

**A Personal Interview with Pastor Paul R. Hanke**

**Church History 332  
Prof. John Brenner  
4-10-97  
by Dan Schmidt**

**Synopsis of Church History Interview with Pastor Paul R. Hanke 4-3-97**

As stated in the title, the following information is based on a personal interview with Pastor Paul R. Hanke, a now retired Pastor living in Belle Plaine, MN. Pastor Hanke graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1947. After graduating from WLS, Pastor Hanke served as a parish pastor for twenty-nine years, and as a chaplain at the Belle Plaine Lutheran Home for fourteen years. Although Pastor Hanke is officially retired, he continues to be very much involved in the affairs of the Church, and has very willingly given his consent for the accompanying video-taped interview.

Before starting with the interview itself, I think that it would only be fair to say that the guidelines for this Oral History project had changed from the time it was first conceived. The subject remained the same, but the emphasis went from a very narrow focus on Pastor Hanke's experience as Secretary of the WELS in 1961 and 1962, during the WELS break with the Missouri Synod, to a somewhat broader overview spanning his nearly fifty years as parish pastor and as chaplain of the Belle Plaine Lutheran Home, (a skilled and intermediate care facility for the aged and the developmentally disabled). To be truthful, I'm thankful that the focus was broadened to include many of the highlights of Pastor Hanke's long and varied ministry. I'm thankful because it not only allowed me (a senior at WLS), to gain important insights into the parish ministry, but also because it allowed me to see how God in his grace mercifully equips his called workers to serve a variety of God's people in a variety of different settings.

Yet, even though the focus was broadened somewhat, this interview did have three primary areas of focus. They included the following. 1) A brief commentary by Pastor Hanke on what he perceives to be the similarities and differences in "ministry" from when he first graduated in 1947 until the present. 2) On Pastor Hanke's perception of such historical events and / or decisions such as the WELS / Missouri break in the late 1950's and early 1960's. 3) And finally, on Pastor Hanke's experiences with "special ministries", such as being a chaplain to the aged

and the developmentally disabled, and his experiences serving on the World Mission Board. And while other discussions were included in this interview, the above mentioned remained the primary areas of focus.

### The parish ministry then and now

As far as those questions that compared the parish ministry in 1947 to the present, I would say that Pastor Hanke offered some very insightful commentary. In many ways, Pastor Hanke's comments echoed those comments that one might hear sitting in a Seminary classroom. Pastor Hanke reflected the fact that the "preaching of God's Word" remains the central core of the parish pastor's work, and that our preparation as parish pastors should continue to reflect that fact. He also reminded me of the need to prepare well enough to speak to the hearts of the people, and not to fall into the trap of simply reading a sermon. His comments stemmed in part from his frustration with "seasoned pastors", whom he felt to easily fell into the trap of simply reading their sermons.

In the area of Evangelism, Pastor Hanke reminded me of the necessity of getting out and "pounding the pavement" and "knocking on doors" and getting to know the people. Pastor Hanke's first call was to a mission congregation <sup>which</sup> whom he felt needed a strong hand to lead them in this regard. He spoke of the need for a congregation to be aware of the privileges and the responsibilities that they have towards outreach, yet never neglecting the need for careful instruction. From his experience, the best way to accomplish such outreach begins with the Pastor, both in his continued encouragement and in his leadership through God's Word. He also stressed the importance of leading by personal example.

Pastor Hanke did express concern for what he perceives as the lack of stability in today's congregations. According to Pastor Hanke, this is largely due to the fact that young families rarely stay in one place for very long. These and other demographic factors continue to be a concern as a congregation grows and finds itself needing to establish strong leadership among

the non-ordained workers in the congregation. Pastor Hanke also stated that he believed this would be one of the next generations greatest challenges.

### **Significant Historical events in the WELS**

As far as the historical events surrounding the break-up between the WELS and the Missouri Synod, Pastor Hanke was surprisingly candid, yet understandably careful of his appraisal of those very emotional and difficult years. This was not an easy time for anyone involved. The split affected not only families but also congregations as a whole. Many people who enjoyed the benefits of fellowship before the break-up of the Synodical Conference, could no longer enjoy them after 1962. This fact presented not a few difficulties for all who were involved. For many, including Pastor Hanke, this was indeed a difficult and emotionally trying time. From a pastor's perspective, the difficulties were both administrative and personal. Yet as Pastor Hanke insightfully observed, "It caused people to really give some thought to what they believed, and it forced them to stand up and be counted". As difficult as that decision was, God used it to accomplish many positive things in His Church.

Pastor Hanke also provided a first hand glimpse of seminary life in the 1940's. I was surprised to learn that not only were students on campus year around during those years, but there also seemed to be a much greater participation in the maintainence and care of the seminary grounds by the student body as a whole. Pastor Hanke's firsthand report of the atmosphere on campus and the need for sensitivity to the surrounding community during WWII were also quite fascinating.

### **Pastor Hanke's experiences with "special ministries" and the World Mission Board**

It was also quite interesting to learn of Pastor Hanke's involvement on the World Mission Board. His account of the early years of our missions to Central Africa allowed me to see the many specific details and careful planning that go into carrying out such outreach. His enthusiasm for his work on the Mission Board was quite evident.

Finally, the interview presented an opportunity to talk to someone who had not only spent nearly thirty years in the parish ministry, but someone who also had the unique privilege of serving as chaplain to those with "special needs", specifically the special needs of the aged and the developmentally disabled. This aspect of the interview was quite informative in that it showed some of the pioneering efforts of members in our church body who sought to meet the very specific and specialized needs of people who were often overlooked in previous years.

In conjunction with his experiences as a chaplain, Pastor Hanke helped to make this interviewer aware of the many ways in which the Lord can use and shape us to serve God's people, no matter what their needs. Pastor Hanke served as a real example in this regard.

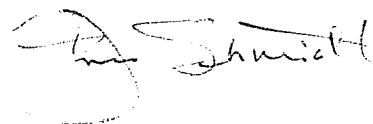
As a whole, I felt that this interview provided a very refreshing insight into the life of a parish pastor <sup>and</sup> chaplain who had faithfully served his Lord for nearly fifty years. The interview itself provided ~~and~~ opportunity to touch on some historical events which may have otherwise gone unnoticed. I am thankful to Pastor Hanke for his willing cooperation in this project, and for this opportunity to get a very personal glimpse into our Synod's past.

Pastor Hanke, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. I'm very much looking forward to our time together and from learning from someone who has traveled the road ahead of me.

I have included below most of the questions that I believe will be covered in our interview this coming Thursday, April 3rd, 1997. (I hope to arrive at your house about 1:00 p.m.) Please feel free to read the questions through and make any additions or corrections that you feel are necessary. While I planned that these questions would focus on many of the highlights of both your seminary and pastoral career, they are by no means intended to be a complete synopsis of your ministry. There also may be additional questions which flow out of our discussion during the interview, and that is just fine (this is a class project, and I'm not Dan Rather). Besides, these questions may also serve to enhance our discussion and fill in the necessary blanks. Also, if you at anytime during the interview feel that you would like to make additional comments or feel the need to make any applications, feel free. I'm here to learn and I would appreciate any insights that you may have.

I had planned on doing the interview in your home if that's O.K. with you. I have a video camera and tapes, all I would need is sufficient lighting, and a quiet space to ensure that our interview is both audible and is able to be seen. At this point, I don't know exactly how long the interview will last. Hopefully, if all goes right we can finish in a little over two hours.

Again, thanks so much!



#### Interview Schedule

Q: I understand that you graduated from W.L.S. in 1947, is that correct?

Q: What do you remember most about your years at the Seminary?

Q: Aside from the usual class work, what kind of activities were you involved in?

Q: Who were some of your professors at the Seminary?

Q: Do you have a favorite quote or anecdote from the classroom that you would like to share?

Q: During the early years of your College and Seminary career, World War II was still being fought. How did the war-time effect your years at school?

- Q: I noticed that you attended the Seminary from 1944 to 1947. Did you also have the opportunity to serve as a Vicar during those years? If not, were there other opportunities to gain field experience before your first call? ( You may wish to include any opportunities you may have had as the Son of a Parish Pastor).
- Q: (If the above applies)...What do you feel were the advantages of being the son of a Pastor? What, if any were the disadvantages?
- Q: I know that there were \_\_\_\_\_ in your class who graduated from the Sem in 1947. Was there a shortage of Pastor's at that time? If so...how did that your particular class?
- Q: Your first call was to a Mission congregation in Monticello, MN. Could you tell me a little about that first call?
- Q: What was the strategy in starting mission congregations at that time?
- Q: What do you feel the greatest challenges were in working in a mission congregation?
- Q: During the time you spent at Monticello, that congregation became self supporting. What factors do you feel helped to get that congregation to that point?
- Q: Do you feel that there are significant differences in the way Mission congregations are being started today as opposed to then?
- Q: While serving in Monticello, you also served as Secretary for the Crow River Valley Conference of the Minnesota District. What do you remember from that experience?
- Q: How did your experiences in serving the Conference and the District help you in your Parish? (or vice-versa)
- Q: You were also a charter member of the Synodical board for Information and Stewardship, is that correct? What was the function of that particular Board?
- Q: What was your particular role on the Board for Information and Stewardship?

- Q: In 1953 you accepted a call to Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Big Bend, WI and then in 1955 to St. Peter Ev. Lutheran in St. Peter, Minnesota.
- Q: St. Peter's was already an established congregation at that time, is that correct?
- Q: You served that particular congregation for over twenty years, what do you feel were the significant developments in that twenty year period?
- Q: St. Peter's congregation also built an Educational Unit in 1979, was that your first experience with a building project such as this?
- Q: What significant things did you take away from that experience?
- Q: You served as a Circuit Pastor during your years at St. Peter is that correct? What particular challenges do you feel that opportunity provided for you?
- Q: During that time you also served on the Executive Committee for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. What was happening in Central Africa at that time?
- Q: What was your role on the committee at that time?
- Q: What significant things did you learn from that experience?
- Q: It seems that you were serving a number of offices during the Synod's break with the LCMS. Wasn't that a difficult time for you and others involved?
- Q: You also served as Secretary for the WELS in 1961 when the split took place, what do you remember of that experience?
- Q: How did the split with the LCMS play itself out in your own particular Parish?
- Q: Are there particular lessons that you feel that we can learn from that experience yet today?
- Q: In 1976 you then were granted a peaceful release to assume duties as a Chaplain of the Belle Plaine Lutheran Home. What was behind that decision?



Q: What experience did you previously have in working with the aged and and the developmentally disabled, and how did that experience serve you as a Chaplain?

Q: What were some of your specific duties as Chaplain of the Lutheran Home?

Q: What do you feel were the highlights of those years?

Q: How would you compare or contrast your service as a chaplain at the Lutheran Home compared to your service as a parish pastor?

Q: Pastor Hanke...It occurred to me that you graduated from the Seminary exactly fifty years ago. For someone who is at the Seminary and who is about to graduate...what advice would you give?

Pastor Hanke, thank you again for granting this interview and thank you also for your years of faithful service.

THE SEMINARY LIBRARY  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
Mequon, Wisconsin