

**The Life and Ministry  
of  
Jerome Paul Birkholz**

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This video/paper looks at the Life and Ministry of Jerome (Jerry) Paul Birkholz. I attempted to focus on the three main areas of his life: Husband, Father, and Teacher. This video follows the life of Jerry Birkholz from his early childhood to his training at Dr. Martin Luther College, and then onto the various calls at which he served throughout the course of his ministry.

There are several things that I learned through the course of researching and constructing this video. 1) The Lord uses various things in a person's life to get them to where he wants them to be. He uses a variety of different signposts to lead a person into the public ministry. Some know from very early on that this is something they want to do and others need somewhat of a wake-up call to realize it. In the end, whatever the road taken may have been, the Lord will use us for his good purpose.

2) The ministry requires much time. This was made clear throughout all of the interviews. When a person devotes his life to serving in the public ministry, often time spent with the family is sacrificed. Even though this is true, the Lord still blesses those who serve him. Though the ministry does demand that a lot of time be devoted to it, it is time well spent. What better way can we spend our time than to proclaim God's Word and to teach others the importance of having Jesus in their lives!

3) The Lord rewards his workers. Carolyn Birkholz makes this point in her interview. Though they are not what you would call rich, the Lord has blessed Jerry and Carolyn Birkholz in many different ways, from the three children that turned out well to the lasting memories from the different places of ministry. Even with the difficulties that are faced through the course of one's ministry, the Lord blesses us so that the joys far outweigh the difficulties. He often uses those difficulties to prepare us for what may be coming later on down the road.

4) The Lord continues to bless his workers, even after their years of service. This can be seen by the joy that Jerry has when he sees different students that he had in class at one time. The students give him the reassurance that he has served faithfully when they give thanks for the influence he had on their lives.

5) I think the last thing that I learned from researching this paper was a point made to me once by Dr. John Lawrenz. He said, "Everyone in the public ministry owes it to the Church to excel in at least one area of ministry." I believe that Jerry Birkholz has shown throughout his ministry that the area that he excelled in was teaching at the high school level. He served faithfully for a number of years at MLS and had a positive influence on the students there. When he took his call to MVL, he was able to start a school that still exists today and is flourishing. Finally, when he took his call to MLHS, he was able to give stability to the young faculty and clean up some of the problems that existed in that school. This idea of "excelling in at least one area of ministry" is an important and sometimes intimidating challenge to keep before everyone who is in the public ministry.

The interviews with Jerry Birkholz and his wife Carolyn took place on March 24, 2000 in their home in Watertown, Wisconsin. The interview with Carol Markgraf took place on March 30, 2000 at her home in Kekoskee, Wisconsin. I would like to give a word of thanks to guest interviewer, Kurt Schaser. Because of the great distance and the fact that I was not able to make a trip out to Colorado, Kurt facilitated the interview with Pastor Mark Birkholz on April 5, 2000 at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Thornton, Colorado. Unfortunately, also due to the distance factor, I was unable to interview Jerry's other daughter, Sharon Favorite from Eagle River, Wisconsin. Attached you will find the survey that she completed to help contribute to this paper. The questions are the same as those that were asked to Jerry's other two children on the video.

*Questions Used Throughout the Course of the Video Interviews:*

- 1) (To Jerry) Tell me about the early years of your life.
- 2) (To Jerry) How did your parents influence you in becoming a teacher?
- 3) (To Jerry) Could you tell me a little bit about your wife?
- 4) (To Carolyn) Tell me about your first date.
- 5) (To Jerry) Tell me about your children and how you tried to influence them.
- 6) (To Mark) What was it like growing up in the house of a teacher?
- 7) (To Carol) What's your occupation?
- 8) (To Carol) What was it like growing up in the house of a teacher?
- 9) (To Jerry and Carolyn) How did you influence your children?
- 10) (To Jerry) What are the different places that you served?
- 11) (To Carolyn) Share some of your memories from Jerry's teaching.
- 12) (To Jerry) Could you share some of your memories, such as when the students would come over to your house?
- 13) (To Jerry) Could you tell me about the group of kids that met with you from MLS?
- 14) (To Jerry) How did it get its name?
- 15) (To Mark) What was it like having your own father as a teacher?
- 16) (To Jerry) Where did you move on to from MLS?
- 17) (To Jerry) Were you the development director?
- 18) (To Carol) What was it like having your father as a teacher?
- 19) (To Carol) Do you have any fond memories to share from Minnesota?
- 20) (To Jerry) Was that where you finally retired?
- 21) (To Jerry) What have you been doing since you retired?

22) (To Jerry) How did you model your faith to your children and then to your students?

23) (To Carolyn) How did your husband try to influence his students and model his faith to them?

24) (To Carol and Mark) How did your father model his faith while you were growing up?

25) (To Carol and Mark) What influence did your father have on you while growing up?

26) (To Carol and Mark) How does he influence you now?

\*\*\*\*\* Attached are copies of the original surveys that were given to Jerome Birkholz, Sharon Favorite, and Carol Markgraf.\*\*\*\*\*

## Early Years

Mother: Margaret Braun

Occupation: Housewife

Father: Ernst C. Birkholz

Occupation: Minister of the Gospel

Hometown: St. James, Minnesota

Birth date: June 18, 1931

Your Full Name: Jerome Paul Birkholz

## Education

Grade School: St. Paul's Lutheran School - St. James, Minnesota 1937-1945

High School: Dr. Martin Luther High School - New Ulm, Minnesota 1945-1949

College: Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN. 1949-1952 3Yr. Graduation  
1956 BSED

Other Schooling: Michigan State University - East Lansing, MI - MA - Administration  
1969 + English  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary - Summer Quarter

Did you have a role model while growing up that influenced you in becoming a teacher? If so, who? How did he/she influence you?

What role did your parents play in your becoming a teacher?

They encouraged a solid Christian education but allowed me to choose my college and choice of career

What made you decide to become a teacher?

While working the pea/corn canning season in Spring Valley/Rochester, MN, the summer after high school, about 20 classmates & friends worked the summer job driving truck to haul the product from the fields to the Viner/canning factory.

Questions about your wife

An incident that occurred on a break at a truck stop

Who is she? CAROLYN M. (McCRORY) BIRKHOLOZ

When did you meet? AUGUST, 1952

How did you meet? JERRY WAS ASSIGNED TO MY HOME CONGREGATION (ZION, TOLEDO, OHIO). I SANG IN SR. CHOIR OF WHICH HE WAS THE DIRECTOR. I ALSO TAUGHT SUNDAY SCHOOL + HE TAUGHT BIBLE CLASS.

When were you married?

AUG. 14, 1955

What is/was her occupation? HOUSEWIFE - SECRETARY - TYPING TEACHER - FINANCIAL SEC. - TREASURER AT PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL -

MATERIALS CO-ORDINATOR AT KRAFT FOODS

CLERK AT HALLMARK STORE

What influence has she had on your life as a teacher? She has been very supportive and provided a Christian home atmosphere as well as working outside the home for financial support of the family. "Worked to support my habit <sup>Teach</sup>

Children

Who are they?

Mark Alan Birkholz - Pastor, Lord of Life Lutheran Church - Thornton, Colorado  
Mrs. Larry (Sharon) Favenite - Housewife, Accountant, Organist - Christ Lutheran Church, Eagle River, WI

Where are they now?

Mrs. Daniel (Carol) Markgraf - Housewife, <sup>Kindergarten</sup> Pre-School Teacher, Piano Instructor, Organist  
St. Peter's Lutheran School/Church, Nekeoskee, WI.

How did you encourage/influence them in their lives as they were growing up?

Required Christian education for grade school and college along with basic music (Piano) instruction. Regular church attendance, participation in athletic and music activities with social contacts with Christian youth.

Calls

Please list the calls that you have served with the years (if possible)

Zion Lutheran Church/School; Toledo, Ohio 1952-1964 New School for the Congregation, Grades 5-8, Principal, Youth, Sr. Choir Director, Athletics, bus driver, Custodian

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan 1964-1979 English 9, 11, World History 10  
Planning Board (Activity) Advisor, Recruitment Director - 6 years

Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School - Principal - Administrator - Teacher 1979-1991  
New Ulm, Minnesota Association Coordinator/Development 1991-1992

Michigan Lutheran High School - Principal, Administrator, Teacher 1982-1997

S.E. Peter Lutheran School - Grades 6-8, Principal, Fort Collins, Colo. 1998-1999

Anecdotes:

Reformation Lutheran Church, San Diego, CA January/February 2000 - Spiritual Renewal

MLS: Many memorable events with the high school youth while I served to advise the Planning Board (Activity/Social) Bikerental program, our own skating rink, the many welcoming & farewell as well as other social parties. Driving charter bus for the College Tour/Class trips, the Choir Tours, Recruitment trips.

MLHS: Student discipline matters, financial organization, ~~release~~ release of two called workers, strategic planning process, Retirement after 45 years.

MVL: The 1st principal/administrator of a new area Lutheran High School, the process of starting from scratch, temporary location, purchase of property, financial planning, building, many trips at night to respond to alarm system. Self study of the school/operation; Strategic Planning process for the 18 member

OTHER: Congregation Association. 16 oz Mt. Dew bottle thrown through house with dismissal of a called worker. Association banquets, 40th Anniversary in teaching ministry

Toledo: New School, New Church, buses, Killarney Lutheran Camp Association - use of & purchase of an acre in 1964 to build a new school building.

Big Daddy's Club  
Support group for student with drug problems  
Building new Dorm  
Temporary classrooms,  
Plywood palace for Dorm

Perhaps give duties/subjects taught at the high school level. Include coaching, etc.

Principal, Administrator

Religion Old Testament, New Testament

World History

9<sup>th</sup> English Grammar, Literature

11<sup>th</sup> American Literature (English), English Literature, World Novel

9<sup>th</sup> Algebra

10<sup>th</sup> Chorus

In what unique way(s) did you, or a least tried to, influence your students?

I tried to share with them the many joys of the ministry.

Describe the relationship that you had with your students.

I have always felt that my wife and I had a good close relationship with the students, especially during the 15 years at MHS when I was heavily involved with student life activities and recruitment and my wife was teaching part time and part time in the business office and later in the library.



Name: Carol Markgraf

Occupation: Kindergarten

What was it like growing up in the house of a teacher?

often gone - work at school, recruitment, meetings, NML

family activities often were "school events"

didn't worry about family problems my friends were - stable

What was it like having your own father as a professor/teacher?/principal - different from <sup>Phase 1</sup> teacher - a little more pressure to do well, time keeping - stories would rain over

principal - benefit - leaving study hall to get forgotten items - sometimes excluded from "the crowd", the jokes etc

What influence did your father have on you growing up in leading you to where you are now? What influence does he have on you now?

a lot - he felt strongly I should "try" DNLC for a year - "life I knew

encouragement for our school, calls, example he set is one we try to set for our children

How did your father model his faith for you while growing up?

- didn't skip church on vacations - every week - hard to understand sometimes

- devotions - devotion to his "job"

- praying - dedication to his family

Anecdotes from your childhood about your father from his various calls.

3 calls 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade -

Phase I

Name: Sharon Favorite

Occupation: Self-employed dry cleaner

What was it like growing up in the house of a teacher?

The great thing about it as I look back is that my parents always set a wonderful Christian example. We didn't always have what some of my friends' families had, but from them I learned to appreciate what I do have. I think the part that I disliked the most was the hectic schedule & the fact that my

What was it like having your own father as a professor/teacher?

I had my Dad for 3 years in high school. The 2 years of English don't really stand out in my mind so they must have been uneventful. He was a good teacher & I still remind my kids about proper grammar. History was a tough subject for me. Dad helped me by teaching me some study skills. I still use -

What influence did your father have on you growing up in leading you to where you are now? What influence does he have on you now? Dad always wanted us to do the right thing, as I think most Christian parents do. He encouraged me to go on to DMCC. I was unsure about this but tried it. Eventually, I graduated from DMCC. I don't regret the education that I have, but it wasn't the right one for me. I know did your father model his faith for you while growing up?

I have a hard time coming up with a time that my father did not model his faith. I'm sure this happened, but to me I always saw a man with a very strong faith. I never heard my Dad curse or swear. Still haven't. He was always a wonderful

Anecdotes from your childhood about your father from his various calls.

An anecdote is hard to come up with. Don't get me wrong we had fun, he had fun. I really enjoyed when my family traveled. I appreciate the effort my parents made to show our family this country. Mom didn't always enjoy the packing & unpacking of the pop-up camper, but we saw a lot & had a lot of fun.

1. Dad wasn't home many evenings because of meetings or other events.
2. Those study skills now as I am back in school. Being at a school with my Dad <sup>and Mom</sup> as one of the teachers did have some drawbacks. They always knew what was going on. I couldn't hide much from them. However, because he was a teacher, I wasn't asked to participate in some activities with my friends. As I look back now, this wasn't a bad thing, but at the time I felt like an outsider.
3. am in school now for accounting. My education at DMLC is not wasted though as I do help at our elementary school, direct the Jr. choir, and play organ for church. I still look up to my Dad & respect his opinions. I don't always do what my Dad says now, but I do look to him for his advise.
4. Christian example to me, my friends, & his co-workers.