

“God Has Done It All!”
Reflections and Insights of Reverend E. H. Wendland
By Jim Price
April 26, 1997

The title is from Beck’s translation of 2 Corinthians 5:18. These words were quoted by Prof. Wendland in The Diary of a Missionary and rightly so. It truly is God that has done it all and Prof. Wendland not only professes this but it is clear that he lives by it.

During the course of my vicar year I had the opportunity to serve Prof. Wendland at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Mishicot, Wisconsin. Wendland is in “retirement” in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, just south of Mishicot. Whenever it was my turn to preach at St. Peter’s, my supervising pastor and I would meet with Prof. Wendland for text study and after that I was “required” to hand in my expanded outline and completed manuscript both to Pastor Waege and Prof. Wendland. Thus began my relationship with E. H. Wendland. Since I have known him and worked with him for over a year it is hard to say exactly when I learned a particular point or if it was even in formal preparation for this video. But nonetheless learn I did.

Some would expect that a man so devoted to missions would have had this desire from childhood on. But this is not the case with Prof. Wendland. Even though he was literally born and raised on Northwestern College’s campus he did not have a burning desire to become a pastor or missionary. Rather it was merely assumed that he would go to the Christian schools available in Watertown, Wisconsin, including Northwestern College. Upon graduation from Northwestern College in 1938, he went to Germany for a year to study at the seminary in Berlin-Seelendorf (no longer in existence). Wendland

went mainly for the opportunity to see a bit of the world and because he loves the German language. At this point in his life he was unsure if he wanted to be a pastor.

The political climate in Europe was extremely tense during this time. Wendland is perhaps one of the few men alive who was happy that Prime Minister Chamberlain caved in to Hitler. His reason? So that he was allowed access to Germany for his year of study. During that year of study (1938-1939) Wendland saw the Nazi regime in action. People often wonder if the persecution of the Jews was real. Wendland saw it with his own eyes. He kept a diary during his year in Germany but could not write down any of his personal thoughts and reactions to what he saw for fear of being arrested. Paranoia? No! While on a public bus in Berlin Wendland heard one of the passengers, who was drunk, deriding Hitler. The bus driver heard the man's anti-Hitler remarks, radioed ahead and the "brown-shirts" were waiting at the next stop to come on board and arrest the man for the crime of voicing his political opinions. By God's grace Prof. Wendland came back to America just one week before Hitler bombed Poland.

God used the atrocities of the Nazis to focus Prof. Wendland on the pastoral ministry. The persecution of the Christian churches in Germany amazed him. Perhaps even more amazing to Wendland was the way these persecuted Lutherans held on to their convictions and continued church work as best as they could. He was now convinced that the pastoral ministry was what he wanted to pursue.

This led him to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary where he completed his seminary training in only two years because of his satisfactory progress made at the German seminary. In those days they didn't have a vicar year as part of the training. They also didn't have many available calls for the graduating class. Out of a graduating class of

twenty-three students only Wendland and one other student were immediately assigned to service in the Lord's kingdom. His assignment was to be a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary High School. At the time of his graduation he held no great aspirations to be a world missionary. Instead after one year at MLS he was called to Washington, Iowa, which he accepted.

During his years in Washington, Iowa he experienced frustration. Even though this was a home mission setting it didn't seem to be too promising. For example: after personally going door to door in this town of five thousand he had culled only one prospect. He described these years as "hitting bottom." He feels that hitting bottom is something we all need to go through in the ministry, that it is beneficial in the long run. He also remarked that after serving a few years in such a tough situation there was no place to go but up. Any area of service after that seemed like a big step forward.

And so we turn our attention to Janesville, Wisconsin, his next field of labor. This also was a home mission but unlike Washington, Iowa, this field was ripe for the harvest and was a very enjoyable time for him. During his years both in Iowa and in Janesville Wendland learned how to "do" home missions. According to him he was totally inexperienced and had to feel his way through but by God's grace and blessing he was able to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work.

From Janesville he was called to serve in Benton Harbor, Michigan. This congregation had over one thousand communicants with Wendland as the sole pastor there. During these years his German skills were put to good use as he preached both in German and English every Sunday. Since this was a large congregation his administrative skills and ability to delegate were very quickly developed and expanded.

Demonstrative of that delegation is the fact that only the more serious counseling cases were brought to him due to the faithful work of a board of elders for which he is very thankful. I believe his exact words were, "You learn to rely on your people." This ability to delegate would soon serve him well in Africa where it was his responsibility to start a Bible Institute and prepare the Africans for self-government in their church.

Prof. Wendland feels that these twenty years he served in the parish ministry were invaluable training for his time in Africa. He readily concedes that the younger you are the easier it is to learn new languages and he is quick to praise the work of our younger foreign missionaries. However he has great concern over a seeming preponderance with sending Seminary graduates to these overseas calls. His reason is that they have not had time to develop theologically and haven't had the experience that is so helpful when dealing with the thoughts and practices of another culture. Ultimately he wishes we could send experienced men to these foreign calls and just let them observe for the first five years they are over there so they could get a better handle on the language and the culture.

According to Wendland during the first two years in Africa and perhaps even longer in Japan a missionary can not get that much work accomplished. So it bothers him greatly when he sees men who have only been overseas for six or seven years (just getting their feet on the ground) suddenly being placed on a call list to a spot back in the U. S. He feels this is hindering our mission work in Africa and an unnecessary temptation especially for the men who were assigned overseas upon graduation from the Seminary. The reason he feels it is such a temptation is because foreign mission work can be quite trying and these men who haven't served on their own in a stateside parish

start to think, "I bet it would be a lot less frustrating back in the states." He is quick to point out that you are going to face problems and frustrations no matter where you are. Washington, Iowa looms large in his mind as proof of that. His advice is to rely on the fact that God called you to wherever you are and he will get you through it even if times are really tough.

The Lord has called you there because he wants you there and he can make use of you in spite of your weaknesses, capitalizing on your "strengths" and personal areas of interest. One myth Prof. Wendland helped dispel for me is that a missionary needs to be a super-handyman. He readily admits that he has very little if any mechanical aptitude. Perhaps that is why in The Diary of a Missionary we see him often lamenting all the mechanical problems he faced with vehicles.

We see the Lord's grace at work in Wendland's sharing of the gospel in Africa. The missions grew tremendously and a large number of Africans were motivated to pursue full-time work in the church. From Africa, Wendland was called to the seminary to teach homiletics and Old Testament courses as well as share his experiences and insights gleaned as a missionary. If the call had been to anywhere else except the Seminary Prof. Wendland would not have accepted it. Africa is that dear to him.

So dear that he was willing to accept the call to go back to Africa for five years after "retiring" from the Seminary at the age of seventy-two. Now that he is "officially" retired he writes books on his experiences and has traveled to South America for a missionary conference as well as numerous trips back to Africa to study AIDS and assist with the mission work there. On May 15, 1997, he is scheduled to go back yet again to Africa. Although this is partly a "vacation" he will be meeting with Rev. Hachibamba

and Rev. Kawiliza concerning the publication of training materials for their seminary as well as materials to educate the Africans about AIDS. Thirty percent of young adults in Malawi are HIV positive. And we worry about how bad it is in the U. S!

What did I learn from and about E. H. Wendland? I learned a lot. Pastoral theology, missiology and more. I heard the reflections of a man who has been blessed with many opportunities to serve throughout his life and is extremely thankful for it. His goal at this point in life is simply to serve in whatever way the Lord would allow him. After all, "God has done it all!"

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