

Time Across The Ocean

An Interview with Daniel Balge (WELS European Chaplain 1989-1995)

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One of the many men who influenced my decision to become a pastor is Professor Daniel Balge. Although he would be too modest to admit it, Professor Balge has without a doubt done the same for a number of other men as he has served on the faculty for over a decade at our pastor training college. Whether it was a kind word in the hallways of MLC or encouragement in the classroom, Daniel Balge has touched the lives of hundreds of pastoral students.

Anyone of his former or current students can testify to his love for the ministry. He brought his ministry to life in the classroom and showed his students the joy that it has brought in his life. In particular, Professor Balge often told of his six years he served as the WELS Military Chaplain in Europe. “The Dog” story, “The Swan” story, and a number of other memorable tales from his ministry demonstrated for students the future stories of their own that they would one day experience and the joy that each man would find in his own ministry. However, the true joy that Professor Balge always stressed for us to reflect upon was on God’s Word. It is the Word that remains constant. It is the Word that keeps Christians connected. It is the Word that comforts God’s people.

God’s Word Is Constant

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)

As stated before, Professor Balge often was fond of talking about his time that he spent in Europe. On October 8, 2006 I had the privilege of meeting up again with my former professor and talking with him about his time across the ocean. When I was preparing my questions for this interview I thought for one reason or another that Professor Balge’s time in Europe would be a dramatically different type of ministry.

Living in a different country, ministering to primarily military families, being the pastor of several different congregations were all factors that gave me this impression.

Professor Balge reminded me of the glorious truth that he taught in the classroom, that even though his location might have been different, God's Word wasn't. God's Word stayed the same for him during his time in Europe and it stays the same for every pastor who serves in the ministry.

During this interview Professor Balge said "we just did the work that needed to be done." He did this work using the same Word, same sacraments, and same Christian spirit as any other pastor would. What a great reminder this is for every called worker! Despite differences in the scope of each pastor's call, he is still using the same tools as his other brothers in the ministry. It is God's Word that every pastor has as his foundation for the ministry. It is God's Word that gives every pastor what he needs to carry out the work that needs to be done for the kingdom.

God's Word Connects

"The body is a unit, though it is made of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greek, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Professor Balge taught the same Scriptural truths to his people in Europe as he did in Baraboo, Watertown, or Green Bay. His members in Europe were connected to other members of the kingdom through this same Word. This constant Word is what keeps the children of God together in one family. No matter where a person may be on the globe, they are always together with the Church.

Professor Balge said that even though he, his wife, and child were away from the rest of their family, they always felt still strongly connected to them. He attributes this to the fact that having grown up in the “prep system” and having gone away for high school, college, and seminary helped them become good communicators. Even though the Balge’s didn’t have many of the modern day technology such as e-mail or web cams, they still stayed in touch with their family back the U.S. through letters and many phone calls.

Even though the Balge’s were across the ocean, Professor Balge says that he never felt disconnected from the WELS. The people at Special Ministries still kept him updated on things that were going on in the U.S. from something as small as American Sport’s scores to regular WELS publications, reports, and letters. Professor Balge appreciate how much these people never made him feel like he was on the other side of the ocean, but that he was still close to them in their hearts. But again, for the Balges, it always came back to the fact that they knew from God’s Word that they weren’t alone. They were part of the body of believers and doing a part in the work of the kingdom. It was God’s Word that made them feel connected to the rest of the body.

God’s Word Comforts

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

One of the challenges that arose during Professor Balge’s time in Europe was the driving time. Having to serve different congregations in a variety of countries, it was essential that Professor Balge spend a number of hours in the car. Obviously a lot of driving will take a lot out of the pastor. But no matter how rushed he felt or how little

time he had to get things done, he knew that he would have God's Word to comfort him during these times.

Professor Balge continually says during this interview that that challenges he faced while in Europe although some of them unique for his situation, he was able to get through them because of the comfort of God's Word. He reminded me that though each man's challenges in the ministry will be and are unique, each man has the same Word which comforts him.

My time at Martin Luther College was a blessing because of Professor Daniel Balge. His attitude towards the ministry is one that I hope to emulate. I pray that he continues to be the positive example for many other pastor track students as he was for me. But more importantly it is my prayer that the truths he taught and lived out for his students—God's Word is what is constant, God's Word is what keeps us connected, God's Word is what comforts—continue to be in the heart of every pastor.

A VHS tape of this interview is available with the WLS Library.