

A HUMBLE SERVANT OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE: DISTRICT PRESIDENT
WINFRED B. NOMMENSEN

An Oral History

Senior Church History
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Winfred B. Nommensen

Former District President Winfred Nommensen's ministry is characterized by two words: humble service. Throughout his forty-six years of service in the public ministry as a parish pastor, and nine years of service as the President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod, his actions show his willingness to serve others.

As you read this oral history of the life and ministry of Pastor Nommensen, make special note of his attitude towards the ministry and towards his District Presidency. You will see that he was not afraid to get advice from others, and he did not hesitate to designate authority to laymen and pastors alike. You will see that he did not view the office of District President as a prize to be grasped, but he saw it as an opportunity to serve more of God's people in more ways than the parish ministry. You will see his humble estimation of his own gifts and abilities, and his faithfulness in using them.

The next twenty-nine pages are the transcript of an interview with Pastor Nommensen, conducted one blustery afternoon on November 23, 1993. This interview was recorded using a hand-held, battery operated tape recorder. I have tried to transcribe the interview word for word, as much as possible. However, in some instances Pastor Nommensen's response was unclear on the tape. I have indicated this by ellipses, or by inserting words into brackets, in what I hope was the original meaning of his response. Following those pages will be a short evaluation of that interview, with additional quotations from other sources which support the thesis of this paper: Winfred Nommensen was a humble servant of God and His people.

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Tape interview with Winfred B. Nommensen
conducted by John D. Roebke on
November 23, 1993

November 23, 1993 interview of Winfred B. Nommensen

ROEBKE: Let's start off with your birth and your early childhood. What is the full name you were given at birth?

NOMMENSEN: Winfred Bendix Nommensen.

R: What date were you born?

N: January 31, 1924.

R: Where were you born?

N: My folks lived in Pickett, Wisconsin. My father was a pastor there [at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church], but I was born in a hospital in Oshkosh, WI in the midst of a big winter snowstorm.

R: I bet that was an adventure to get your mother to the hospital in the middle of that snowstorm?

N: Well, they knew it was coming. So, my father took my mother to the hospital beforehand. And, of course, he relates a long story of how he got there after his church service. The roads were all blocked. . .so he got handcart on the railroad, one that you pump up and down. . .and that's how he got to Oshkosh from Pickett on the railroad in the middle of a snowstorm.

R: In the snowstorm?

N: One of the members of the congregation had one.

R: That must have been cold.

N: Yes, it was.

R: Could give me the full name of your father?

N: Martin John Nommensen.

R: What was your mother's full name with her maiden name?

N: Erna Ottillie Kollath.

R: Was either one of them born in Germany?

N: No, they were both born in Milwaukee [WI].

R: Do you have brothers and sisters?

N: I have two brothers. Martin William Nommensen is older than I am. A younger brother named Carl Robert who is younger than me by four years. I have a sister, a step-sister, Elsbeth now married to Charles Flunker who is a missionary in Brazil.

R: Now, you said she was your step-sister. Did your mother die?

N: My mother died when I was thirteen years old [in 1937].

R: I'm sorry to hear that.

N: Two years before that, I had a sister who died also--Edith Nommensen. When she died, she was two months old. . .

R: Was it influenza or pneumonia?

N: No, I think it was this crib death. I remember getting up one morning and she was not breathing too well. We took her to the hospital and [they couldn't do anything]. My mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

R: Do you remember what year that was?

N: 1930 something. . .when I was thirteen.

R: Then when did your father remarry?

N: Four years later my father remarried.

R: What was the name of the woman that he married?

N: Esther Frenz (spelling confirmed).

R: Okay, let's talk about growing up. You said that you grew up in Pickett, WI.

N: That's where my parents lived when I was born. When I was about a year old, nine months old, they moved to Juneau, WI. My father was Pastor [at St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church] and that's where I grew up.

R: So you consider yourself a native of Juneau more than anything? What would you say was the greatest influence that your parents had on you?

N: Oh, I would say the Christian influence on my life. They were very much concerned about us. . .they made sure that we went to parochial school, of course. They had a parochial school there. I spent all eight years there.

R: What was the name of your school there?

N: St. John's.

R: How would describe your relationship with your parents?

N: It was very good. I think they did a lot of things with us. Like my father built a cottage on the lake so we could

spend time there in the summer months.

R: Where was that?

N: The cottage was in Pleasant Lake. I don't remember what county that was. It was between Westfield, WI and Coloma, WI.

R: Did you have time to get away as a family, to go to that cottage to spend some time together?

N: We would spend three weeks up there every summer. That was our vacation time. Sometimes we would spend four weeks, but my dad would just spend three weeks. He would go home and then come back and get us.

R: That's really important when you're a pastor to just get away and spend time with your family. I'm sure you found that out, too.

N: There was a lot of fishing. . .the entire family likes to fish.

R: That's good. Do you still have ownership of that cottage?

N: No, after my mother died, then it became a little too much for my dad to take care of himself. We painted the floors and everything, but that's all the help we were. He finally sold it after two years.

R: Where was the church you were baptized in? In Pickett?

N: It was in Pickett. I think that was Grace Church.

R: Do you remember the date you were baptized, by any chance?

N: No. . .I have a baptismal certificate. . .

R: Your dad was the one who baptized you?

N: Right!

R: . . .So, how did your pastor influence you toward going into the ministry? So, in this case, how did your dad?

N: My dad just sent me to Northwestern College. We went to Northwestern Prep for high school.

R: . . .Is there any particular reason he sent you to Prep instead of public school or an area Lutheran school?

N: No, I think he was hoping that we would be pastors. So, he started us off right there. . .where we would have the languages.

R: Did both of your brothers go there, too?

N: Yes, all three of us went.

R: . . .Of your brothers, did either of them become pastors?

N: My younger brother became a pastor.

R: . . .What were the names of some of the teachers at your grade school?

N: One was a cousin. . .Marie Nommensen Affeldt. The next one was Ruth Ibisch. The next one was Richard Bruesehoff. The last one was Roland Jacobs. Surprisingly, I had each one for two years. . .

R: Did they have four teachers on staff?

N: No, there were two on staff. . .It was a two-room school with four grades in each room. . .

R: How did your teachers influence you towards entering the ministry?

N: Well, I think that Mr. Jacobs was very concerned about us becoming pastors. He was my 8th and 7th grade teacher. . .he did so by the way he conducted himself.

R: An excellent role model for you. . .So, you stayed at Juneau pretty much through your high school years?

N: I stayed in the dormitory at Watertown for nine months of the year, although I would usually come home for the weekends. We were only seventeen miles from Watertown. But, we had Saturday classes so we couldn't leave till Saturday noon and we came back on Monday.

R: Which teachers do you remember influencing you the most towards the ministry at Northwestern Prep?

N: Well, Mr. Jacobs. . .all the others were good teachers. . .

R: . . .but the teachers at the prep school, did any of those stick out in your mind, that you had fond memories of?

N: Well, the one that showed the most concern was old Pastor Wendtland, Ernst Wendtland. . .

R: The same one that is over in Africa now, or his father?

N: His father. The one that is in Africa now was eight years ahead of us. He was a senior [at college] when I was a Sextanner [first year high school student].

R: Do you have any more humorous stories from your high school years that you would like recorded for posterity?

N: No, I don't think so. . .they were humorous at the time, but you forget them. . .

R: . . .what was campus life like during the late 1930s?

N: Our life was entirely different in the dormitories because they had preps and collegiates together. In other words, I had a senior in college as my monitor when I was a Sextanner. My brother was in the same room. My other roommate was Professor Franzmann from Northwestern College. . .Gerhard Franzmann. . . was a freshman in college. So there was a senior from the college, a freshman from college, a Quartanner, and a Sextanner in the room. . .of course, the collegiates had to supervise the prep students and help them with their work. I think that was an excellent arrangement because it gave a little more responsibility to the collegiates and gave a tremendous amount of help to the students. I also, of course, became a tutor later on, at Northwestern College and they still had the same system then. I must admit I don't know how I could have worked in the dormitory successfully if I hadn't had the two college students in the rooms. . .they really kept discipline in the dormitory. . .

R: . . .what a great recruitment tool. . .

N: I did find that I also had experience at tutoring at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in rooms that just had high school students. There, of course, a senior in high school roomed with freshmen and they weren't quite ready for it. Some of them did pretty well, but others weren't quite ready for it. I could really tell the difference when the collegiates were in the dorm.

R: Were you involved in any sports in prep or college?

N: I played every sport that came along.

R: You were a regular all-star athlete. . .

N: I wouldn't say the first part. . .no, I was very fortunate. The Lord gave me some gifts. I played football, basketball: those were the two main sports. . .then in my senior year at high school we won the championship of what is now the league of Milwaukee. . .

R: When you went to college, did you play for any of teams that Umnus had, those unbeaten teams?

N: Not the unbeaten teams. I was in college during the war, so we had basketball for two years, well, really one year and then we started playing my senior year. Football we played for two years and then we dropped the sport, there was no

football. Then I helped coach the preps during my senior year in college.

R: What was that like going to Northwestern College during World War II?

N: Well, there was a lot of work around. Of course, you had to work to put yourself through school. I worked for the railroad in the afternoon for a few hours. Of course, we were finished by noon during the summer months. . .we went to school all year round.

R: Was that because of World War II?

N: Yes, it was because of the war.

R: Did you ever encounter any anti-German sentiment. . .?

N: I as a student never felt that way if there was some. And I worked for the railroad and the men there never said anything. They knew who we were and why we weren't in the Army, so that was no problem at all. I did spend one summer working before we went to school all year long at Milwaukee Nordberg Manufacturing Company. . .where we made engines for the steamships. . .In fact they were very kind to me there. One school year, we had off the month of September that was the only month we could work full-time. During that month, we worked hard and they let me work as many hours as I wanted to. So, I could earn enough money that month to pay my school bill. Of course, school was only \$180 a year. . .As far as my German background and going to school instead of the army, either they looked at you as a 4-F, in other words, you had some physical disability. . .or a 4-D which we were which was a deferment because we were studying for the ministry.

R: What effect, if any, did World War II have on you entering the ministry?

N: I don't think it had any bearing on it. I think sometimes the thought that maybe you should be in the army and defer your studies was there, of course. We were anxious to have pastors at that time, too. Actually, they encouraged us. . .

R: Let's move on to the Seminary. . .how did you find yourself adjusting to the Seminary?

N: Well, here again we graduated from Northwestern in January 1945. . .and the war ended, then we went directly to the Seminary. We graduated and the next week we went to Seminary. . .they just accelerated the program. We also had summer sessions at the Seminary and so for six months I was at the Seminary and then I had to leave for tutoring at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. I taught all the math at the high school there. . .But it was during that year that the war ended. So

we finished out the school year and then we had a special course from January to April perhaps which those people who were out did not have to take. But the students who were at the Seminary got the four extra months of teaching. But then they had off from April to September. And to get me back into my class, you see I had missed three months of school, we had a six-week course that covered all the work from the three months. I think there were about fifteen of us in that. . .from there, I went back to the second year of Seminary with my class even though I had been out. . .teaching.

R: So most of the men did go on to Seminary from college?

N: Most men.

R: Do you have a professor that you have a really fond memory of at Seminary?

N: I think we learned the most from Professor Meyer. . .

R: . . .how would you describe him as a teacher?

N: I don't think he was an excellent teacher. He had his Dogmatics notes and if you'd read them, you'd get what he said in class. But I think that the fact that this was Dogmatics from a teacher [who knew we would] be teaching it later on made it very interesting. Of course, he could answer any question we had. I also experienced Professor Lawrenz his first year at the Seminary. He started there my senior year. So, those were the two men that stood out. There were other capable professors there. . .

R: Did any one of them influence your ministry more than others?

N: No, I don't think so. By the time you get to the Seminary, you are pretty much ready to go.

R: . . .Let's talk about your family. Could you give me the full name of your wife?

N: Helen Jane Klug. . .

R: How did you meet?

N: Well, I always say we never met. We always knew each other. I moved to Juneau when I was one year old. She moved to Juneau when she was one year old--she's four years younger than me. So we always knew each other. Jokingly I always say I used to push her around in her baby buggy. She always responds she never had a baby buggy so I couldn't.

R: Did you go to the same school?

N: Same school.

R: Did she go to Prep or did they not allow women to go to Prep?

N: She went to Juneau High School.

R: Would you describe your courtship?

N: One thing that brought us together was our big bobsled and we were a little older and so we had to pull it up the hill for the kids to slide on. It held about ten kids. . .there was a hill right next to the church which went down to the school. We did a lot of sledding that was a part of our pastime. I suppose that's when it started a little bit. Summertime, of course, we were working separately and didn't see much of each other. Occasionally, we would. When I was on the basketball team and the baseball team she was there. She always came to the games. . .

R: Did you write a lot of letters?

N: Yeah, when I was in Saginaw that was '45, that was her senior year of high school. Then she went to New Ulm, of course, and I was in Mequon and we wrote letters then. Then she graduated and went to Jamestown, North Dakota to teach all eight grades and I was tutoring at Northwestern. That was the 1949-1950 school year. I also tutored at Northwestern during the 1948-1949 school year.

R: When did you finally decide to get married. . .when did you propose to her?

N: Oh, I think it came while I was tutoring at Northwestern, about a year and a half before I finished tutoring. . .We had an understanding that we would get married and I guess I gave her the diamond at Christmas time during the '49 Christmas. Or was it at Easter? I guess it was at Easter when I went out to Jamestown.

R: Was she surprised?

N: Well, she knew I was coming so I guess she realized it since we had the wedding date already set at that time.

R: What was the date that you were married?

N: June 25, 1950. . .forty three years ago. Time goes in a hurry. And the Lord has blessed all those years.

R: How many children did you have?

N: Four children.

R: This might be tedious for you, but could you list their names and dates of birth?

N: Jane Annette...April either the 16th or the 24th, 1951...David John, June 15, 1953...And then Lori Jean...she's either April 16 or 24th...and what year was that? '63, or '61? And the last one is Daniel, Daniel Paul, and his birthday is January 15, he's 21 now also, 1972.

R: What do your children do now?

N: Jane is married to a pastor, Reverend David Tiarks...in Burnsville, Minnesota. David is an attorney in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, and married to Bonnie Thompson. And Jane and David have five children, and Dave and Bonnie have four. And Lori is married to Steve Hagman...they live in Milwaukee, and have three children...And Dan of course was just engaged.

R: Here's an interesting question: How would you say that your wife has helped you in your ministry?

N: Well she's always been supportive of church work...and has never demanded that I take time away from my work...you know, spend time with the family...she just realized that church work came first, and was very supportive. We certainly spent time together, but I'm sure there were times when she would rather have had me home with her and the children, but she never demanded it, so she was very supportive always. She served as my secretary you might say, answered the telephone, took messages. I don't think the congregation realizes how much a pastor's wife does.

R: That's something I struggle with too, looking ahead into the future, trying to balance family and ministry, it's really a delicate balance--you dare not neglect one or the other.

N: You're right. And it works out. Of course I've always followed the procedure--and everyone might not agree with me--I like to have my study in the house, in the parsonage, because even though you're in your study working, you're home...and if there's an emergency, you're there to help. I remember one emergency which I was very thankful I had my study in the house. We lived in the old parsonage at Salem. I was upstairs, the study was upstairs, my wife was downstairs in the dining room, somebody walked into the kitchen. He never knocked or anything. And he went down the hall, my wife said, "Who's there?" and there was this man. And she said, "What are you doing," and he said, "Oh, I just stopped in, and I want to know about some land back here." He was a man who had gone into several homes, and accosted women. My wife said, "I have nothing to do with it, I'll call my husband." I was upstairs. So she called me of course, and he followed her, and she walked out of the dining room, he was right behind her back--good thing I was there. And when she called and I answered...that was it, he left in a big hurry. I told him we aren't selling or renting land, it was church land, he left the house, and that was the last we

saw of him.

R: How did you know he was the accoster?

N: Well, there had been going around there a picture in the paper, that looked like him. They finally caught him, and when we read the description, my wife said, "That's him."...I was glad I had my study there to help her out and save her, you might say. But even for the children, they knew that their dad was at home, otherwise they may never see their dad during the day. He's gone at night, and you're away at school, they don't get to see him...I say not everybody agrees with me on that, but I think it's worthwhile. In fact, I encourage our young pastors to have their study in the home.

R: Let's just briefly run over the calls you held in your ministry...You were a tutor at Northwestern from '48-'49?

N: '48-'50.

R: College or Prep?

N: I was the only tutor. One tutor for everyone.

R: No wonder you had to have the college students helping you out there...How did you feel on Call Day when you found out you be going to be the tutor there?

N: I sort of knew I was going to be the tutor, because they always took an athlete to help with the coaching at Prep. And I was about the only one who had coached the Preps for two years with Umnus...So I guess I sort of knew that it was coming.

R: Was the College any different in '48 when you got there?

N: I don't think so, no.

R: Who was the Dean of Students at that time?

N: Pastor [Waldemar] Pless was dean from '48-'49...And then they had a new dean...Ewald Tacke.

R: What were some of the activities you were involved with while you were there, as far as teaching, coaching?

N: I taught Sexta Latin my first year. The second year, since they were getting a new dean, they just had me do some private tutoring, not too much of that.

R: So would you see your call more of an administrative than a teaching one?

N: I was more of a disciplinarian.

R: They must have respected you...

N: I can't complain about the students. I enjoyed those two years, but I didn't get a lot of sleep once in a while, because I would stay up until twelve o'clock, get up at six o'clock..But I'm thankful for the cooperation I had from the Juniors and Seniors, and I think that goes back to Professor Pless, because he was an excellent man with the students...But here's no way, if someone's going to shoot firecrackers in the dormitory, there's no way that one man is going to stop that. But all we'd have to do is tell the Juniors and Seniors it's time that it stopped, and it stopped...The Juniors and Seniors, they were good classes. And my brother was a Senior...Don Sellnow was a Junior, Jim Fricke was a Junior, those were excellent men. Paul Eickmann was a Senior...when you have people like that to work with...

R: How did you try to influence high school or college students towards the ministry?

N: Of course I was in the office there a lot, and the kids could come down and talk...But I think that partly I would encourage them in their studies. At the faculty meetings if somebody was having a problem, I would talk to them, encourage them. I also encouraged the men in their rooms to help each other in their studies.

R: Let's talk about the next call you received, Sugar Bush--was that 1950-59?

N: '50-'59: Grace, Sugar Bush, and Emmanuel, [township of] Maple Creek...it was a dual parish.

R: What was the size of those two congregations?

N: Oh, I think that Sugar Bush had about 220, and Maple Creek had about 100...I had the privilege of living right out in the country. Farmers to the left of us, and farmers to the right of us.

R: Did you enjoy that?

N: Oh, it was wonderful; there was no better place they could have assigned us. I always thought of them as the two sweetest places in the world--you know, **Sugar Bush, Maple Creek.**

R: Would you describe the adjustment from tutoring to going into a dual parish?

N: Well, I had done quite a lot of preaching. I had preached once a month at a congregation in Iron Ridge, [Zum] Kripplein Christi congregation. I preached once a month there the English service, because the Pastor could not preach English...He preached in German, and once a month I preached in English,

because the boys of the congregation were marrying girls who didn't know German, so they had to have an English service. So I preached once a month there for maybe three years, while at my Senior year at the Seminary, and two years tutoring. So I was sort of accustomed to writing a sermon, and preaching, and so it was an adjustment, of course. At Northwestern you didn't have any Ladies' Aid meetings or anything like that, but having grown up in a parsonage I was used to that.

R: They didn't have Vicar years back then, did they,

N: No...It was interesting. I got there and they were in the midst of a building program at Sugar Bush, putting on a new boiler room and sacristy...and a new front.

R: Are building projects a tense time for churches, would you say?

N: They take a lot of time. I think they are exciting for a congregation, because they're doing something. Most of them are in favor of it, because they see a change, and something that helps them...Sugar Bush was the congregation you might say was doing things...The other congregation had no real challenge...

R: That really seems to be an indicator of whether a church will be around in twenty, thirty, fifty years or not.

N: That's right. If they're active and trying to stand, or if they're satisfied with the status quo, and not doing anything, eventually they're going to die. And especially in this area, where you have so many churches. Sugar Bush was only five miles away, and the big church in New London was only five miles away...so they didn't need the church out there--it was nice and it was handy for them, and everything else, but not a necessity.

R: What are some of the fondest memories you have of your years there at Sugar Bush and Maple Creek?

N: Well I think that the fondest memories are of the people. We loved the people up there, and they treated us loyally. In the ten years we were there, we never bought a roast or a steak. We had to purchase two deep freezers, to keep the meat that they gave us...like I say, we never bought a roast or a steak while we were there.

R: What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at that dual parish situation?

N: Well, at Sugar Bush we built an educational wing...Otherwise, I think it was trying to encourage spiritual growth, encourage church attendance, and things like that. I had three services a Sunday, two at Sugar Bush and one at Maple Creek, just to

give people the opportunity to go to church. Some of them were farmers and couldn't come early. That's always a challenge in any congregation, to have them go to school, to get them involved.

R: Was it difficult being in a dual parish situation?

N: Not really. For my Youth club I had them all together, both congregations together. In fact, I had the largest youth group I ever had up there. I had over 40 people...Ladies' Aid, I mean we had two Ladies' Aids, Men's Club, there was only one Men's Club at Sugar Bush. Of course you had two Council meetings, [two] Voters' Meetings, and things like that...Of course, I think we only had two Voters' Meetings a year.

R: You kind of mentioned this before, the people were very friendly to you?

N: They were very helpful with my wife, of course, she learned a lot from all the ladies around her, how to cook and can and anything else. And of course we had a beautiful place to live, on an acre of land, an old house, built in the 1870's, 1872? But we kept it up, it was comfortable.

R: You mentioned that you were involved with the Youth group. What other activities, or committees or clubs did you associate yourself with? Or even besides clubs, like shut-ins, etc., what were some of the other duties there?

N: All the duties of a Pastor...I got involved with starting Fox Valley Lutheran High School.

R: Let's move on to Salem. You were there from 1959 to 1992, correct? (affirmative nod). OK, how did you feel when you received this call to this...Milwaukee congregation, as opposed to the rural life there in Sugar Bush?

N: I always said I didn't want to live in Milwaukee because the houses were one right next to each other...but when you compared the work, there was no choice. We had to accept the call. The challenges were there at Salem, in a growing community, building that needed to be done and everything, you knew that with a clear conscience you couldn't stay where you liked it. But then the Lord took care of us there too, because like I said, I had no desire to live in Milwaukee, where the houses were one right next to the other, but at Salem, which was Brown Deer at the time, there was a whole vacant lot right next to us...There was a woods right behind us, there was a house north of us, but right next to us there was empty land. And so here we came, and this was given to us...And as far as the church was concerned, of course, we had a school, and four teachers, and as it went on, we had to add teachers to the school,. And all those years I was there, there was never a time when there wasn't some challenge for the congregation,

a challenge for growth. We were always thankful for that. I received calls during that time, but there was always something going on at Salem so there was no way I could take it.

R: ...What was the size of Salem in 1959?

N: I don't know, about 350 communicants.

R: Do you know what the size is now?

N: 1100.

R: Did you have any other pastors there?

N: No, no we didn't get an associate pastor until 1980...Of course during that time, I did have assistants. Like Pastor Robert Voss...He preached at our church once a month.

R: Was that while he was involved with Wisconsin Lutheran College?

N: He was at Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College, and then at the Synod office...I also had Seminary professors conduct Sunday morning Bible classes.

R: In 1980, your first associate--what was his name?

N: David Rosenow, he's in Hutchinson, MN now.

R: Who were some of the other men you worked with?

N: Well, Rosenow left in 1989, then Pastor Simons, Dan Simons. Of course, during this time I also had graduate assistants. The first graduate assistant was Martin Spriggs. He was with us from '88-'90. And then Mark Voss was with us from '90-'92. He, of course, was assigned then as a pastor...He was the third pastor...And then we also got Sims, Snoden Sims, and that was in '91...so he was really the third pastor. And then when I retired, Mark Voss took my place [in 1992].

R: Now Gene Sims is no longer there?

N: No, Gene Sims took the call to Northwestern. [Mark Voss is still there]...So they went from four to two, mainly because of finances. It may sound strange to you, but Salem is in a changing neighborhood. In one year, 1989, in one year we lost members that contributed over \$100,000...And the members we're getting now...they're not able to give that much. We have single parents coming in now...and though they tried to keep on, there was no way they were going to keep on two teachers...they had to consider dropping a pastor.

R: You said the neighborhood is changing--are there more people moving in there from the city, or most people moving out to

the suburbs?

N: We have people joining the church coming from the city, and that's about as far out in the city as you can get. They also have condominiums there, apartment buildings there, where a lot of single parents or divorced people are moving out there to live with their families, really put a strain on the school, when their kids go to school. The members we lost were good people who lived in the area, but then moved away, moved out of the area, some are retired, some moved up North...it's a changing neighborhood, and that's why they dropped one of the pastors. I still help as I can, I do all the shut-in work, I hardly ever preach too much.

R: It's too bad that because of financial restraints they had to cut back, because with all the single parents they could almost use the extra staff for counselling.

N: Absolutely. And the congregation realizes that, but they don't have the money. And I think that some of the members are doing whatever they can, to help out the pastors. They know they should have three pastors there...I've been privileged to be involved with building programs all the time there...Refurbished the old church, redecorated that, of course, we built the gymnasium, classrooms, and built a new church...always was something going on...I was fortunate. I always had good [lay people]...you know, a pastor can get pretty involved in a building project, but I didn't have to. There were men there who knew more about it than I did. They made some excellent decisions. All I had to do was keep it going. It was enjoyable.

R: What did you enjoy the most about your years there at Salem?

N: Oh, I think what I enjoyed the most was seeing the people develop spiritually, getting involved with the work of the church. That was really satisfying, the spiritual growth that we had.

R: What did you enjoy the least at Salem?

N: Really, I wouldn't say there was anything I enjoyed the least. Sometimes things would happen you wish wouldn't, the divorce cases...I suppose you could say I enjoyed those the least. But the work was still there.

R: What was the biggest challenge for you at Salem?

N: I don't know if there was any biggest challenge. Certainly the building programs were a challenge. The working together of the members, getting them to work together was a challenge, but you know when you have a building program, it isn't hard to get them to work together.

R: What did you do to encourage children, or youth, or even adults to enter the ministry while you were at Salem?

N: Usually we would speak about it in confirmation class, but we weren't too successful, as I recall. But there are a few, teachers, and several pastors, Roy Rose, John Moll, that's about it.

R: Let's talk about now your work as a Synodical officer. How did you first start getting into Synod work?

N: The Lord has been very good to me in giving me many opportunities to serve people in different capacities. For one thing throughout the years, I have been at the Youth camp up North, Camp Bird, which we had since '53...Pastor Stelter at Two Rivers does most of the work now, but I'm still involved with some things. Then I think the next thing I was involved with was Wisconsin Lutheran High School Board. I was the chairman of that for several years. Then I think the Synodical job was what is the Commission on Worship. Then I became involved with the Board of Support, first at the District, then I was Chairman of the Synod Board of Support. The Board of Support takes care of widows [of pastors] and retired pastors. That has now been taken over by the Vice President of the District. And while I was on the Board of Support I was also on the District Praesidium, first as the Second Vice President, then as the First Vice President. Then of course I was President when Pastor Boldt died. I'll never forget that. Getting ready for the District Pastor-Teachers' Convention, he had left just what we were going to discuss, he would always take care of the details. So he took all his stuff with him and left me behind [when he went] to Michigan to visit his daughter over there...[the convention] was one week later. And while he was over there he had his heart attack [in 1983]. So all the materials for the convention were in Michigan. And the convention started on a Tuesday morning...Friday I think it was when they called and said he had a heart attack...And we still hadn't set up the schedule for the conference. I was never so busy in all my life. Because as First Vice President I had to take over for him. He didn't die until a week after the convention.

R: How would you describe your predecessor, Pastor Boldt?

N: Oh, George was an excellent man. A wonderful sense of humor, a good theologian, could deal with people very well. I enjoyed working with him very much.

R: How did you feel stepping into his shoes?

N: Well, you feel sort of helpless. He did such a terrific job, yet at the same time you can only use the talents the Lord gives you. I think everybody realized it wasn't going to be the same. I can remember one pastor who came to me, who didn't know how our District Council was going to work out without

George there, but it worked out all right...They all cooperated very well. That was quite an experience, though.

R: That must have been quite a jump going from First Vice President to District President.

N: As Vice President you consulted quite a bit, but you don't handle things, you're not on the firing line. When you get to be District President, you're it. You have to take responsibilities...It was a shock, you might say. Again, as I say, I think the pastors in the District were very cooperative.

R: Could you describe the differences between doing work as a parish pastor and doing work at the Synod office? What were the advantages and disadvantages?

N: Some things are very similar, but on a different level. You do a lot of counselling as District President, but it's with pastors. It's surprising how often your phone rings when you're District President. People ask for your advice and things like that. Of course as District President you have responsibilities that you don't have as pastor of a congregation. You don't have to be concerned about call meetings outside where you're at [when you're a pastor]...You don't have to be concerned about doctrine of other places, and things like that. But this is one of the things that I think trouble most of the District Presidents, is to be separated from contact with the congregational members, and your rapport with them, your relationship with them. It's a little more impersonal when you make it to the District level. And yet, not really either, because you still have a lot of personal relationships with pastors. But it isn't quite the same as with families of the congregation, you're a little farther removed.

R: Do you think it would have been easier for you to do your duties as District President if you would not have been pastor of a congregation?

N: There's a big tension when you're pastor and President. And I think the tension is that there is so much to do, and you can't do it all. You know there is work in the congregation, you know there is work in the District to do, and you just don't get it all done. I don't suppose you'd get it done if you were just a pastor or just a District President. But I think that when there is two responsibilities, then the tension really comes through...And I think that most of us District Presidents feel a lack, that we can't get it all done. But as I say, I don't think you could resolve the conflict if you were just a District President or a pastor. I know that they had talked about sort of changing it, by keeping a District President a part of a congregation, but not having him as the head pastor. Then the Graduate Assistant more or less becomes the pastor of the congregation, which in some cases would work, I suppose, if you had a smaller congregation. At a large congregation

the associate pastor would become the head pastor. You're sort of removing the District President from the congregation, and yet at the same time, letting him be in the congregation to experience first hand what needs to be done.

R: So there are advantages and disadvantages to the way it's set up.

N: I'd just like to go back to one thing, the fact that the District President would still have his hand in the congregation. One of the problems that a congregation has with our Seminary professors is that they no longer have contact with a congregation. And there is thought of making every seven years, that they would be sent to a congregation, and work with a congregation. I think you would have the same thing in a District President, if they would lose contact with a congregation.

R: Let's discuss some of the activities you were involved with as District President. I'm just going to list a couple of things, and I'd like you to describe your feelings towards them. The first one, Assignment Day...How does that make you feel each time you had to go into a Call Day situation?

N: I think you went in realizing how inadequate you are, and it had to be rather humbling. I don't think there was anything I enjoyed more doing, but you also had to realize that the Holy Spirit did a lot of work. I don't think there is any greater joy than to go to young people and say, "Here is your first assignment, where the Lord wants you to work."...I would say that there was a whole two months where you could hardly spend time with anything else, except preparing for the Assignment Day students...There's a terrific amount of work that goes into that, and here again, I think that all the work that the Conference of Presidents does, there has to be, we have to have help from others. You have to get used to that help. Now, with the assignment of students, we got a book of characterization on all the students, all the teachers who would graduate, all the pastors, and all the Vicars. We know what their capabilities are, we know their strengths, we know their weaknesses, only because other people have told us. We wouldn't find that out by ourselves. So now you have to look over it all, that's about 250 people, 150 teachers, and about 50 pastors and 50 Vicars. You have to know their strengths, know their weaknesses. Then you have to look at the calls. Where are the calls that I have in my district? Of course, those are the ones you are concerned about. What does this congregation need? What kind of a personality do you need? All of it, you have to take into consideration. The size of the congregation, the amount of work of the congregation, and then you have to find the students that would fit those congregations. And there are some [students] who just aren't good at evangelism, and we've gotten that report from their Vicar year, and things like that, various things that you all put together. But you as

a congregation have need for an evangelist. Naturally, you're not going to put someone who hasn't those abilities in that place. But you have to know the congregation, you have to know the students, and you don't get to know them in just one hour. You really have to sit down with them...And if it's a classroom teacher, who are the other teachers there, are their personalities going to clash? Can they take a student who hasn't progressed to being an excellent teacher yet? And workers there, is there someone there who can work with that teacher, and help him grow in his teaching abilities? An associate pastor [call], which of these boys is going to be able to work with someone else? There are so many ramifications. And, of course, we do rely a lot upon the advice we have. And then up at New Ulm, other teachers, ones who are in charge of practice teaching, the Dean of students, the President, all of these people are involved. We come to the Seminary, and of course you have a President of the institution who knows the students. And you ask for advice, "Do you think this person will fit here? The way I look at it, he will, but do you agree with us?" There's a lot of praying going on, and I'm sure the Holy Spirit is really guiding us. But you don't get to a place by chance, your name isn't just drawn out of a hat...I remember in past years not being able to assign all the Seminary students. Some were left. And I can remember one fellow, thanking us for not assigning him, prior to the date and place he was assigned. Because he realized when he got there, that that's where the Lord wanted him. And that's where his talents really fit. And sometimes there isn't a place for the individual, and it's much better that they wait than they go some place where they are destroyed in their ministry.

R: ...It's definitely a much more difficult process than I ever realized...

N: It's a wonderful experience. I think that it's one of the most thrilling things about being a District President. It's one of the most awesome.

R: I imagine you have to have a good relationship with the other D.P.'s to accomplish your goals, so that you're not vying for a candidate.

N: I would say that there is a good working relationship among us...we all realize we can't have the best one. I think we all realize that not every congregation needs the best one. In fact, the best one might not work out very well at that congregation.

TAPE TWO

R: Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the assignment of the candidates or would you like to move on?

N: Well, I think we can move on, because another area is making out a call list...According to most congregational constitutions, they go to the District President when they are in need, they seek his advice. And, of course, we do make out the call list for them. I always tried to meet with the council of the congregation, to let them have input into what kind of a pastor they would want, what kind of strengths, what are the weaknesses in the congregation. I think that most of the District Presidents do that...[But I would always] try to visit personally with the council. And then when you find out what they think their needs are, of course, you also know the congregation too, and it's areas of what they should have, what their weaknesses are. Then you start thinking, "Who are we going to put on that list?" And here again, I don't think any District President does it on his own. You have your Vice President to consult...they always have input into every call [list] that is sent out. Sometimes you consult with the circuit pastor, for that congregation. You might consult with other Presidents of other Districts, if they have someone they think really needs a call. You also do a lot of consulting with the professors at the Seminary, who taught these students, and know whether or not this student will fit in this situation. So again, you look to a lot of input into the call list. You may consider 30 or 40 men on a call list. So then, of course, you narrow it down, and the congregation finally gets a list of four or five men. And then, of course, a congregation has the right to add names to that list. Although that's a difficult thing too when at the last minute somebody says, "I'd like to add this man to the list." And you know the fellow wouldn't work too well there. So I have always tried to circumvent that by having them give me names that they want to have considered for the call list, let the congregation do that prior to making out the call list. Then you can always come to a call meeting and say, "We've considered all the names, and these are the four we feel are the best." So they had their name considered...And the Holy Spirit works through a congregation in that way too. I've always been convinced that someone calls somebody, that's the one the Holy Spirit wants to have the call.

R: Would you like to comment on the use of a congregational questionnaire [in getting congregational input into a call list]? ...Is it a common practice in Synod?

N: It is getting to be that way. I didn't use a questionnaire, but I had spoken to Pastor Rutschow [now District President of the SEW District], and told him what I needed at these meetings. See, the only thing there is that you open it up to more congregational input, rather than just the councilmen. But I think that in fact some of the District Presidents will send them to the councilmen prior to their meeting, so they can fill it out beforehand and think about it. I think it's a good idea to get them involved.

R: Did you personally attend every single time they needed a called worker for a pastor or a teacher, would you go and talk with every single congregation, or would you send like a Vice President to deal with them?

N: It would all depend on my schedule. I always tried to attend the first one, to meet with the council. After that, sometimes the vacancy pastor would conduct it, the circuit pastor, at times the Vice Presidents would attend--there was no set rule.

R: I imagine that it must have kept you quite busy...

N: You never know how many there are going to be. It varies from month to month. But, of course, they would only call them every five or six weeks. If you had five vacancies in a district, you might have five, one call meeting a night, a week. It all depends on when they had their meetings. Some congregations like to meet right after their services, so that was pretty difficult. Sometimes it was difficult for the circuit pastor, and someone else did it.

R: Let's move on to another topic. I was reading some of the District proceedings, and I noticed that several times in your report to the assembly you mentioned shortages, shortfalls in the SMO, and I was wondering how you deal with congregations or with a District that is lax or lagging behind in its giving, and the whole idea of stewardship.

N: That is one of the areas that generally in the realm of the Conference of Presidents. And it's a difficult area. Here again, we have to have help. There's no way that the District President can do it all by himself. So we do have the organization known as the CCFS, where we do have a committee, that is responsible for the SMO's of the congregation. And, of course, the District President is still the one where the responsibility falls. But there again, you want to have some lay people involved, you'll have some teachers involved, you'll have some pastors involved, that deal with the congregations. In most districts they have the congregations divided up into circuits, and there will be a man from the CCFS who is in charge of the various circuits. I think that our district has six men on it, the CCFS, but they have divided the various conferences up among themselves, and they are responsible for all the information from the Synod getting to them. On occasion the District President, at their request, will send a letter to the congregations, but it is the CCFS who does most of that work. But the President is responsible.

R: Is the CCFS also responsible for Reaching Out programs, Lift High the Cross, Synodical stewardship programs that we have?

N: Yes, they are the ones who are really in charge of that.

I would say that Lift High the Cross had it's own special [committee].

R: How did you encourage a local congregation in its stewardship? Did you ever go personally to talk to them?

N: The only time I would talk to them would be at a call meeting, or with the council. Because there too you're going to talk about the salary of the new pastor. I never found that the salaries were too high. And yet at the same time you had to encourage them to pay the pastor a decent salary, and yet at the same time not to hold back some help from the Synod just to pay the pastor. You should do both. Sometimes it's hard for a congregation to see the proper balance.

R: What role did you play in planting new churches in the district, in mission work? Did any of that fall under the COP, or the District Mission Board?

N: It is both the responsibility of the District Mission Board and the Synodical Mission Board. I always tried to attend the District Mission Board meetings...

R: This is a question I'm going to ask because I'm involved with an inner-city church, St. Philip's. How do you feel about our Synod's involvement with cross-cultural work in inner-city missions?

N: I think that we have to be involved with that work. I'm so thankful that the Wisconsin Synod has been one of the few synods that has not left the inner-city. Some of our congregations have moved out, but not the majority of them by any means. And I think that we have to continue that, even if it becomes a case where it becomes a mission. Some of the foreign mission work is right here in our own back yard. And I think we have to keep that in perspective.

R: Let's move on to another topic. Let's talk about, and this is not a very pleasant topic either, but dealing with the disciplining of pastors and congregations--how do you deal with that?

N: Here again the Conference of Presidents needs help. And a lot of that is through the circuit pastor. He's the one who is closest to the congregation, and he has 6 or 7 congregations that he's overseeing. And it's his responsibility as the arm of the COP and the District President to supervise the doctrine of that area. We tried, as a District President to meet with the circuit pastor, at least twice a year, and discuss the various problems that we had. Many of them would call me personally and ask for advice as to what needed to be done. So the District President doesn't become involved until the circuit pastor has dealt with it...Many times that's as far as it goes, the congregation follows the circuit pastor's

advice...Many times the District President doesn't have to become involved.

R: I was reading the 1990 district proceedings, and I saw that there was a lawsuit one pastor brought against the Synod for several million dollars. Do you remember that case?

N: That was a case where we had a pastor ineligible for a call...The civil courts heard it, said Synod...dealt correctly in the matter, according to their policies, so it was thrown out of court. But that was quite a shock for me to get something in the mail saying I was being sued for several million dollars. We were insured by Church Mutual, so they paid the lawyers' fees, and so on.

R: I also read in the District proceedings you were commenting on a resolution at Synod Conventions that congregations should be represented by a 50-50 mix of laity and pastors. How do you feel about the importance of the laity getting involved with the work of the church?

N: I like to see the laity involved in the work of the church. The only problem I have, I feel, I'm afraid that the move of Northwestern to New Ulm, I'm afraid that the laity was very responsible for that move. Unless they have good advice...I think that there has to be a balance of some sort, but they do have to get involved in the work of the church.

R: How do you feel about the decision of the last district [Synod] convention to move Northwestern to New Ulm, and the amalgamate Prairie du Chien at Watertown?

N: The decision was made, and we have to abide by it. My reservations...it does not follow the educators' advice to always put your school where your students are. Now that would be putting it in the Wisconsin area, because that's where the largest number of our constituents reside. Not that I have anything against New Ulm, or Florida, or whatever, but I think that the best thing would be to put your school where your students are. They didn't do that. They failed to do that with Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College was sent up to New Ulm. They built up there instead of maintaining what they had down here at that time. Maybe we would have had more students than we knew what to do with. But to move our college, the college for pastors, out of the area, this is where we get into danger. And I guess the other great thing I had against going to New Ulm, was that how are the students going to support themselves, trying to find jobs in New Ulm? New Ulm does not have places for students to work to make enough money to pay for school.

R: What do you see as positives for the schools being together, other than financial aspects?

N: Well, one positive might be that pastors and teachers get to know each other in school, rather than just out in the field. That might be a positive, I don't know how necessary it is. I think it's going to be a drawback for them, there will be more married students, and that's going to make it even more difficult for them to make a living if they can't get jobs.

R: You said you were involved with getting Staff Ministry set up [in a prior conversation]. Can you explain a little bit more what that's all about? How do you see that fitting into the ministry ten years down the road?

N: Here again, I was involved in setting up the Staff Ministry program, but again the COP to a committee to do, and the committee comes back to the COP with it's report, and it has to be done that way because the COP couldn't do all that work. Now the Staff Ministry program would specialize, or center on, for example, evangelism, training someone special for that. You would have the theological background, the Dogmatics classes and things like that, training special for evangelism. It might be counseling they would be specially trained for, it might be administration, running the church office. You could have a church secretary, but if you have someone in charge of administration, it would be all that much better. Then the pastor doesn't have to worry about it at all. The administrator takes care of it. Several programs like that we are gearing up for in the Staff Ministry program at New Ulm right now, that would help in the future. For example, a congregation like Salem, they would have a man who was in charge of evangelism. He would not do any preaching, he might help with communion or things like that, but his main thrust would be evangelism. Or he could train members to go out and testify their faith. Or he could set up a list of prospects--who are the good prospects, who are the bad prospects. Now a pastor [still] has to spend a little of his time on that, but he wouldn't be full time on that. I think that St. Paul's, Hales Corners, has got a man on their Staff Ministry program, or a family administrator who is working for other congregations, but he's also got his hand there, and it is his job, they use him, to help families raise their families. Now, the pastor does all those things, but if that's all he has to do, he'll do so much better the job on it. I think that's where the Staff Ministry program will really help the Synod in the future.

R: Do you want to comment on how a congregation might feel about funding such an individual, because you mentioned at Salem how they had to cut back on so many programs?

N: Finances are always going to play a part. The committee I worked with felt that the pay should be, possibly, on the same schedule as the principal of the congregation. That would be the level. You see, maybe the principal of the congregation takes care of education...

R: Do you see any problems with the pastors getting along with the staff ministers?

N: Those are personalities that will be involved...You're going to have some problems, I suppose. Here again, and this has always dismayed me so much, in some joint ministries, dual pastorates. We have to remember the divine call. It's the Lord who has called them and put them in that place for that purpose. Not everybody has the same talents. We're all different. But the Lord wants those talents of those two people to be used at that place at that time. And we don't have to vie with each other. We have to work together with each other, use the talents God has given to us. Now, with the Staff Ministry program, especially for a man who has specialized in evangelism, then the head pastor, or the pastor, has to say, "Well, that's his area now. Let the Lord use his talents in that area right now, and I'll keep my hands off of it."

R: That might be tough thing for people to do.

N: That's right, but it has to be done. We have to remember the Lord has given him talents, the Lord has called him there for that purpose, I'm going to keep my hands off of it, this is the Lord's work. That person is going to respect the pastor's position, his preaching and everything else. And maybe he would preach a little different than that pastor would, but still, let him do it the way he wants to.

R: One last thing I want to talk about as far as activities as a D.P. I noticed also in some of the things you wrote in the District Proceedings, you talked about called worker care committees, study clubs. How would you suggest the Synod slows the number of men who are resigning from the ministry?

N: Well, I think the called care committee is one of those. That before the problem blossoms, that somebody's talked to these men. The called care committee in the congregation, of course, they may stumble on to these things because they interview these people to find out what their problems might be...and maybe it will stop right there. But they can always go to the circuit pastor, and he can help. I think the problem is that many resignations come because people don't consult with others soon enough. I know as District President I had people come to me, talk about resignation, you know, they were frustrated with their work and things like that. Many times it's because they were expecting too much. They were trying to program the work of the Holy Spirit, and it wasn't going quite the way they programmed it, and they become frustrated. And that's a case where you talk it over, and bring them to the realization, "Maybe I'm expecting too much. I shouldn't be expecting that."

R: It [resignations from the ministry] sure does seem to be an epidemic problem in many congregations today.

N: Well, some of the resignations are due to a person not acting the way he should. The reasons don't come out, we don't broadcast them, so there are some resignations like that...It isn't always because of the work...There are other reasons a man resigns, he has to resign.

R: As you look back on your presidency, which people helped you the most?

N: Oh, there's a lot of them...A District President has to have a lot of help. Every committee in the district--your youth program, your adult program, all of those things. Schools--now I just might mention there, for example, the list for teachers. We don't really do that. We approve them, is what we do. The Board for Parish Services, Dr. Schmeling and Dr. Plath, know the teachers, know their capabilities. It would be impossible for us to do that, so we ask them for help there. And then there's your fellow members on the COP, the Vice President, the District Council. A District President doesn't do it all, I tell you that. You've got to have a lot of advice.

R: Are there any other activities as District President that we haven't touched on, that you would like to mention briefly?

N: Well, I think we touched on just about everything. The various phases--you mentioned the Staff Ministry program. Or, just like the Man and Woman [doctrinal statement]. This again, the Conference of Presidents didn't do that. We approved it, we had a committee work on it, and we asked the Synod for advice, on how to not change the doctrine, but how to change the wording so it would be better understood, and not misunderstood. Here again, the COP was responsible for it, but a lot of people worked on it.

R: That just probably reminds you that you are a servant, that the higher you go, the more you are a servant, the more you depend on others.

N: That's right. As a District President, you just have so many more ways to serve the Lord, or his people. For that, we're thankful. You never feel that you're able, or qualified, as a District President...but you realize that the Lord wants you to use the talents that you have. I certainly don't think that I had that many talents, but I hope the Lord used the talents that I did have at that time during the District Presidency. I'm sure he did, because he put me there. But as far as accomplishments, you don't take credit for those. There are so many people you work with, and it has to be that way.

R: One last recap question of your ministry. How has the ministry changed over your lifetime? For a guy like me who's going to be assigned in 1994, how is it going to be different

for me than it was for you back in 1948?

N: I think that the main difference is going to be the counseling that you have to do today, that we did not have...A materialistic world that we never had...abortion, we never would have thought of that. But, with the materialistic world coming in, the idea they're saying is, "Well, this is the best way," whether it's God's way or not doesn't make any difference. And I think that's where the big change is. The preaching, the teaching, I think that's all the same. I don't think that's changed that much, although of course, now you have different things you have to emphasize, different things that you're going to be pointing out.

R: Would you like to talk about some of the activities you've been involved with since you stepped down from the Presidency [effective July 1, 1992]? I know that you were involved as a vacancy pastor at my grandparents' church in Ft. Myers, but did you do some other congregational fill-in work like that?

N: No, I haven't, mainly because of my sickness. I can only do so much. I still do the shut-in work at Salem...I still do preach occasionally. They asked me to preach for an Advent service, and I said I'd do it, but I started my radiation treatments in December, and I didn't know how I'd feel, so...

R: Would you like to talk about the cancer?

N: Our times are in the hands of the Lord. If the Lord wants to take me through cancer, that's the way he'll take me home...I think that He's given some wonderful treatments for cancer we didn't have years ago. And like the doctor told me, "I've got bad news for you, you have cancer, but good news too, it's treatable." He could have said that it wasn't.

R: When did you receive that diagnosis?

N: Back in June [1993].

R: What was the diagnosis?

N: Lymphoma.

R: They found this during a routine checkup? Were you feeling sick?

N: No, I had a swollen leg. My leg was swollen. That's what made me go to the doctor. He knew right away...He put me in the hospital right away, took a biopsy.

R: The tumor was in the leg?

N: In the groin area. Then I found out that I also had some cancer in my chest.

R: How did you feel when the doctor broke the news to you?

N: Well, you're shocked, and yet at the same time, my God, I've had almost 70 years of life, the Lord has been good to me. Why complain, why worry? I've always been thankful that the Lord has given me so many opportunities to serve. It's almost overwhelming, the various areas that I have been able to do that. In fact, I'm still on the Luther Haven board, I started that going. The Child and Family service, I was involved with starting that. There's so much the Lord enabled me to do and serve, I'm just thankful for that. And now, if he wants to take me to heaven, so be it, if it's time to go.

R: How's your family been taking this?

N: Well, I don't know, I haven't really asked them.

R: Was it difficult to tell them?

N: I don't think it was difficult. I guess my wife was there, of course, involved [when I found out]. I think the children are concerned, they'd like to see me around for a while. I don't know how necessary that is.

R: It's always easier for those who are leaving than those who are staying around.

N: Yes. And I think they're taking it real well. I know my daughter, the day after [she found out], said, "If that's the way the Lord wants to take you, that's the way it has to be. There isn't much we can do about it." And you never know. The Lord can still keep me around for another ten years, although I don't know how anxious I am for that.

R: When did you begin your first treatments?

N: June. Chemo was only until now [November], radiation will start in December.

R: And your current status is...

N: Well, the doctor was happy with the CAT scan, he said, but of course, you have to wait and see what time will develop. The tumors in my groin have practically disappeared, but the ones in my chest here have not. They decreased in size, the doctor said they went down a centimeter in size, but they're not gone. I said the Lord didn't want them to go away, he wanted them to stay there.

R: What would you say to somebody else who is going through the same type of lymphoma? I know what you would say to people as a pastor, but now that you have experienced this yourself,

would you say anything different,

N: I don't think so. We're still in the Lord's hands. And the Lord will see us through it. He gives you strength for every day. I'm thankful I don't need a lot of strength...some people have it a lot worse than I do.

R: One more question, we're almost done with our interview. What advice would you have to give to men like me who are about to enter the ministry?

N: Be faithful in your work, your studies, dealing with people. Use common sense...You can't teach common sense. Many times I would advise, seek the advice of others.

Analysis of interview

It is safe to say that the Lord has given Winfred Nommensen many gifts and talents. God used those talents in many aspects of Pastor Nommensen's ministry. For example, in 1960, the year after Pastor Nommensen accepted a call there, Salem Lutheran Church had 800 baptized members, and 152 children enrolled in its Lutheran Elementary School¹. In 1990, Salem had 1,580 baptized members, and 274 children in its school². I am sure that Pastor Nommensen would give all the credit the Holy Spirit with the dramatic increase of members. In the interview you just read, Pastor Nommensen said, "I certainly don't think that I had that many talents, but I hope the Lord used the talents that I did have at that time during the District Presidency."³ Professor John Jeske, a Seminary classmate of Winfred Nommensen, has this to add:

"He [Pastor Nommensen] was not the top of the class...but, he was faithful in using his gifts...[He was] happy to work at the particular job and with the particular gifts the Lord has given him to work with...Nommensen recognized what are the gifts, how can I use these to the glory of God?"⁴

If one examines the early years of Pastor Nommensen's ministry, one can see that from early on he was not afraid to work with other men. When he was the only tutor at Northwestern, he had to rely on the members of the Junior and Senior college classes to help him keep order in the dormitory. When he was pastor at Sugar Bush and Maple Creek, he encouraged lay involvement in ministry as a key to the survival of the congregation. "If they're active and trying to stand, or if they're satisfied with the status quo, and not doing anything, eventually they're going to die."⁵

During his years at Salem, the congregation went through many building projects, including the restoration of the old church and turning it into a museum. Pastor Nommensen did not impose his will on these projects, but says, "There were men there who knew more about it than I did. They made some excellent decisions. All I had to do was keep it going."⁶

It is in President Nommensen's involvement with the Call Day process that his qualities as a humble servant shine brightest. In his very first President's Report at the 1984 Southeastern District Convention, President Nommensen said,

"I was privileged for the first time to take part in the assignment of the graduates of Dr. Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. What a thrill to see the gifts God has given to these young people to be used in kingdom work."⁷

When asked how he felt going in to each Call Day situation, Pastor Nommensen said,

"I think you went in realizing how inadequate you are...I would say that there was a whole two months where you could hardly spend time with anything else, except preparing for the Assignment Day students."⁸

Pastor Nommensen also commented on how the Conference of Presidents relied heavily on the advice of others, such as professors, bishops during the Vicar year, and student teacher supervisors. He said,

"There's a terrific amount of work that goes into that, and here again, I think that all the work that the Conference of Presidents does, there has to be, we have to have help from others. You have to get used to that help."⁹

As a Senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, with about three months to go until my own Call Day assignment, it is reassuring to know that my assignment will not be due to chance, but that

the Holy Spirit, working through faithful men in the COP, will send me to exactly the right place God wants me to be.

President Nommensen also relied on others in producing call lists for congregations in his district. He was not the kind of man who dictated matters to the congregations in his district, but he sought out their input. He met with the church councils of a congregation before making out the call list, in order to "find out what they think their needs are, of course, you also know the congregation too, and it's areas of what they should have, what their weaknesses are."¹⁰ Pastor Nommensen also sought the advice of his Vice Presidents, circuit pastors, and other District Presidents. And finally, as he states, "I've always been convinced that someone calls somebody, that's the one the Holy Spirit wants to have the call."¹¹

President Nommensen also showed his attitude of service when it came to dealing with shortfalls in his district's Synod Mission Offerings (SMO's). The SEW District of the Wisconsin Synod had its share of problems with congregations being delinquent in its giving to Synod. For instance, during the first quarter of 1990, of 285 congregations in the Synod which made no SMO remittances, 26 of them were in the SEW District.¹² Also, 1990 subscriptions of congregations in his district were \$3,158,416, a decrease of \$33,680 from subscriptions in 1989.¹³ 52 congregations in his district did not even reach their subscriptions in 1989.¹⁴ John Jeske states,

"He is not your prototypical take-charge kind of guy. I think that he would rather work subliminally...Maybe there were some members of the district, and I'm not thinking of anybody, who might have felt, 'I think he should

have ridden herd on somebody more than he did.' If somebody were to say that, I think I could understand it. I never said it, because I would much more prefer to lead by example, rather than by mandate."¹⁵

No doubt it is a most difficult thing to encourage giving, whether it's on a local congregational level or on the district level. It is also difficult to encourage giving when the economy is weak, as it was during the Recession years of the late 1980's. I don't know that if President Nommensen had been more of an authoritarian leader, that it would have achieved the result of increased offerings. And if a dictatorial style of leadership would produce those offerings, I think one would have to question the motivation behind those offerings. I would like to allow President Nommensen to address the issue for himself, as he did so eloquently in his President's Report at the 1990 SEW District Convention:

"I know there are those, too, who act as if God in heaven could be satisfied with a few dollars, the leftovers after we have spent the rest on our enjoyment. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will move them to give in love to the Savior who has redeemed them, putting their priorities in the proper order. We do not want to forget that God never comes first to a man's pocketbook and then to his heart, but ever, always, and eternally to his heart alone. Behind and above all our offerings...there must stand the living, vital, heart-warming, personal faith in the redeeming Christ, which alone will enable us 'to be priests to serve his God and father.'"¹⁶

Let the record state that President Winfred Nommensen used other men to accomplish the goal of encouraging giving to the Synod. President Nommensen realized that

"the District President is still the one where the responsibility falls. But there again, you want to have some lay people involved, you'll have some teachers involved, you'll have some pastors involved, that deal with the congregations."¹⁷

President Nommensen also relied on the CCFS, the committee responsible for encouraging stewardship in the district. "But the President is responsible."¹⁸

One last area which typifies the leadership of President Nommensen is his attitude towards the Staff Ministry program. As a part of the COP, he was involved with the inception of this program, which is intended to train men and women to work in areas of ministry which traditionally have been a pastor's responsibility. These areas include evangelism, administration, and family ministry, to name a few. These trained Staff Ministers will have much of the same theological training as pastors, yet not the languages. When I asked him what problems he foresaw in a pastor and a Staff Minister getting along, this is what he said:

"We don't have to vie with each other. We have to work together with each other, use the talents God has given to us. Now, with the Staff Ministry program, especially for a man who has specialized in evangelism, then the head pastor, or the pastor, has to say, 'Well, that's his area now. Let the Lord use his talents in that area right now, and I'll keep my hands off of it.'"¹⁹

God grant all his pastors and teachers in our Synod such humility and respect, that we may work together!

I hope that I have given an accurate portrayal of the ministry of President Nommensen. I hope that I have captured the essence of his ministry, that of humble service. In our circles, we give the District President a lot of authority, and with that authority comes a lot of responsibility as well. I believe that the only way a man can survive as a District President or a parish pastor is to emulate the attitude of

Winfred Nommensen, who said, "Be faithful in your work, your studies, dealing with people. Use common sense...You can't teach common sense. Many times I would advise, seek the advice of others."²⁰ I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to gain advice from President Nommensen, and I would like to thank him wholeheartedly for his help with this paper.

END NOTES

1. 1960 WELS Statistical Report, p.48.
2. 1990 WELS Statistical Report, p.80.
3. Transcript of oral interview of Winfred Nommensen, November 23, 1993, p.26.
4. Oral interview of John Jeske, February 10, 1994.
5. W. Nommensen interview, p.12.
6. Ibid., p.15.
7. 1984 SEW District Proceedings, p.18.
8. W. Nommensen interview, p.18.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p.20.
11. Ibid.
12. 1990 SEW District Proceedings, p.41.
13. Ibid., p.19.
14. Ibid.
15. J. Jeske interview.
16. 1990 SEW District Proceedings, p.19.
17. W. Nommensen interview, p.21.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p.25.
20. Ibid., p.29.

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