education; and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin, for his theological training, graduating from the Seminary in 1930. In November, 1930, he was united in holy wedlock with Bernice Oelke at St. John's Lutheran Church at Markesan. They have been blessed with two daughters, Carol (Mrs. John Hansen) and Corinne (Mrs. Herbert Wachholz).

**Highlights of his Ministry to the Church**

Pastor Strohschein was ordained on July 13, 1930, at St. John's Lutheran Church, Buffalo, Minnesota, and installed on August 17 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Dundee, Wisconsin, and at Peace Congregation in neighboring Waucousta. From 1936 he also served Immanuel Lutheran Church at Campbellsport, with which the Peace Congregation was united in 1938. In November of 1949 he accepted a call from St. John's Lutheran Church at Princeton and was installed on December 4. During his years at Princeton a new school was built and also a new parsonage.

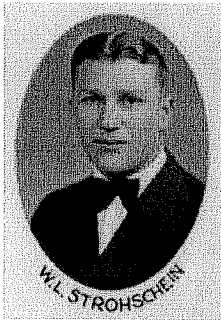
Pastor Strohschein also faithfully served the church at large as president of the Northern Wisconsin District from 1950 to 1952, as visiting elder of the Winnebago Pastoral Conference for 23 years, as a circuit visitor for 4 years, and for several years as a member of the Synod's Board of Trustees.

The Lord has richly blessed His church with the talents which He bestowed upon Pastor Strohschein: his unusual energy and capacity for work, his courage to speak up in behalf of his convictions, and his unique ability to apply the Word of God to the problems and situations of everyday life.

Today we thank our Lord for this gift to the church, and we ask Him to continue to bless His faithful servant in the years that lie ahead.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Seminary graduation photo, 1930



Picture taken from St. John's Centennial yearbook, 1964





## Obituaries

Northwestern Lutheran, December 1998

**Walter L. Strohschein  
1905-1998**

Walter Strohschein was born March 2, 1905, in Albion, Minn. He died Oct. 19, 1998 in Princeton, Wis.

A 1930 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Strohschein served at Trinity, Dundee, Wis., and St. John, Princeton, Wis. He also served as District President of the Northern Wisconsin District and chairman of the synod's Board of Trustees.

He is survived by his wife, Bernice; one daughter; four grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; and two siblings.

**Rev. Walter L.  
Strohschein**

Rev. Walter L. Strohschein, age 93, of the town of Princeton, WI, died on October 19, 1998 at his home. He was born on March 2, 1905 to the late Karl and Wilhelmina (Kammen) Strohschein in the town of Albion, Wright County, MN. He attended Dr. Martin Luther College at New Ulm, MN, Concordia College at St. Paul, MN, and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, graduating from the seminary in 1930. In November, 1930, he was married to Bernice Oelke at St. John's Lutheran Church in Markesan. He was ordained on July 13, 1930 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Buffalo, MN, and was installed on August 17th at Trinity Lutheran Church in Dundee and Peace Congregation in Waucoosa. He also served at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Campbellsport.

On December 4, 1949, he was installed at St. John's Lutheran Church in Princeton. During his years at Princeton a new school and new parsonage were built. He served the church at large as president of the Northern Wisconsin District from 1950-52 and as visiting elder of the Winnebago Pastoral Conference for 23 years and as a circuit visitor for four years, and for several years as a member of the Synod's Board of Trustees. He retired from the active ministry in 1980, commemorating 50 years of service. He was also an avid hunter and loved to fish.

He is survived by one daughter, Carol (John) Hanson, Milwaukee; three grandsons, David (Gianna) Wachholz, Markesan, Daniel (Stephanie) Wachholz, Ripon, and William (Linnea) Hanson of Milwaukee; one granddaughter, Sara (Dick) Ruhl of Princeton; seven great-grandchildren, Carissa, Alyssa and Melissa Wachholz, Markesan, Shauna Wachholz, Ripon, Katie and Craig Ruhl, Princeton, and Samuel Hanson, Milwaukee; son-in-law Herbert Wachholz, Princeton; one brother, Alfred Strohschein, Mora, MN; two sisters, Linda Kabolsky, Owatonna, MN, and Lydia Peterson, Arlington, TX. He was preceded in death by his parents, one daughter, Corinne Wachholz, five brothers and four sisters.

Funeral services will be held on Thursday, October 22 (today) at St. John's Lutheran Church in Princeton at 7:00 p.m., with Rev. Robert Pless officiating. Visitation will be from 3 p.m. to time of services at the church. Burial will be in Memory Hill Cemetery in Princeton.