

Bramdeo Ramgolam
Church History Project
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**WELS Special Ministries
European Civilian Chaplaincy**



Commission on Special Ministries:

European Civilian Chaplaincy

The purpose of the Commission on Special Ministries (CSM) is to *"To assist the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and its churches and agencies in meeting the special spiritual needs of those who cannot be served with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the regular programs of our churches and schools."*¹

The Commission on Special Ministries established the Military Services Committee (MSC) to specifically serve WELS members in the armed forces. The objective of the MSC is *"To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with God's people who are serving in the military."*

In order to carry out its objectives, the MSC has established as its Guiding Policies:

1. To call civilian chaplains to serve military personnel where a concentration of WELS members warrants a full-time chaplain.
2. To appoint contact pastors wherever possible when such a need becomes evident.
3. To develop and provide a mailing program of spiritual literature for military personnel.
4. To review regularly contact pastors reports and make recommendations when necessary.
5. To plan and conduct contact pastors institutes.
6. To visit areas to be served when such a visit becomes necessary for the purpose of evaluation.
7. To meet with WLS graduates with those who may be appointed as contact pastors and orient them to the work of a camp pastor.
8. To provide materials for those men from the field who are appointed as contact pastors which will help orient them to the work of a contact pastor.

¹ Mission statement for Military Services Ministry part of WELS Special Ministries.
<http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2601&collectionID=652>

9. To submit regular reports of its activities to the SMB.

WELS Civilian Chaplaincy for Europe is a branch of the MSC which serves WELS enlisted in the armed forces along with anyone that the Lord brings to hear his Word. The ministry to WELS members in Europe was started just after the closing of the Vietnam War. As American forces were slowly withdrawing from Asia, Pastor Karl J. Otto the seventh civilian chaplain in southern Asia was asked by the Special Ministries Board (now, CSM) to evaluate the American military presence in Europe.

Chaplain Otto was able to contact many WELS members serving in the armed forces throughout Europe. Because of the many WELS members living in England, Germany, Greece, Italy and Turkey it was seen proper to have a full time civilian chaplain ministry to minister to God's people in Europe. Chaplain E.C. Renz was the first full time civilian chaplain in Europe, he served from 1973-1982, since then there have been 15 chaplains who served in this position. Chaplain Joshua Martin, a 2001 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is the current civilian chaplain in Europe.

Today, worship services are held in London, Switzerland, and in various cities of Germany. If you would ask a civilian chaplain to describe his week, he would have to tell you about his ministry for the whole month. Since his ministry involves serving WELS members who are spread out across Europe he goes where they are to bring them God's Word and the Sacraments along with adult instructions and even Sunday School classes. Because of the great distances of travel, and daily schedule of the people that a civilian chaplain serves, communion is often received about 3-4 times per year. One of the most joyous things for a chaplain is seeing how important the Lord's Supper is for member's who can only receive Christ's body and blood once a year.

European Civilian Chaplains	
Name	Year
Pastor Karl J. Otto	Vietnam-Thailand 8-1971 - 4-1972 Exploratory-Europe 5-1972 - 7-1972
Pastor Edward C. Renz	3-1973 - 1-1982
Pastor Clayton C. Krug	5-1977 - 8-1978
Pastor Charles A. Schlei	8-1978 - 7-1981
Pastor Donald Tollefson	7-1981 - 6-1984
Pastor Richard Froehlich	1-1982 - 11-1984
Pastor Lee Neujahr	5-1984 - 11-1989
Pastor Timothy Johnston	10-1984 - 5-1986
Pastor Joel Jaeger	10-1986 - 5-1992
Pastor Daniel Balge	10-1989 - 6-1995
Pastor Dennis Smith	5-1992 - 9-1994
Pastor Philip Kieselhorst	6-1995 - 12-2001
Pastor Robert Hartman	12-2001 - 5-2003
Pastor Michael Schroeder	8/2002 – 8/2007
Pastor Thomas Kraus	6/2003 – 6/2004
Prof. Jerald Plitzuweit	7/2004 – 7/2005
Pastor Joshua Martin	10/2007 –
Various Pastors have been to Europe for a 3 month term two or three times a year to help out the various Chaplains since 1995.	

Locations of Worship
England

London Area

1st Sunday of each month

Worship at 13.00 Bible Study at 14:00
Northwood Methodist Church

Germany

Frankfurt / Mainz / Wiesbaden

2nd and 4th Sunday of each month

Worship at 10:30 Bible Study at 11:30
Wicker Gemeindehaus

Ramstein

2nd and 4th Sunday of each month

Worship at 18:00 Bible Study at 17:00
Ramstein Air Force Base South Chapel

Stuttgart

Saturday before 3rd Sunday of each month

Worship at 18:00 Bible Study at 17:00
House Church

Switzerland

Zurich Area

3rd Sunday of each month

Worship at 13.00 Bible Study at 14:00
House Church

Video Interview with Alfons Woldt WELS Special Ministries Administrator 1973-2002

Questionnaire

1. How long did you serve as administrator for WELS Special Ministries?
2. How did you fall into the role of administrator for WELS Special Ministries?
3. What was your role as administrator for WELS Special Ministries?
4. Did your administrative role start with the European Civilian Chaplaincy to WELS military personnel or did you begin with the ministry in Korea and Vietnam?

5. Was it difficult to establish the European Civilian Chaplaincy compared to Asia?
6. Can you tell me three key events for the establishing and continuing of this special ministry?
7. Did you use WELS congregations to help with this ministry, or was it more independent and required mainly work done by the civilian chaplains?
8. Do you think that our WELS congregations can help improve our ministry in the military?
9. Do you see any hindrances or opportunities ahead for the chaplaincy program?
10. What was the most memorable event during the time you served as administrator?
11. What were the most joyful occasions in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
12. What were the most frustrating or saddening or disappointing events in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
13. What is the most important thing to remember for those administering and conducting the European Civilian Chaplaincy today?
14. What communication techniques did you use to gather information on WELS members who were serving in the military and to keep in contact with the civilian chaplains?
15. During your years as administrator, what can you tell us about the relationship with the sister churches in Europe?

**Video Interview with Pastor Carl Ziemer
WELS Special Ministries Administrator 2002—**

Questionnaire

1. What is your role as current administrator WELS Special Ministries?
2. Describe the start of your administrative role for WELS Special Ministries?
Was it a challenge?
3. Do you think that your role as administrator has changed greatly since the previous administrator?

4. Can you tell me three key events for the establishing and continuing of this special ministry?
5. What are the most joyful occasions in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
6. What are the most frustrating or saddening or disappointing events in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
7. What is the most important thing to remember for those are administering and conducting the European Civilian Chaplaincy today?
8. As current administrator is communication a problem, when it comes to gathering information on all the WELS members that are over seize?
9. Has the internet helped with the ministry to the European Civilian Chaplaincy to WELS military personnel?
10. After the 9/11 security measures, has our civilian chaplains access to military personnel been affected?
11. Has the reputation of the WELS Special ministry from previous years, helped make ministry easier in the military?
12. Do you see any hindrances or opportunities ahead for the civilian chaplaincy program?
13. What is the most important thing to remember for those are administering and conducting the European Civilian Chaplaincy today?
14. Other comments?

Email Interview with Prof. Jerald Plitzuweit
Former European Civilian Chaplains to WELS Military Personnel

Questionnaire

Former European Civilian Chaplains to WELS Military Personnel

1. How is the European military chaplaincy ministry different from a congregational ministry?
2. Describe an average week of a European Civilian Chaplain?
3. How did you prepare for this type of ministry?

4. What are the biggest challenges in this ministry?
5. What types of skills are needed for this type of ministry?
6. Can you see the chaplaincy ministry opening new doors for sharing the Gospel?
7. What were the most joyful occasions in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
8. What were the most frustrating or saddening or disappointing events in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?
9. What is the most important thing to remember for those who are administering and conducting the European Civilian Chaplaincy today?
10. Concerning your relationship with the sister churches in Europe, how were you involved with them?
11. Who was your favorite vintner (wine-maker)?

Sample of Answered Questionnaire

Prof. Jerald Plitzuweit

Former European Civilian Chaplains to WELS Military Personnel

Former European Civilian Chaplains to WELS Military Personnel

1. How is the European military chaplaincy ministry different from a congregational ministry?

At the present time the chaplain holds services once or twice a month at a location. The monthly schedule when I served as an assistant chaplain to Pastor Michael Schroeder (2004-05) had a service in the Frankfurt, Germany, area every Sunday. That no longer is the case with one chaplain in Europe. Presently on the first Sunday of the month the chaplain holds a service in western London, England; on the second and fourth Sundays in the Frankfurt, Germany area and on Ramstein Air force Base (Germany); on the third weekend at Stuttgart, Germany, and at another location on Saturday and at Zurich, Switzerland, on Sunday. If there is a fifth Sunday in the month, the chaplain attempts to arrange a service in another location in Europe where there's a cluster of WELS/ELS members. There are no formal organizations such as ladies aid, men's club, or a young people's society. There's no church council at the various worship sites although the chaplain relies on lay leaders to assist in identifying worship locations, getting clearance to enter restricted military bases, and organizing fellowship gatherings/meals. All phases of ministry are done while the pastor is at a location: worship service, Bible class, adult instruction, Sunday school,

and fellowship. There are no shut-in calls on the elderly and few, if any, personal visits on the delinquent. Hospital calls on the wounded are infrequent since the military ships wounded soldiers back to the U.S. as soon as they are stabilized. The chaplain conducts his ministry in two foreign cultures, the culture of the countries in which he lives and works (Germany/Switzerland/England) and the culture of U.S. military regulations that impact what he can and cannot do. Electronic communications (e-mails) play a major role in how the chaplain keeps in contact with those he serves. For our worship sites we use churches of other denominations, military chapels, and private homes. When necessary, we carry our own portable keyboard to accompany the service. Both Pastor Schroeder's wife and my wife played for the services we conducted.

2. Describe an average week of a European Civilian Chaplain?

An "average week" does not describe the routine of a chaplain. Perhaps an "average month" might give a truer picture, but that would be too lengthy. If I had a new sermon to prepare for the coming Sunday, I spent about 20 hours working on the sermon. If I had a Bible class to conduct the following Sunday, I spent another five to ten hours working up the Bible class and duplicating handouts. I spent two or three hours preparing the Sunday bulletin. Remember we had no secretary serving the chaplains in Europe. One German lady who worshiped with us volunteered to keep our contact list up-to-date. That was an excellent support for us. My wife made travel arrangements if we were flying to England or needed motels while driving to and from our worship locations. She tried to make these at least three weeks in advance to have the most options and to find the best prices. Each week had its share of e-mails that needed a response. The last week of the month I prepared my requisitions to send to the synod office in Milwaukee. I sent these both by e-mail and by surface mail so the synod office would have the actual receipts for its file. Some days Pastor and Mrs. Schroeder and I and my wife traveled to youth hostels to check out retreat locations. We needed enough space for worship and enough rooms to conduct adult Bible class, youth Bible class, and Sunday school at the same time. We had two retreats in the course of the year, one over Easter and the other at Reformation. This brought together people from throughout Europe to worship, carry on Bible study, and have Christian fellowship with other WELS/ELS people living in Europe. I had the youth Bible class for these two retreats. I spent considerable time writing one of these studies and checking available printed studies for the other. Our youth Bible class embraced youth from the age to 10 to 16. When my wife and I arrived in Germany, we were required to visit a number of German offices to obtain our resident visa and to secure our driver's license for our year of service. We also needed to visit the military base at Ramstein a number of times to obtain a permanent pass to the base. We tried to obtain passes to other bases. Although we spent hours in meetings with military chaplains, we did not succeed in getting a pass that would allow us to enter all U.S. military installations in Europe. This is a sampling of tasks required when a person serves in the European civilian chaplaincy.

3. How did you prepare for this type of ministry?

We received no special preparation for serving in Europe. My wife and I read a few books on European culture before we went. My wife carried a German pocket dictionary when she went shopping. I studied German in high school and college, but had forgotten many of the details of the German language. I believe a person needs some German speaking ability to survive in a small German village such as the one we lived in. I did on the job ministry training by working side-by-side with Pastor Schroeder.

4. What are the biggest challenges in this ministry?

Challenges: keeping up an energy level with three hours travel, two Bible classes, two services, and two fellowships on one day (second and fourth Sundays); understanding the spiritual cares and personal concerns shared by military people who are separated from family and friends and living in a foreign country; finding a comfort level while living in a foreign country.

5. What types of skills are needed for this type of ministry?

Skills needed: ability to work in a foreign culture; self-starting personality to identify and complete responsibilities; ability to understand and respond to the needs of military personnel and their families; ability to stand alone with little on-site support.

6. Can you see the chaplaincy ministry opening new doors for sharing the Gospel?

It proves difficult to bring the Gospel to German nationals among whom we live. There appears little opportunity to reach out to the unchurched military personnel. Our members brought friends to services and retreats. During my year in Europe these contacts did not lead to attendance at adult instruction classes. We did instruct several spouses of our members during my stay in Europe. The primary purpose of this ministry is to serve WELS/ELS military personnel, students, and people whose jobs take them to Europe.

7. What were the most joyful occasions in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?

Joyful occasions: confirmation Sunday for young people who had completed catechism instruction; retreats at which members enjoyed joint worship, Bible study, and fellowship; worship and fellowship with members of our sister German church, the ELFK.

8. What were the most frustrating or saddening or disappointing events in connection with the European Civilian Chaplaincy?

Frustrations: WELS congregations that do not inform their members in the military that we serve people stationed in Europe; the WELS/ELS military personnel stationed in Europe who do not avail themselves of the opportunity to use the Means of Grace on a regular basis.

9. What is the most important thing to remember for those who are administering and conducting the European Civilian Chaplaincy today?

Each person serving in ministry needs to remember that we cannot see the spiritual work the Spirit carries on in the heart when the Word is proclaimed. Our U.S. military presence in Europe is changing; we will have fewer families stationed in Europe in the future. The time may come when it is no longer prudent to support a European civilian chaplain.

10. Concerning your relationship with the sister churches in Europe, how were you involved with them?

Pastor Schroeder and I attended a two-day winter convention of the ELFK in Leipzig. We were treated as honored guests and enjoyed the fellowship of these pastors and their families. Members of the ELFK who had moved to the western part of Germany after reunification of East and West Germany attended our services in the Frankfurt area.

11. Who was your favorite vintner (wine-maker)?

Kastanienhof in the village of Bodenheim.

Pastor emeritus Jerald J. Plitzuweit
December 2, 2007