

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE:
A HISTORY OF WELS MINISTRY TO THE ARMED FORCES 1945–2020

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ABSTRACT

Ministry is all about the people that God has called a pastor to serve. Often, a pastor will be called to serve those who serve in the armed forces and their family members. For as long as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has existed, it has served its members who serve in the United States military. The goal of this paper is to trace the WELS involvement in military ministry, post-World War II up to the present.

After tracing a portion of history of military ministry within WELS, one can see the vast efforts and care WELS has for all its members, especially those serving in the military. When the synod began to grow, WELS organized committees that oversaw this work of military ministry extensively, from the work of the Spiritual Welfare Commission to the current Military Services Committee. WELS sought the spiritual well-being of their military members by providing devotional materials with the mailing program, which is still in effect today, although it has greatly improved by communicating through online services like emailing devotional resources and streaming worship services. Lastly, WELS has a long history of equipping and sending pastors who dedicated their ministry to serving WELS military personnel. All this is done to serve God's people who find themselves serving in the military.

INTRODUCTION

A pastor was preparing for church Sunday morning. A woman and her four children came into church early that day because the mother was part of the altar guild. It was her Sunday to set up for communion. As she walked up to the altar, the pastor asked, "How are you doing, Betty?" Betty broke down into tears. Her husband was currently deployed in Iraq. She was not only managing the four kids without him but was constantly worried for her husband's well-being. The pastor addressed the situation instantly and both he and Betty went to talk in his office. He apologized for not checking in more often on her and the family. After some much-needed pastoral counseling, Betty joined her kids in the pew and the pastor went to get ready for church. The service started ten minutes late that day.

A pastor was faithfully attending to the duties of his ministry. He taught catechism, made shut-in visits, and got together with members both old and new. Sunday mornings always went great as he memorized his sermon in order to effectively communicate God's Word to God's people. Then one Sunday morning he saw a familiar face, one he hadn't seen in a long time. The pastor approached the gentleman, shaking his hand, "Delmar, it is great to see you. You haven't been to church in a while. Where have you been?" The man was puzzled by his pastor's comment. He replied, "Pastor, I was deployed out to sea the past few months." In the business of ministry, it had escaped this pastor's mind that a member of his flock had been unable to make it to church due to the fact he was on a ship for the past six months.

These are just a few stories that illustrate why military ministry is important. The woman in the first story is my mother. This happened back in 2005. The man in the second story is my father. This was early in his naval career. As I come from a family of those who have served in

the military, I have always been aware of the importance of pastoral care for servicemen and their families.

Ministry is all about the people that God has called a pastor to serve. Often, a pastor will be called to serve those who serve in the armed forces and their family members. For as long as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has existed, it has served its members who serve in the United States military. The goal of this paper is to trace WELS involvement in military ministry, post-World War II up to the present. Several authors have covered the era of the World Wars in regard to WELS pastoral care to its servicemen.¹ This paper will attempt to cover a history of WELS military ministry that has not been recorded as thoroughly. This will give a record of the many ways WELS has served its members in the military in the past eighty years. In addition, this paper will provide updated information to those who are dedicating their ministry to serving our members in the military. Lastly, this paper will help understand how the WELS military ministry has grown into what it is currently, analyze what the applications are, and discuss its lasting importance.

¹ Useful papers found on the WLS essay file include: Edward Renz, "A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel," Clayton Krug, "Ministering to Members in the Armed Forces," Mark Schoeneck, "A History of WELS Ministry to its Servicemembers During the War Years," Michael Woldt, "Chevrons or Chevrons? A Look at the Wisconsin Synod's Ministry to its People in the Armed Forces, Especially During the Two World Wars." Useful papers found in the Synod Archives: The Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection- "A Little History."

A BRIEF HISTORY: MILITARY MINISTRY IN THE WISCONSIN SYNOD, 1850-1945

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has existed since 1850. Throughout its history, its mission has been to serve God's people with the Word and sacraments. Regardless of who you are or where you go, WELS has always made efforts to reach and serve its members. This is true for those who serve in the military as well. However, when the Wisconsin Synod was first established, it had other matters to attend to. These matters included things like synod organization, establishing churches, equipping pastors, and growing in membership. As of now, it is difficult to pinpoint what work was being done in the realm of military ministry from 1850 up to the early 1900s. This isn't to say that the Wisconsin Synod wasn't serving its members in the military, but that this ministry would have fallen on the duties of a pastor at a church near a military base. Often these were Missouri Synod pastors due to the fellowship of the Synodical Conference. Pastors who tended to the spiritual welfare of their military members were known as camp or contact pastors, sometimes referred to as civilian chaplains.

The Army and Navy Board

Military ministry would change shortly after the turn of the 20th century when the United States entered World War I. This caused the Wisconsin Synod to consider how it could most effectively serve those in the Armed Forces. The Wisconsin Synod discussed these efforts as part of the Synodical Conference. "The Synodical Conference, a merger of the Missouri, Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods, formed in 1872 carries on its work today independently of other Lutheran organizations. That is also the reason why the Synodical Conference has found it

necessary to carry on the spiritual work for its own boys in the Army and Navy.”² In June of 1917 the Lutheran Church Board of Army and Navy, U.S.A was commissioned and quickly oversaw the work being done to serve its military personnel. This board was established and supported by the church bodies within the Synodical Conference. “The Wisconsin Synod had through President G.E. Bergemann appointed Reverends O. Hagedorn, J. Brenner, and Mr. Ernest V. Briesen – and this committee agreed to do all the work for their boys through the Chicago Board.”³ At first, these men worked from home until eventually they received office spaces in the City Hall Square Building in Chicago.

The work of the Army and Navy Board did many different things in order to provide for the spiritual welfare of their military members. For starters, they kept files and records of their members who were serving and where they were stationed. Having these records up to date allowed camp pastors to engage with the soldiers or sailors when the opportunity would arise, as well as provide a current address to receive mailings. Mailings included Christian reading material such as Bibles, pocket hymnals and prayer books, and sermon tracts.

Whereas civilian chaplains and camp pastors have no military ranking, Missouri Synod had Lutheran pastors serving as military chaplains. The Army and Navy Board oversaw the work of those chaplains. Since the Wisconsin Synod was in fellowship with the Missouri Synod during World War I and World War II, this also allowed for a Lutheran chaplain to serve Wisconsin Synod members while they were in the military. This was important as war broke out and men were deployed overseas. It was a comforting thought for the pastor, friends, and family members to know that the spiritual needs of those military members were always being cared for.

2. “*A Little History*,” Box 1, Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection, WELS Synod Archives, 2.

3. “*A Little History*,” 2.

The Start of the Spiritual Welfare Commission

The work of the Army and Navy Board continued throughout World War I and a long time after. However, this board was supervised primarily by the Synodical Conference. It wasn't until 1941, during World War II, when the Wisconsin Synod established its own committee to oversee this work exclusively. The committee was known as the Spiritual Welfare Commission (SWC) and was a subcommittee of the General Mission Board. At its start, headquarters for all activities of the SWC were located at Salem Lutheran Church, 1916 East Thomas Ave, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁴ Those serving on the committee when it began were Pastors E. Blakewell, E. Benj. Schlueter, Wm. Nommensen, J. Jeske, Professors Karl Schweppe and E. E Kowalke, and Mr. A. Dammann.⁵ The reason behind forming a new committee was the disagreement between WELS and the Missouri Synod on the military chaplaincy. Yet, for the remainder of World War II, the committee was urged to keep negotiations open with the Army and Navy Board of the Synodical Conference.

The work of the Spiritual Welfare Commission paved the way for growth in the area of military ministry. Keeping records of military members, sending Christian literature, and connecting camp pastors to serve those members was now the focus of a commission within the Wisconsin Synod. This work would have certainly failed without the efforts of pastors and congregations working with the SWC. Upon its establishment in February 1941, the SWC urged the congregations to assist in caring for their men's spiritual welfare,

Up to now the work of this Commission has been to keep in touch with the young men from our circles who are stationed in widely scattered camps. Letters and Prayer Books

4. *"Your Church and 13000 in Military,"* Box 4, Scrap Book 1941 #1, Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection, WELS Synod Archives, 2.

5. *"Spiritual Welfare Commission,"* Box 4, Scrap Book 1941 #1, Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection, WELS Synod Archives, 2.

have been sent to them. The Commission has urged our congregations to keep in touch with the men from their membership, and to buy subscriptions of the Northwestern Lutheran for them. It is self-evident that, without the full cooperation of our congregations and pastors, this Committee cannot function. The great need of this blessed work is apparent to all. Therefore, lend this Committee willing and helping hands that its work may go on unhindered.⁶

The SWC had the resources and finances from the General Mission Board but it worked with churches to provide for those in the armed forces throughout the remainder of World War II.

The work of ministry done by the SWC was unique for its time. The synod attempted to serve its military members while still adhering to a clear confession of faith. A few days before World War II ended, the synod convention met in New Ulm and expressed their appreciation for the work being done by the SWC.

The “complete confidence” in the “well-known spirit” of the synodical arm entrusted with the care of members in the armed services, the Spiritual Welfare Commission, calls attention to the very individualistic stance the Wisconsin Synod took in its World War II activities as contrasted to that of other church bodies, including the sister Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference. In summary, the Wisconsin Synod sought to care for its some 22,000 members in the armed services by a mailing program, by camp pastor arrangements, and eventually by sending out its own chaplains, without any involvement in the government's chaplaincy program.⁷

This stance of wanting to preserve a clear, doctrinal confession regarding the call, church and ministry was a topic of discussion for the next couple of decades. The Wisconsin Synod took a firm stance as a confessional Lutheran church body against the unionistic tendencies that were seen in the government chaplaincy program. Even though the Wisconsin Synod had been slowly struggling with the Missouri Synod in terms of fellowship since 1938, this topic, as well as others, eventually played into the reason for splitting with the Missouri Synod in 1961. At this

6. *Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 6–13 August, 1941, 23.

7. Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 194.

point, it created the need for the SWC to consider how it would engage with those who serve in the armed forces.

A NEED FOR CHANGE: 1945–1959

The end of World War II marked a time for a change in military ministry. Now that the efforts of this ministry were being taken care of solely by the Wisconsin Synod, it was time to discuss how this ministry, the work of the SWC, would continue. The war was over but the work to care for our military members was not. The Spiritual Welfare Commission stressed the importance of ramping up its work. They stated in September 1945,

Peace does not mean the end of the SWC. With cessation of hostilities, the SWC, instead of “folding-up,” must now “follow-up” and intensify its efforts to maintain contact with the service men and women of our churches who will continue to serve at home and abroad in the occupational and reconstructional forces. More particularly must the SWC intensify its efforts on behalf of the spiritual welfare of thousands of our service men, many of whom will for months and years be confined to hospitals, convalescent and rehabilitation centers. For them peace will not erase the painful and poignant memories.⁸

This was a critical time when the efforts of the SWC were needed in providing for the spiritual care of their servicemen. The mailings of Christian literature continued to go out, allowing spiritual healing from the horrors of war. This time of peace also urged pastors to get in touch with the synod’s sick and wounded, numbering over 1,100, scattered throughout the country and some in foreign nations. At that time, about 190 Synodical Conference pastors were able to serve in this way.⁹ For this work to be efficient, it was important for the SWC to constantly stay updated with the current whereabouts of its hospitalized veterans. They sent out change of address forms to churches so that they could update the SWC if addresses changed. The SWC noted that during this time, “Several full-time contact pastors have been called who

8. “Peace and the S.W.C.,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 32, no. 20 (30 September 1945): 209.

9. “Peace and the S.W.C.,” 209.

are able to visit the wounded and hospitalized of our church as well as the unchurched.”¹⁰ It was apparent that many were hurting due to the conflict of World War II and the synod was there to share the comfort of God’s Word with them.

Following World War II, rumors of the SWC closing down circulated. Some began to wonder how long the SWC would function and if it was still needed now that the world was at peace. However, these rumors were addressed and, as a way to keep this ministry on people’s minds, the SWC constantly published articles and updates concerning the work being done among the military personnel. As long as there were those serving in the military, the SWC would continue to reach them with the Word and sacrament. In addition to this, in 1948, United States President Truman reinstated the drafting of men to maintain the defensive forces required for the nation. This was partly in response to what would be known as the Cold War, as it was necessary to keep the military numbers high if a potential war broke out. This also meant that the SWC would not have any need to slow down but rather keep up with the numbers of newly enlisted military personnel.

Korean War

In 1950, the United States entered the Korean War to aid South Korea against North Korea and its communist ideals. In doing so the newly named Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission (LSWC) naturally increased its efforts to serve those who were affected by war, whether they were stationed at home or abroad. E.W. Schaefer wrote, “These boys are the concern of the

10. “The Care of the Hospitalized Veterans,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 32, no 21 (14 October 1945): 221.

church.”¹¹ The synod proved that by the actions taken to provide for their spiritual well-being through mailing. However, this task was not easy or inexpensive. The LSWC was in need of expanding its efforts and that required funding. To raise awareness of this need, the LSWC encouraged pastors to once again inform their congregations of the efforts of the LSWC by making use of LSWC offering envelopes and having LSWC Sundays, similar to a mission festival service. The generosity of the Wisconsin Synod and its members was exceedingly great. The budget for the LSWC in 1949 was about \$4,420,¹² but it was increased to \$24,000 in 1951.¹³ The result of synod members donating directly to the cause showed itself in the LSWC’s ability to call Pastor Luther Voss as a full-time civilian chaplain to Camp Rucker, Alabama, in 1951. Then a year later, in 1952, the LSWC called its first contact pastor, Fred Tiefel, to serve in a foreign mission field. The base of operations was in the Japan-Korea area. All of this was possible due to the immense financial support of the synod.

For two years, Pastor Voss served around 200 Wisconsin Synod service members and their families in Dothan, Alabama. He gave pastoral care to military personnel stationed at Camp Rucker, Alabama, and Fort Benning, Georgia. Pastor Voss was a World War I veteran, and so he understood what military life was like, making him the ideal man for this call. This call of a full-time civilian chaplain was the first step in great progress for the military ministry in the Wisconsin Synod. In addition to this, due to the conflict of the Korean War, pastors once again picked up the task of being camp pastors, as some had previously done during World War II.

11. “What’s in the Offering,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 37, no 20 (12 September 1950): 308.

12. *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 3–9 August 1949, 151.

13. *Proceedings of the Thirty-first Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 8–15 August 1951, 164.

Congregations were once again encouraged to make use of the resources of the LSWC. One new resource was especially noted, the servicemen's prayer book, *God Our Refuge*. It was prepared and distributed, selling over 10,000 copies within the first six months.

In 1952, Rev. F Tiefel boarded the S.S India Mail for Japan. This call to do work in a foreign mission field was complex and greatly impacted not only how the Wisconsin Synod conducted military ministry but also the efforts of world missions. *The Northwestern Lutheran* spoke of Tiefel's call in this way.

Pastor Fred Tiefel accepted the call of the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission to do exploratory work in the interests of our servicemen and women stationed in the Japan-Korea Area and also to investigate opportunities for the opening of mission stations for our Board of Missions... Present plans are to radiate from this base into surrounding territories and Korea. The future policy of the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission as to sending more Contact Pastors into foreign areas will be determined by Pastor Tiefel's reports from the field regarding opportunities of service and need.¹⁴

From 1952-1956, Pastor Tiefel's ministry out of Japan was busy but very rewarding. He operated in the Yokohama-Tokyo Japan area. First working out of a hotel in Yokohama but eventually, in 1953, he was moved into a rental home. This was made necessary as his wife arrived and joined him in 1953, as well as the need for more adequate quarters for work.¹⁵

Pastor Tiefel's duties to military members included church services on weekends, teaching those interested in higher learning of the Bible and language studies, and pastoral care to military families. He often spoke of being visited by servicemen and women on weekends, enjoying fellowship with them, and his wife preparing a home-cooked meal for them.¹⁶ The

14. "L.S.W.C - News and Notes," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 39, no 5 (9 March 1952): 70.

15. *Proceedings of the Thirty-second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 5-12 August 1953, 31.

16. "A Service to our Servicemen in the Far East," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 43, no 14 (8 July 1956): 215.

military and their families in return expressed the joy and comfort they found in having the spiritual care of Pastor Tiefel.

He also found opportunities for foreign mission work among the Japanese. Pastor Tiefel became proficient at reading, speaking, and writing Japanese. However, he found it most effective working with his Japanese associates. It was noted that one service was done entirely in English. Another was done with the sermon being translated into Japanese. The singing and liturgy for this service were occasionally done in English, but usually, that too was done in Japanese.¹⁷ The blessings of this ministry, in combined efforts of the LSWC, impacted and influenced a change in how the Wisconsin Synod served our military members stationed overseas. Soon, the Wisconsin Synod sent other pastors to serve Wisconsin Synod members in the Armed Forces who were deployed overseas. The Lord blessed those efforts and in addition helped establish world mission work.

The Missouri Synod and Military Chaplaincy

The military chaplaincy question was thoroughly discussed by the Wisconsin Synod throughout the 1940s and 1950s. This consideration of how to engage in chaplaincy only added to the growing struggles between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod which had been on the rise since Missouri accepted the Union Resolutions in 1938.¹⁸ Whereas the Missouri Synod continued

17. "Church services in our Tokyo Mission," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 44. No. 3 (3 February 1957): 40.

18. Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 147. In short, the Union Resolutions were the declaration of church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). This is covered in pages 138–159. However, this book is a tremendous resource as a whole for understanding the issues that led to the split between Wisconsin and Missouri. Chapters two (65–102) and three (189–194) are especially insightful in regard to the involvement with the government's military chaplaincy program and how the Wisconsin Synod addressed the topic.

to engage in the military chaplaincy program, Wisconsin decided back in 1939 that it would not participate in the government chaplaincy program due to a violation of scriptural principles and confessional doctrine. However, they made efforts through the Spiritual Welfare Commission and local contact pastors to serve their military members.

The issue of fellowship and Missouri's involvement in the chaplaincy program came to the forefront of discussion after World War II ended. Perhaps Missouri saw the government's military chaplaincy as a justifiable thing in times of war but now in times of peace it was an issue that had to be addressed fully. "The end of this war did not signal a cease-fire in the chaplaincy dispute but, instead, prompted calls for a resolution of the disagreements."¹⁹ These admonitions and disputes came up in many discussions at synod conventions throughout the mid 20th century. Committees who were tasked to study the involvement in the government's military chaplaincy reported what they concluded as they reviewed the chaplaincy program. In 1954, G.A. Press presented his brief essay on the military chaplaincy at the Missouri-Wisconsin Synod Presidents Conference. The overall point was to convey the truths of Scripture concerning this question of involvement in the government military chaplaincy program. He stated, "Our objections to the Military Chaplaincy have always been based on the doctrines of State, Church, and Fellowship."²⁰ Another man who was tasked with evaluating the military chaplaincy issue was Pastor Edward Fredrich. He presented an essay later that year at the Synodical Conference convention stating,

The principle of the separation of Church and State is, however, undermined by the Chaplaincy system, in which the State establishes by law the post of chaplain and maintains it by public funds.... the government is interested in maintaining a high standard of civic righteousness, especially in its soldiers in time of war; or the State

19. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 95.

20. G. A. Press "The Military Chaplaincy," 12-15 January 1954, 1.
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/4093/PressMilitary.pdf>.

permits the Church to call chaplains and traces their spiritual authority to spiritual sources; or the government is fair to all in dealings with various denominations. No matter from what good motive or under what extenuating circumstances or with what attempts at indiscrimination, the fact remains that in the chaplaincy system the State invades the realm of the Church.²¹

The issue was not strictly a matter of church practice but ultimately a doctrinal issue. “Unionism was “the most serious charge” Wisconsin made against the chaplaincy. Chaplains were appointed spiritual leaders over certain groups with no regard for denominational boundaries.”²²

The Wisconsin Synod made great efforts to reach out to their sister synod for decades, but to no avail. The Missouri Synod did not give up their unionistic stance which led to a break of fellowship in 1961. This greatly impacted how military ministry would be carried out. The Wisconsin Synod, by this point in the late 1950s and early 1960s, had seen the effectiveness and improvements of a full-time civilian chaplain and an overseas contact pastor. This work of military ministry was being done without violating scriptural principles and matters of fellowship. So, as tensions between the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod escalated, the Wisconsin Synod simply shifted to exclusively providing Wisconsin Synod pastors to serve Wisconsin Synod members in the military whenever possible.

Ministry after the Korean War

With the Korean War ending by 1953, the LSWC once again was able to focus its efforts and attention elsewhere, such as with the ministry being done in Japan, the establishment of an improved and adequate office space, and the calling of people to fill vacancies on the committee.

21. Edward C. Fredrich, “The Military Chaplaincy and Scouting,” August 10–13, 1954, 4. <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1552/FredrichMilitary.pdf>.

22. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 98–99.

In 1950, the committee was renamed the “Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission.” This resulted in many updates to the mailing program as the office also moved to the Northwestern Publishing House building in September of 1950. For various reasons the previous mailing address was retained until April 1951 when it changed to 3624 W. North Avenue.²³ The address of where the LSWC worked out of was not the only small change in the early 1950s. In 1951, Pastor Nommensen and E. Benj. Schlueter resigned and were replaced by Pastor A. Berg and Pastor F. Brandt.²⁴ Other new members appointed to the LSWC in the 1950s included Pastor P. Kuehl (Chairman), Walter Kleinke (Executive Secretary), N. Kleinhans, A. Schroeder, and Professor Conrad Frey.²⁵

The service members on file also kept changing throughout the 1950s. Naturally, with the end of the Korean War, enlistees and draftees were low by 1955, thus affecting the mailing list and numbers for the LSWC. In 1955, there were only about 4,000 servicemen and women on file. This allowed for the budget to drop in 1955 to a sum of \$12,000.²⁶ Yet, with the number of Wisconsin Synod military members constantly shifting, it was important for pastors and congregations to keep the LSWC updated. This constant flux of numbers continued throughout the late 1950s, as well as changes to the budget.

23. Edward C. Renz, “A History of Spiritual Services for Military Personnel,” written for The Military Service Committee, a subcommittee of the Special Ministries Board, October 1982, 7.
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3986/RenzHistorySpiritualServicesMilitary.pdf>.

24. “Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 38, no. 8 (22 April 1951): 121.

25. Clayton E. Krug, “Ministering to Members in the Armed Forces,” 22 December 1978, 8.
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/2757/KrugMinistering.pdf>.

26. *Proceedings of the Thirty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 10–17 August 1955, 29.

“WHERE YOU GO, I WILL GO”: 1960–1990

The 1960s were a time for extensive improvement in military ministry. It was previously noted that the Wisconsin Synod had been dabbling in the work of providing civilian chaplains to administer Word and Sacrament to military members. Once the Wisconsin Synod officially broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1961, the work of WELS civilian chaplains was needed now more than ever, because prior to the split, it was acceptable for a Missouri Synod chaplain in the Armed Forces to serve a WELS member who was in the military. This was especially needed when members were deployed overseas or away from a local WELS church.

While the LSWC continued to mail devotional material to servicemen abroad, it never compared to the services provided by a pastor in person. In fact, the number of servicemen on the mailing lists deployed to other nations in 1961 was about 1/3 of those who were signed up to receive the devotional material. “The breakdown is as follows: 1300 are in the states, 900 are on foreign soil, and 800 names are in the ‘hold file,’ awaiting changes of address.”²⁷ This meant that there were plenty of men and women whose spiritual care was primarily left in their own hands as they read what was sent to them.

The challenge of reaching military members abroad was on the minds of many among the Wisconsin Synod’s leadership at the time. As a result, a special convention was called in 1962 to discuss many matters of ministry. One of the topics on their agenda was the church’s efforts to reach all its military members. At the convention, the LSWC considered the problems closely

27. *Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 8–17 August 1961, 32.

and proposed some solutions. The first was “to employ more intensively all pastors of our Synod or affiliated synods who are located in areas and in circumstances which will permit them to maintain personal contact with Armed Forces personnel.”²⁸ As this work was done, the LSWC knew that it may burden pastors with extra travel expenses, needed materials, and overall time away from their other parish duties. So, the LSWC also proposed to help financially compensate those who served as contact pastors, needed devotional materials for service members, or had excessive expenses for travel. The LSWC stated that approximately thirty pastors were needed for this contact work. Then, in addition to this work, the LSWC suggested,

The calling of two full-time pastors, for the present, whose duty it will be to extend personal spiritual care to Armed Forces personnel stationed in two areas of our country which simply cannot be reached by local contact pastors, and in which at the same time there are concentrations of military installations. These are the middle eastern states, centered around Washington, D. C., and the south-central area, including Texas and neighboring states.²⁹

The duties of these pastors included contacting military personnel in order to invite them to worship, seeking opportunities to administer communion, seeing to the spiritual welfare and religious training of servicemen’s families, and submitting reports to the LSWC. “In general, doing all that his calling as soul-shepherd requires him to do for persons committed to his care.”³⁰

By 1963, twenty-four local pastors had accepted the appointment to be contact pastors. However, the commission regretted to report that the San Diego bases were not yet being served

28. *Proceedings of the Special Synod Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 7–9 November 1962, 15.

29. *Proceedings of 1962 Convention*, 15.

30. *Proceedings of 1962 Convention*, 15.

due to a shortage of manpower in that area.³¹ As well, the intentions of having two full-time contact pastors were not successful at this time.

In January of 1963, the LSWC extended calls to two men to serve as full-time contact pastors, or “circuit riders.” Both declined. The LSWC thereupon decided to conduct a preliminary exploration of the eastern and southern areas of the country, since it was felt that the indefiniteness necessarily involved in our description of the nature of this ministry contributed to the hesitation to enter the work.³²

It was then that Pastor Luther Voss once again stepped up to serve in this way for the betterment of the LSWC’s efforts. After obtaining a leave of absence from his congregation in Milwaukee, he and his wife headed out to the Washington D.C area. His work there involved surveying for the potential establishment of a congregation in the area as well as to report how to effectively serve the military members there. Pastor Voss was the perfect man for this task as he had prior experience as a contact pastor. He also established contact with leaders in the Department of Defense, both military and ecclesiastical.³³ This allowed him to have up-to-date information on what was going on in the area concerning those in the Armed Forces.

The LSWC also made improvements to the mailing program in the early 1960s. As of 1963, the LSWC was sending Christian literature that included information pertaining to local churches and contact pastors, a short order of service in bulletin form, plus “*Meditations*” each time it was published.³⁴ Two years later, in 1965, the LSWC began to include an issue of *The*

31. *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 7–14 August 1963, 153. The Reformation Lutheran Church in San Diego was established in October 1962 but did not receive a full-time pastor until the summer of 1963.

32. *Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 153-154.

33. *Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 154.

34. *Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 152.

Northwestern Lutheran.³⁵ However, the LSWC recognized that those who were stationed stateside typically had a local pastor contacting them in addition to the mailings, but those who were overseas only received mailings. Therefore, with the 1963 convention, they began looking into the needed work of sending a Lutheran pastor overseas to strictly serve our servicemen. They stated, “A possible means of making contact with servicemen overseas in a limited way, specifically in Germany, has come to our attention; namely, through arrangement with pastors of Lutheran church bodies in confessional fellowship with us.” These efforts and beginning ideas paid off greatly when the United States ramped up its efforts in the Vietnam War in 1964.

The Civilian Chaplaincy in Vietnam

Despite the nation seemingly looking forward to a time of peace and a decrease in military numbers, the Department of Defense had begun to take steps to engage in the conflict in Vietnam. This caused the LSWC to respond and serve WELS members who would undoubtedly be stationed overseas. So, at the Wisconsin Synod convention in 1965, authorization was given to “the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission to send a pastor to the Vietnam area as well as to other areas of the Orient to serve our men in those locales with the Word and Sacrament.”³⁶ In addition, due to the efforts and research done by Pastor Voss in the Washington D.C. area, it was decided that a pastor ought to be called to the Norfolk, Virginia area in order to serve the military

35. “Servicemen and Students to Receive the Northwestern Lutheran,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 3 (7 February 1965): 34.

36. “Specialized Ministries-Men in Service,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 20 (3 October 1965): 311.

personnel and establish a mission church there.³⁷ That year, Pastor Voss received the call to become “the first full-time civilian chaplain to serve Wisconsin Synod members in the Armed Forces.”³⁸ With this call he went over to Vietnam from 1965 to 1967 to serve WELS members in the Armed Forces. This was the first call of its kind in the Wisconsin Synod. He was called full-time as a civilian chaplain and salaried by the synod not the government.

Despite not working within the government chaplaincy program, Pastor Voss, as well as other local contact pastors, were typically met with no hindrances to their ministry in terms of jurisdiction and authorization. This was due to the communication efforts between WELS President Oscar J. Naumann and the Department of Defense Armed Forces Chaplain Board. It was noted in extensive correspondences that the Chaplain Board appreciated the interest WELS had to care for their own members without relying on government issued chaplains. While keeping a confessional stance and maintaining principles of fellowship, the WELS had good relations with the Government Chaplain Board. As a result, the Chaplain Board was willing to work with WELS pastors so that they were able to carry out their ministry to Wisconsin Synod members in the Armed Forces. In correspondence provided at the 1965 Synod Convention, the chairman of the board said to President Naumann,

Each clergyman so designated should have appropriate credentials from you which he can present to proper authorities upon arrival at a military installation. These credentials should indicate that he is an ordained clergyman of your church and that the church has approved him as a contact pastor to provide religious administrations for members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod serving within the Armed Forces. With these

37. *Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 191.

38. “Wisconsin Synod Calls Civilian Chaplain for Vietnam,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 24 (28 November 1965): 379.

credentials, I am confident that your pastors will encounter little difficulty in fulfilling their mission.³⁹

This authorization allowed WELS pastors to access military facilities in order to meet with WELS members. The LSWC noted that the WELS civilian chaplain was not hindered in where he could go unless it was deemed unsafe in a war-torn country. “Both the military and civil authorities in Vietnam permit Pastor Voss to go wherever his pastoral services are required.”⁴⁰

Pastor Voss left the States in December of 1965 and began working out of Saigon, South Vietnam, in January. To make this ministry more effective, the LSWC urged pastors and parents to notify them of those who are stationed overseas in Vietnam. They were to send the names of those servicemen to the new address of 3624 W. North. Ave. Milwaukee, WI.⁴¹ This information aided the efforts of Pastor Voss, and those after him, in seeking out WELS members in the military and administering the means of grace to them.

The work the pastors did over in Vietnam was immense. The duties included many things from weekly services held in their hotel rooms or the French Reformed Cathedral in Saigon to traveling to military bases scattered across South Vietnam in order to talk with members and administer communion.⁴² Pastor Voss, when he began serving in Vietnam, commended the cooperation of the chief chaplains in the military. They helped Pastor Voss, and

39. *Proceedings of the Thirty-eighth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 4–11 August 1965, 194.

40. “Serving Our Men in Vietnam,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 24 (13 November 1966): 361.

41. “Wisconsin Synod Calls Civilian Chaplain for Vietnam,” 379.

42. Mark E. Schoeneck, “A History of WELS Ministry to its Servicemembers During the War Years,” 1985, 8.
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/2831/SchoeneckWELSMinistryServiceMembers.pdf>

the WELS civilian chaplains after him, find the WELS men in their units and even made their offices available for counseling with WELS members.⁴³

The ministry of the civilian chaplains in Vietnam endured many challenges. The travel arrangements at this time in Vietnam were strained because of the conflict. This resulted in unpredictable flights, meetings being canceled or rescheduled, and long road trips. It was not until WELS chaplain Waldemar Hoyer that these challenges were avoided. Chaplain Hoyer received MACV Invitational Travel Orders in 1970, which granted him full access to all military bases as well as the ability to access military transportation to a greater degree.⁴⁴ Some pastors were impacted by the war directly as they were often encouraged by the authorities to be cautious and to remain inside their homes at night.⁴⁵ At times, communications were frustrated by the ever-changing addresses of servicemen in Vietnam and the slow mailing process. Yet in all this, God kept all those who served as WELS civilian chaplains safe and blessed the ministry in Vietnam during this time.

The ministry in Vietnam was met with great success. Pastor Arnold Schroeder, a pastor on the committee for the LSWC, wrote an article in the *Northwestern Lutheran* stating, “We are reaching proportionately more of our members in this way than we would with a military chaplain attached to a specific unit. Pastor Voss is free to roam the country at will with the exception of actual combat zones... The Spiritual Welfare Commission feels that this type of

43. “*What’s Luther Doing in Vietnam?*”, Box 2, Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection, WELS Synod Archives, 2.

44. “With Chaplain Waldemar Hoyer in Vietnam,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 57, no. 12 (7 June 1970): 192.

45. Ron Siemers “Tour of Duty for the Lord: The Experiences of WELS Chaplains in Vietnam,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 25 May 1988, 9–10.
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3706/SiemersWELSchaplainsVietnam.pdf>.

ministry has fully justified itself in Vietnam.”⁴⁶ With that conclusion, the LSWC continued to call men to serve as civilian chaplains in Vietnam.

Pastor Voss returned to the States in 1967 and served the spiritual needs of military personnel on the Eastern seaboard until his retirement in 1970.⁴⁷ Professor Erwin Scharf of Watertown, Wisconsin, accepted the call after him, but only for a short time. He was scheduled to be back in the classroom for the second semester at Northwestern College. His temporary assignment at this time included a comprehensive study of the ministry to our people serving in foreign areas and the practical usefulness of our program in times of war.⁴⁸ Following Professor Scharf was Pastor Frederic Gilbert who served for a short period spanning about four months. Pastor Melvin Schwark served December 1968-November 1969. Pastor Waldemar Hoyer served November 1969-1970. Pastor Roland Ehlke served September 1970-1971. The last of the civilian chaplains in Vietnam was Pastor Karl Otto, serving from August 1971-1972.

Pastor Otto was also instrumental in establishing a permanent civilian chaplain in Europe. Pastor Otto served in Vietnam until April of 1972 when the number of our men dwindled down to less than one hundred in Vietnam.⁴⁹ It was decided by the Military Services committee of the Special Ministries Board to send Pastor Otto to Europe for about four months, as the synod had quite a number of servicemen in Europe, specifically in Germany.⁵⁰ He set up his operations in

46. “Civilian Chaplain Returns from Vietnam,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 54, no. 18 (3 September 1967): 284.

47. Renz, “*A History of Spiritual Services for Military Personnel*,” 9.

48. “Replacement in Vietnam,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 54, no. 16 (8 August 1967): 250.

49. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-second Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 8–15 August 1973, 53.

50. “From Vietnam to Europe,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 59, no. 9 (23 April 1972): 146.

Mannheim, Germany. There he carried out the assignment to study the feasibility of chaplaincy work among WELS members in Europe.⁵¹ He made contact with many WELS members in Germany, England, Italy, Greece and Turkey. Due to the more than 700 WELS military personnel stationed there, as well as other WELS civilians, it was concluded that there was great need for a civilian chaplain to be stationed in Europe on a permanent basis.⁵²

Progress in the States

While the WELS was having success with the civilian chaplaincy in Vietnam and then transitioning to Europe, many other developments and improvements were happening within the States for military ministry. One change was that the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission was absorbed, after over thirty years of service, under the Special Ministries Board and the work was carried out by the newly established Military Services Committee.⁵³ This allowed for better organization and oversight of military ministry within the Wisconsin Synod.

In another effort to improve the ministry to the military, the Military Services Committee called Pastor Clayton Krug to serve as “civilian chaplain-at-large” throughout the entire United States for a one-year tour. In 1971, Pastor Krug was tasked “to minister to as many as possible of our young men and women in the Armed Forces... and to seek ways and means to improve our service to them.”⁵⁴ Pastor Krug was acquainted with the ministry going on among the Armed

51. “Serving Our Service Men and Women Overseas,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 59, no. 20 (24 September 1972): 320.

52. *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 53.

53. Krug, “Ministering to Members in the Armed Forces,” 9.

54. “News From Civilian Chaplain Krug,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 58, no. 26 (19 December 1971): 424.

Forces, having served the synod ten years as the secretary of the Military Services Committee.⁵⁵

His efforts not only provided pastoral care to service members, but he also met with contact pastors and congregations.

Pastor Krug's visits with WELS camp pastors and others have enabled him to gather a great deal of information on methods and procedures which should prove invaluable, particularly for such who are entering this work for the first time. In addition, he has been bringing the story of our Synod's ministry to our servicemen to attention of WELS congregations from Northern Michigan to the East Coast. He has also been privileged to address congregations of our sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, in New York and Massachusetts.⁵⁶

With all that was happening in terms of growth and improvement in military ministry during this time, it was important to update the congregations of the synod about this ministry. Pastor Krug's tour ended in 1972 after covering 32,000 miles to military installations in the United States and surveying the work done among servicemen.⁵⁷

Pastor Krug's tour through the States resulted in great benefit to the contact pastor program. However, it took a while to reap the benefits of Pastor's Krug analysis and feedback. In 1973, it was discussed that "contact program must be kept alive and strengthened to be effective and to be prepared for future eventualities."⁵⁸ In 1975, it was mentioned again that "the committee is currently studying the matter of conducting regional camp pastors' seminars. Men serving as camp pastors have indicated the need for such an opportunity."⁵⁹ Yet, these efforts did not come about until later that year with the first regional conference for WELS contact pastors

55. "Civilian Chaplain-At-Large," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 58, no. 21 (10 October 1971): 339.

56. "News From Civilian Chaplain Krug," 424.

57. "Civilian Chaplain Krug Reports," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 59, no. 15 (16 July 1972): 239.

58. *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 53.

59. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-third Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 6–13 August 1975, 61.

in Atlanta, Georgia. This seminar addressed challenges that camp pastors face when reaching out to individuals in the military, as well as how to effectively balance other duties of ministry while also serving as a camp pastor.⁶⁰ These seminars continued through the years and at various places in the United States, always at a church with a strong military presence.

At the end of his tour, Pastor Krug not only recommended the continued work of our civilian chaplains but also confirmed the synod's decision to not participate in the government's chaplaincy program.

In a decision predating World War II days, the 381,000-member Wisconsin Synod has not participated in the military chaplaincy program of the Government. The Synod contends that such cooperation with the Government in a religious ministry would compromise the Synod's doctrine and practice.... There are about 500 Wisconsin Synod men and women in the Armed Forces stationed in Europe and Turkey. It is estimated that half of them are on bases in Germany.⁶¹

The improvements and careful consideration of the Military Services Committee during the late 1960s and early 1972 resulted in the establishment of a full-time civilian chaplain in Europe.

The Early Years of the Civilian Chaplaincy in Europe

The call to serve as the first-full time civilian chaplain in Europe was accepted by Pastor Edward C. Renz. He was installed in March 1973 and headed to Europe by the end of the month.⁶² Both he and his wife established themselves in Mainz, Germany. It was decided that the European

23. 60. "Military Contact Pastors Meet in Georgia," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 63, no. 2 (25 January 1976):

61. "Civilian Chaplain for Europe," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 60, no. 9 (6 May 1973): 138.

62. "Civilian Chaplain for Europe," 138.

chaplain would fan out from there to concentrations of WELS men and women.⁶³ The focus of the WELS civilian chaplain in Europe was to serve WELS members in the Armed Forces wherever they might be. However, there were also many WELS civilians in Europe and environs, either ex-servicemen and their families or businesspeople who had established residence there.⁶⁴ This ministry, as well as the one in Vietnam, was a great step for the Wisconsin Synod in establishing a stronger foothold for world mission work.

The civilian chaplaincy in Europe was initially met with difficulties and challenges. Unlike the chaplains in Vietnam, Chaplain Renz was not granted the same privileges in Europe. Transportation was something that had to be figured out when he arrived. Due to the fact that Chaplain Renz was not able to obtain Invitational Travel Orders, he had to provide his own transportation by acquiring an automobile.⁶⁵ Chaplain Renz, as with any pastor at a new mission call, had to build a reputation and inform WELS members of his newly established ministry.⁶⁶ The Special Ministries Board did this by keeping members informed of the work of the European civilian chaplain through the mailing program. In addition, Chaplain Renz reached out to WELS members and traveled often to visit these members and inform them of opportunities to gather and worship. “Since military chapels usually have a full schedule of Sunday morning services, he found that 2:00 p.m. was normally the most convenient time for WELS worship services. Through the years we learned that this schedule proved to be especially advantageous to our

63. *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 53.

64. *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 53.

65. Renz, “*A History of Spiritual Services for Military Personnel*,” 13.

66. “Our Civilian Chaplain for Europe,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 61, no. 2 (27 January 1974): 22–23.

people who traveled great distances by car or train to attend the services.”⁶⁷ This was a blessing to servicemen and their families. In some cases, when members could not make it to the regular services, Chaplain Renz still made plans to visit them on board ship, privately in their homes, or travel to their base in order to serve them.

The civilian chaplaincy program in Europe was also blessed with the support and efforts of WELS. WELS members in the States sent their prayers and even made donations to the Civilian Chaplaincy Fund.⁶⁸ WELS members in Europe supported the ministry in Europe by their attendance and participation in worship opportunities, as well as sending gifts and offerings. Military members also wrote to either the European Chaplain directly or to the Military Services Committee expressing their gratitude and joy of having a pastor serve them in this way. One serviceman wrote, “How did you ever find me? Every place I go the Wisconsin Synod follows me. I was stationed in California and a pastor found me. Now I’m in Germany and you found me. That’s just great.”⁶⁹ It was truly a comforting thought for our members to know that wherever they went, a WELS pastor followed to serve them with the means of grace.

Pastor Renz was extremely busy as the European Chaplain. His duties included that of any other pastor yet, at times, stretched across countries. During his ministry he conducted services throughout Germany, Spain, Italy, England and Iceland.⁷⁰ He visited those in the hospital, those unable to come to services because of distance, and delinquent members unaware or neglecting coming to church. He scheduled times for Bible instruction class for both children

67. Renz, “A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel,” 13.

68. “Our Civilian Chaplain for Europe,” 23.

69. “Our Civilian Chaplain for Europe,” 22.

70. Renz, “A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel,” 13-14. Harold E. Wicke, “Briefs by the Editor,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 63, no. 1 (11 January 1976): 2.

and adults.⁷¹ He even organized a WELS European Retreat in order to promote a time of fellowship for WELS members all throughout Europe. The European Retreat offered several days focused around God's Word with church services, as well as opportunities to build relationships and enjoy fellowship.⁷²

The efforts of the European Chaplain were met with great success within the first few years. It was noted in 1975 that "in two short years as our civilian chaplain, Rev. E. C. Renz is presently ministering to over 500 men, women and children who are members of the Synod. A total of 933 have received communion from our chaplain in this biennium. Over twenty have been baptized, and just recently three were confirmed."⁷³ Pastor Edward C. Renz served as the senior chaplain in Europe until 1982. In total, at the end of his nine-year ministry, Pastor Renz baptized seventy-seven, confirmed twenty-four, and communed privately or in services 5,140.⁷⁴

The church in Europe was growing and, as a result, led to additional opportunities for pastoral services to be done for the WELS members scattered throughout Europe. The Military Services Committee recognized the growth of the chaplaincy in Europe and saw to it that a second civilian chaplain was called there. Pastor Krug was called and commissioned to be the second civilian chaplain in Europe in April 1977.⁷⁵ This allowed for the work in Europe to be more manageable as responsibilities were shared. Chaplain Krug set up the center of his

71. Harold E. Wicke, "Briefs by the Editor," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 62, no. 7 (6 April 1975): 98.

72. Renz, "A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel," 14. "WELS European Retreat," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 61, no.24 (1 December 1974): 381.

73. *Reports and Memorials for 1975 Convention*, 61.

74. "Chaplain Returns," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 69, no. 11 (1 June 1982): 173.

75. "Second Civilian Chaplain to be Commissioned," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 64, no. 7 (3 April 1977): 107.

activities in Nuremberg, Germany.⁷⁶ With Chaplain Krug in Southeastern Germany and Renz in the West, they were able to increase the efforts of their ministry by reaching even more WELS members. Chaplain Krug focused on his area of Germany, conducting services in Wurzburg, Kitzingen, Augsburg, and Stuttgart.⁷⁷ Reports from the civilian chaplains in Europe showed that in 1977 the civilian chaplaincy in Europe communed 700 WELS members, had twelve baptisms and two people confirmed.⁷⁸ Chaplain Krug served from April 1977 to December 1978, when he took a call back to the States.

European Chaplains in the 1980s

Throughout the 1980s, many different men served as European chaplains. Most of the duties were the same as their predecessors. However, the ministry in Europe continued to grow and expand in its efforts to reach WELS members stationed in Europe. When pastors serving as European chaplains accepted a call elsewhere, typically, they stayed in Europe until their replacement acclimated to their new call.

By the 1980s, some additional details of ministry were being done in Europe. This was due to the growth and capabilities of this ministry. Since there were two full-time European chaplains, many pastoral duties were carried out. The European chaplains were tasked with preaching, counseling, teaching, and baptizing. They met with individuals on a one-to-one basis or with their families if they had one. However, by the early 1980s there seemed to be an

76. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-fourth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3-10 August 1977, 73.

77. Renz "A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel," 15.

78. Harold E. Wicke, "Briefs by the Editor," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 65, no. 5 (5 March 1978): 66.

increase of military families. In 1981 convention reports, it was noted that the chaplains in Europe were additionally concerned about Sunday school, instruction classes, and family counseling sessions.⁷⁹ The European chaplains made it a priority to care for military members and their families. They held regularly scheduled services once a month at strategic locations throughout Europe in order to reach these WELS members wherever they were located. They held retreats for their members throughout the year. By 1987, it was reported that there were four retreats held within a year, at Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July and Reformation.⁸⁰

Pastor Charles A. Schlei was called as the third civilian chaplain in Europe and arrived in August 1978 as Pastor Krug's replacement.⁸¹ Chaplain Schlei and his wife settled in a little German village near Erlangen, West Germany. He continued the work Chaplain Krug was doing before him with the addition of preaching services at the military chapel in Munich.⁸² Both Chaplain Renz and Schlei continued to reach out to WELS military personnel as well as WELS civilians who happened to find themselves in Europe. Pastor Schlei served until 1981 when he took a call to be an instructor at Manitowoc Lutheran High School in Manitowoc Wisconsin.

The fourth European chaplain was Donald Tollefson who was assigned as a seminary graduate in 1981. His call as a chaplain was for two years after which he was assigned to parish ministry.⁸³ He took over the work of Pastor Schlei in the southeastern portion of West Germany.

79. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-sixth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3–8 August 1981, 79–80.

80. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-ninth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3–7 August 1987, 86.

81. "The Rev. Charles A. Schlei Installed as Civilian Chaplain – Europe," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 65, no. 18 (3 September 1978): 287.

82. Renz "A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel," 15.

83. "Chaplain Tollefson Commissioned," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 68, no. 19 (13 September 1981): 296.

His area of responsibility included Italy and the city of West Berlin.⁸⁴ Pastor Tollefson served from July 1981 to January 1984 when we accepted a call to Immanuel in Long Valley, New Jersey.

The fifth European chaplain was Richard Froehlich who replaced Chaplain Renz as senior chaplain in January 1982.⁸⁵ He served until 1985 when he accepted a call to Shining Mountains in Bozeman, Montana.

The sixth European chaplain, Lee A. Neujahr, was commissioned May 31, 1984, and continued working in Southern Germany as Pastor Tollefson had done before him. Initially, Pastor Neujahr was stationed at Neunkirchen, West Germany. Eventually, he moved to Nuremberg to more effectively fulfill the work of his ministry. From there he served WELS members in Southern Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy.⁸⁶ Pastor Neujahr served until 1989 when he resigned from his position as a European Chaplain.

Working alongside Pastor Neujahr was Pastor Timothy Johnston, who served as the seventh European chaplain from 1984 to 1986. Pastor Johnston, once he and his wife acquired a home in Germany, found unique ways to assist the ministry in Europe. He conducted worship services once a month and offered Bible classes out of his home.⁸⁷

By 1985, there seemed to be a good system in place for how the European chaplains would carry out their ministries. The challenge had always been how to efficiently and

84. Renz "A History of Spiritual Services to Military Personnel," 15.

85. "Froehlich Commissioned as Civilian Chaplain," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 69, no. 4 (15 February 1982): 58.

86. "Commissioning," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 71, no. 15 (15 August 1984): 238.

87. *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-Eighth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 5–9 August 1985, 55.

adequately reach WELS members scattered throughout Europe. Both European chaplains shared in this endeavor and found effective ways to provide pastoral care to their members wherever they were. For example, in 1985 both chaplains were encouraged to increase their services to the members in England. It was noted that there were sixty-eight persons living in England who were WELS members. Pastor Johnston made more frequent trips to England in order to conduct services and instruct members in confirmation.⁸⁸ Pastor Neujahr found a way to conduct services in multiple places when WELS members increased in the area of Berlin. He had services in Berlin on Saturday night and returned to central Germany for services Sunday morning.⁸⁹

The eighth European Chaplain, Joel Jaeger, was commissioned in September 1986 to replace Pastor Johnston. He lived in Mainz, West Germany, and served that area. He traveled once a month to England for services as well as occasionally making trips to West Berlin and Italy.⁹⁰ Pastor Jaeger served until 1992 when he took a call to Trinity in St. Lucia.

In the late 1980s, both Pastor Neujahr and Pastor Jaeger conducted worship services, Bible classes, baptisms, confirmation classes, one-on-one devotions with communion, and counseling sessions. It was reported that both chaplains administered Word and sacrament to about 700 WELS members scattered throughout Europe.⁹¹ In 1988, Pastor Neujahr wrote an article explaining how the purpose of the civilian chaplaincy was the same as a stateside ministry. The purpose is “to preach and teach the word for the strengthening of faith, comforting

88. *Reports and Memorials for the 1985 Convention*, 55.

89. *Reports and Memorials for the 1985 Convention*, 56.

90. *Reports and Memorials for the 1987 Convention*, 55.

91. *Reports and Memorials for the Fiftieth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 7–11 August 1989, 114.

of hearts and the renewing of lives dedicated to the Savior.”⁹² The European chaplains carried out this purpose by understanding the needs of WELS members despite the distance between them. At this point, the chaplains even scheduled ten different worship services in ten different locations every month. This enabled more WELS military members and their families to attend.⁹³ It was a common practice of the European Chaplains to accrue many hours traveling from place to place in order to reach their members.

92. Lee A. Neujahr, “Europe is our Parish,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 75, no. 11 (1 June 1988): 220.

93. “Europe is our Parish,” 220.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE: 1990–2020

A consequence of living in a sinful, fallen world is the conflict of war. In August of 1990, the United States entered into what would be known as the Persian Gulf War. This was done to aid Saudi Arabia against Iraq, after Saddam Hussein had forces invade Kuwait. The United States was part of a multi-nation coalition that offered military support. As with previous conflicts, when WELS members in the military were called to action, WELS pastors and congregations made efforts to care for the spiritual well-being of those members.

By the time the Persian Gulf War began in 1990, the Military Services Committee had many ways of reaching members of the Armed Forces and their families. WELS had two full-time civilian chaplains in Europe, Pastor Joel Jaeger and Pastor Daniel Balge. Pastor Balge, the ninth European chaplain, had replaced Chaplain Neujahr in 1989. There were around 120 part-time civilian chaplains. These pastors were sometimes serving nearby military bases and installations or pastors who briefly assisted the two full-time chaplains in Europe. The ministry-by-mail program provided printed worship services, a copy of the *Northwestern Lutheran* and *Meditations*, and worship services recorded on cassette and video tape when requested. World missionaries also occasionally served WELS military families when the need arose in places like Okinawa and Korea.⁹⁴

The Military Services Committee understood the importance of keeping up with their members. During the Gulf crisis over 500 new names were added to the list of military

94. *Report to the Twelve Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, June 1990, 136.

personnel. A majority of them joined other WELS personnel in the Gulf area.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, civilian chaplains were not permitted to enter Saudi Arabia. The Military Services Committee even kept in touch with the Pentagon in case the curtain was lifted to allow for such services.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the two European chaplains stood ready to minister to synod members at Gulf naval bases and to Gulf personnel when they came to Europe for rest and recreation.⁹⁷

WELS congregations across the United States were constantly encouraged by the Military Services Committee to update them with status on military personnel. Naturally, this effected some churches more than others. Churches with a strong military presence were greatly impacted anytime military conflict arose. One church in particular was Beautiful Savior in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Pastor Mark Schoeneck reported in a *Northwestern Lutheran* article, “Sunday worship attendance is down because many of our members are currently on duty in the Persian Gulf area.”⁹⁸ This church then sent off weekly devotional mailings to twenty-five servicemen including members, WELS members from other churches, and neighborhood prospects in the military. Pastor Schoeneck and the church shared in the challenge of their members being deployed. They did so by sending devotional material, care packages, and tending to the families that were left behind due to deployment. Yet, even congregations that

95. *Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-first Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 5–9 August 1991, 131.

96. *Reports and Memorials for 1991 Convention*, 131.

97. “WELS Members in Operation Desert Shield,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 78, no. 3 (1 February 1991): 53.

98. “The WELS Goes to Saudi Arabia,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 78, no. 1 (1 January 1991): 12.

didn't have a strong military connection still showed their support by making use of the Military Services Committee's pen pal and care package program.⁹⁹

Work Around the World in the 1990s

By God's grace the First Gulf War was over by 1991 when Iraqi forces surrendered and were driven out of Kuwait. In addition, the Soviet Union had dissolved in 1991 thus ending the Cold War. The end of these conflicts meant that many military members were able to return home. This caused numbers of military personnel to decrease in Europe. By 1993 it was reported that the number of WELS members in Europe was down to 500.¹⁰⁰ The two civilian chaplains in Europe at this time were Pastor Balge and Pastor Dennis Smith. Pastor Smith replaced Pastor Jaeger and served from 1992 to 1994.

The work and efforts of the European chaplaincy continued to be immense. Despite having less numbers, Pastor Balge and Pastor Smith held monthly services at seven locations in southern Germany, one in Belgium, and two in England. A weekly service was held near Mainz in suburban Frankfurt. In addition, they made regular trips to Scotland, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and northern Germany. Occasionally, they visited Spain, Iceland, Greece, and Turkey.¹⁰¹ To put this in perspective, Pastor Balge compared the range of

99. *Reports and Memorials for 1991 Convention*, 131.

100. *Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-second Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 2–6 August 1993, 279.

101. Daniel N. Balge, "Civilian Chaplains: Modern Day Circuit Riders," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 81, no. 3 (March 1994): 17.

this ministry to “being based in Milwaukee and serving a flock scattered between Winnipeg and Orlando, Bismarck and Pittsburgh.”¹⁰²

In 1995, the number of civilian chaplains in Europe was cut from two to one and a half.¹⁰³ The main reason for this was budget reductions across many services carried out by the Commission of Special Ministries including the Board of Parish Services, which the Military Services Committee was under.¹⁰⁴ However, the lower numbers of WELS members stationed in Europe made this an easy decision. At this time there was also a good handle on how this ministry operated with the wide range of contacts, vast number of worship services, and locations. It was decided that one full-time European chaplain was able to handle the workload with the assistance of a part time chaplain. Usually, this part-time chaplain was a retired WELS pastor who served for three months, two or three times a year.¹⁰⁵ World missionaries were also tasked with serving military personnel when opportunities arose. The missionary in Taiwan served members in Okinawa on a quarterly basis.¹⁰⁶

In 1994, Pastor Smith took a call to Holy Redeemer in Port Huron, Michigan. Pastor Balge accepted a call to teach at Martin Luther College. Although Pastor Balge accepted the call to MLC, he stayed in Europe as a civilian chaplain until June 1995 when Pastor Philip Kieselhorst arrived and assumed responsibilities as the eleventh European chaplain.

102. “Civilian Chaplains: Modern Day Circuit Riders,” 16.

103. *Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-third Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 24–28 July 1995, 69.

104. *Reports and Memorials for the 1995 Convention*, 69.

105. *Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-fifth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 26–30 July 1999, 63.

106. *Reports and Memorials for the 1995 Convention*, 85.

Pastor Kieselhorst served until December of 2001. While he was the European chaplain, his regular schedule consisted of six different worship services a month at five different locations in Germany.¹⁰⁷ On the first Sunday of each month, he or his part-time assistant also made trips to two military bases in England. There they held worship services, confirmation class, and Bible study.¹⁰⁸ On the second and fourth Sundays of the month, he held services at Frankfurt and another at Ramstein Air Force base. The third Sunday his destination was Zurich, Switzerland.¹⁰⁹ Since he was now the only full-time chaplain, Pastor Kieselhorst was greatly assisted by part-time retired pastors and world missionaries.

The world missionaries met with military personnel when they were stationed in their mission field. One of the missionaries who helped out in this way was Pastor Kevin Stellick. He was a missionary in Taiwan but often made arrangements to visit military personnel stationed in Okinawa every other month.¹¹⁰ Another was Missionary Strackbein from Puerto Rico. It was noted that in 1999 he made plans to occasionally travel to Guam in order to reach the military members stationed there.¹¹¹

Technology was also a blessing for getting God's Word out to God's people by the late 1990s. In Europe, as well as other mission fields, only having one pastor stretched across great distance meant that worship opportunities were scarce. Yet, this did not stop God's people from gathering together around the Word. With the progression of technology, videotaped services

107. Philip Kieselhorst, "Religious Conditions in Modern Germany," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 84, no. 9 (September 1997): 15.

108. "WELS Work in England," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 85, no. 1 (January 1998): 22.

109. "Fellowship- European Style," *Forward in Christ* 87, no. 7 (July 2000): 18.

110. "Serving Those Serving in Okinawa," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 83, no. 10 (October 1996): 21.

111. *Reports and Memorials for the 1999 Convention*, 63.

and emailed sermons were becoming more usable in these situations. As a result, ministries in Italy, England, and Switzerland, which the European chaplain visited occasionally, used lay members to do the liturgy and watched a videotaped sermon.¹¹² A similar thing was being done among WELS military families stationed in Okinawa, Japan.¹¹³

A New Century: Moving Forward in Christ

At the turn of the century, the *Northwestern Lutheran* decided to change the name of their magazine to *Forward in Christ*. This was fitting as the Wisconsin Synod looked back on their history of 150 years as a church body. The attitude of joy moving forward in God's grace was shared throughout WELS. It showed itself in the desire for mission work and expansion as well as individual work, serving the spiritual needs of WELS members. This drive to improve ministry efforts and serve was no different for the Commission on Special Ministries. The Military Services Committee under the CSM continued to improve the ministry for military members.

By 2001, there was one full-time civilian chaplain and over 120 part-time civilian chaplains who were parish pastors.¹¹⁴ When Pastor Kieselhorst took a call at the end of 2001, Pastor Robert Hartman filled in as European Chaplain. Pastor Hartman was seen as a vacancy pastor in this position until Pastor Michael Schroeder came in August 2002. After Pastor Schroeder came, Pastor Hartman stepped down and turned his attention to outreach in Europe.

112. *Reports and Memorials for the 1999 Convention*, 63. "Fellowship-European Style," 18.

113. "Serving Those Serving in Okinawa," 21.

114. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Fifty-sixth Biennial Convention*, 30 July– 3 August 2001, 92.

Whereas outreach to the locals was nothing new in the European chaplaincy, it was new to focus on establishing a self-supporting WELS congregation.¹¹⁵ The planning and efforts of this ministry were focused in the Frankfurt/Wiesbaden area of Germany.¹¹⁶ Pastor Hartman assisted in this way for two years. Pastor Schroeder, on the other hand, continued to carry out the duties of the European Chaplain until 2007 when he took a call to Living Hope Lutheran Church in Wildomar, California.

Meanwhile, back in the States, the Military Services Committee made technological improvements in May of 2003. They developed a system that allowed the WELS to communicate with military personnel and their families.¹¹⁷ Previously, updating names and addresses of military personnel required sending an informative letter to the Commission on Special Ministries' office in Milwaukee, but now members were encouraged to make use of the online referral system.¹¹⁸

In 2007, with the assistance of the CSM, a military support group was formed called WELS Blue Star Families. WELS Blue Star Families offered support, Christian counsel, and encouragement in meetings, over the phone, and through email.¹¹⁹ The group was a network of WELS members and families with loved ones in the military. While the group was based in the Milwaukee area, they were occasionally contacted by people from coast to coast seeking support.

115. "Where Are They Now?," *Forward in Christ* 90, no. 3 (March 2003): 27.

116. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Fifty-seventh Biennial Convention*, 28 July– 1 August 2003, 74.

117. "WELS News Briefs," *Forward in Christ* 90, no. 5 (May 2003): 25.

118. *Report to the Twelve Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, June 2004, 61.

119. "WELS Blue Star Families Offer Support," *Forward in Christ* 94, no. 4 (April 2007): 21.

Improvements also took place among the part-time civilian chaplains in the United States. The early 2000s consistently had around 120 civilian chaplains serving local military hotspots. In 2004 the Military Services Committee, planned to schedule “six regional conferences over the next three years in support of WELS military contact pastors.”¹²⁰ These conferences were meant to inform and encourage the contact pastors for ministry to the military. Over the span of these years, one conference was held in the South Central District and the other in the North Atlantic District.¹²¹ These conferences were an outlet for exchanging ideas for ministry among the military, increasing awareness of this ministry and knowledge of the resources available through the Military Services Committee.

God continued to bless the efforts and work of military ministry during the 2000s despite the many challenges that were faced. A massive challenge that impacted the Commission on Special Ministries and the sub-committees under them, like the Military Services Committee, was budget reductions.¹²² Budget reductions to the MSC were made in small degrees since the mid 1990s through the early 2000s.¹²³ In fact, by the mid 2000s, all synodical funding had been withdrawn from the Military Services Committee.¹²⁴ Yet, the Commission on Special Ministries continued to solicit alternative funding to keep the Military Services Committee operational as they understood how important it was to provide spiritual encouragement to the men and women

120. *Report to the Twelve Districts for 2004*, 60.

121. *Report to the Twelve Districts for 2004*, 60.

122. *Reports and Memorials for the 2003 Convention*, 15–18.

123. *Reports and Memorials for the 1995 Convention*, 69. *Reports and Memorials for the 2003 Convention*, 17-18. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Fifty-eighth Biennial Convention*, 25–29 July 2005, 18, 24.

124. *Report to the Twelve Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, June 2006, 11.

serving in the Armed Forces.¹²⁵ Thus, the Military Services Committee was funded solely by special gifts and the financial support from the Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS).¹²⁶ The OWLS committed \$50,000 for the fiscal 2006 year.¹²⁷ Even more impressive is that the OWLS continues to commit about \$50,000 a year to the support of the civilian chaplaincy in Europe to this day.

The First WELS National Chaplain

The rise of terrorism and the outbreak of war with Iraq in the early 2000s contributed to the growing awareness of the importance of care for the military. In the past, often some people had negative opinions when the United States engaged in war. The Vietnam War for example was viewed as the most unpopular war of the twentieth century. In a negative way, the war shaped how some people saw Vietnam veterans when they returned from that conflict. However, due to the 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Afghanistan, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom, greater consideration and respect were given to those who served in the Armed Forces.

For WELS, this consideration for military personnel had always been the case. Pastors and congregations had always demonstrated their love and support for their members in the Armed Forces no matter what conflict they were involved in. So with the growing improvements in military ministry, WELS was equipped to provide pastoral care to WELS members wherever they went. In 2006, in a greater effort to care for military members, Pastor Paul Ziemer was

125. *Report to the Twelve Districts for 2006*, 11.

126. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Fifty-ninth Biennial Convention*, 30 July– 3 August 2007, 26.

127. *Report to the Twelve Districts for 2006*, 11.

called to be the WELS national civilian chaplain and liaison to the military. After accepting the call, he was installed in 2007.¹²⁸ Due to the challenge of financial budgeting, this call by the CSM was partnered with the North Atlantic District Mission Board and Beautiful Savior Lutheran in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In this combined effort, the WELS national chaplaincy received funding and support.¹²⁹

Pastor Ziemer was the ideal man for this position as he had extensive ministry experience among the military.¹³⁰ He graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1970 and was assigned to the mission field of Norfolk, Virginia, with the purpose of serving the church there. Resurrection Lutheran Church was established in 1968.¹³¹ For the remainder of the 1970s, Pastor Ziemer served troops at military installations in North Carolina. In 1981 he continued serving on the East Coast and began serving military personnel on the westside of the D.C. Beltway with a focus on Fort Belvoir, Quantico, and the Pentagon.

At the turn of the century Pastor Ziemer served on the Military Services Committee. Then, shortly after 9/11, he made trips to the Middle East in attempts to minister to troops of WELS and the ELS. Prior to his call as the national chaplain, Pastor Ziemer had traveled to Kuwait in March 2005. He did this on behalf of the CSM to minister to American soldiers. In addition to ministering to WELS people in the military, Ziemer worked to establish relationships

128. *Reports and Memorials for the 2007 Convention*, 26.

129. "Strengthening, Equipping, and Encouraging God's People," *Forward in Christ* 94, no. 1 (January 2007): 24.

130. The following information comes from an interview with Pastor Paul Ziemer. Details and additional information can be found in the appendix.

131. *Reports and Memorials for the 1971 Convention*, 69. Norfolk, VA was the ideal area to establish a church in order to serve military personnel. Pastor Luther Voss was the one who concluded this when he worked in the Washington D.C area prior to serving in Vietnam.

that will “enhance the synod’s ability to serve WELS troops in the future.”¹³² Pastor Ziemer’s passion for military ministry was ultimately what made him a great choice for this call. While in Kuwait in 2005, Pastor Ziemer published an online article on the WELS website concerning the work that needs to be done for members in the military. In the article he said,

Face-to-face ministry to the military is critical, in my opinion, because ministering to the military is a personal matter with me. I believe that it is very personal to many other people in WELS also. The notes I get from moms and dads, wives and children, grandparents they underscore the point. Ministry to the military is personal to those who love people in the Military!... I thank God for allowing me to serve for a brief time as a civilian chaplain in the Middle East. I pray he will allow me to return soon to do it again. For me, it’s personal.¹³³

God provided that opportunity in calling Pastor Ziemer to serve as the WELS national chaplain. He faithfully worked in this calling officially since December 2006. Even after Pastor Ziemer’s decision to go into semi-retirement in September 2009, he continued to serve the WELS as the national chaplain. The reason behind this was his passion for military ministry.

The scope of Pastor Ziemer’s call as national chaplain was threefold. First, Pastor Ziemer continued to make trips to the Middle East and other areas of hostility. “Unfortunately, he was not able to visit soldiers in the Middle East more than once or twice a year because of inadequate funding and difficulties gaining access to troops.”¹³⁴ Despite this, he served as the WELS liaison to the U.S. Military Command. Secondly, as the WELS national chaplain, Pastor Ziemer was to build relationships with key military contacts for the betterment of WELS pastors serving as civilian chaplains. Carl Ziemer, administrator of the Commission on Special Ministries said concerning this work, “If we are serious about wanting to serve WELS members in areas of

132. “A WELS Pastor Visits Soldiers in Kuwait,” *Forward in Christ* 92, no. 5 (May 2005): 24.

133. “A WELS Pastor Visits Soldiers in Kuwait,” 24–25.

134. “WELS Serves Troops in Middle East,” *Forward in Christ* 95, no. 2 (February 2008): 22.

hostility, then we must engage and win the respect and cooperation of military leaders and chaplains.”¹³⁵ The third responsibility of Pastor Ziemer’s call was coordinating training conferences for the WELS military contact pastors as well as mentoring new contact pastors.¹³⁶

2007 resulted in many significant changes to military ministry. One change was the calling of Pastor Joshua Martin as the WELS chaplain in Europe. He and his family lived in Spiesheim, Germany. From there, he ministered to hundreds of military personnel and WELS civilians in Europe.¹³⁷ Pastor Martin served as a civilian chaplain until May 2016, after nine years of ministry in Europe. Then Pastor Don Stuppy served as the European Chaplain from January 2017 to July 2020.

Lasting Impacts and Tremendous Growth

The changes and growth within military ministry continued. The leadership and guidance of the Military Services Committee allowed for serious steps to be taken. The WELS national chaplain continued to educate and encourage the contact pastors of the synod as well as establish lasting relationships with key military personnel. In addition, congregations and lay leaders became influential in caring out ministry to the military.

Many programs assisted congregations in equipping WELS members to become more involved in military ministry. A major program was the establishment of the Chaplaincy Certification Program in 2011. The Commission on Special Ministries established this program

135. “WELS Serves Troops in Middle East,” 22.

136. *Report to the Twelve Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, June 2008, 64. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Sixtieth Biennial Convention*, June 2009, 136.

137. *Report to the Twelve Districts*, 64.

for “chaplaincy certification and ecclesiastical endorsement.”¹³⁸ It was initiated as pastors and congregations noticed that many healthcare facilities, jails and prisons, and military bases began tightening the requirements for ministry to be done in their facilities. “Chaplaincy certification means that the applicant has fulfilled all of the class and clinical requirements for certification. Ecclesiastical endorsement means that the Chaplaincy Certification Committee and the Commission on Special Ministries are endorsing the applicant’s ability and moral character for specialized ministry.”¹³⁹

As finances were a factor in beginning this sort of program, “a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans provided seed money to begin the program for WELS and ELS pastors.”¹⁴⁰ From there, the individuals enrolled would pay for the necessary courses. The classes were conducted through Martin Luther College and still are today.¹⁴¹

The Chaplaincy Certification Program was a blessing to military ministry as it equipped pastors, staff ministers, and laypeople who wanted to serve as civilian chaplains. For those who completed the program, this helped establish the necessary credentials for gaining access to military installations and other institutions. However, it was noted that this program was not only for contact pastors or staff ministers, but also laypeople. In congregations with a strong military presence, sometimes WELS military members completed the program in order to serve fellow WELS or ELS members when they were deployed or unable to meet with a WELS pastor.

138. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Sixty-first Biennial Convention*, May 2011, 31.

139. *Reports and Memorials for the 2011 Convention*, 31.

140. *Reports and Memorials for the 2011 Convention*, 31.

141. “MLC Updates Mission Statement,” *Forward in Christ* 99, no. 5 (May 2012): 23.

In 2015, a group known as the Lutheran Military Support Group became instrumental in working with the WELS Military Services Committee and local congregations to strengthen the church's ministry to the military.¹⁴² The group was run by a board of WELS and ELS veterans from across the country. The LSMG works to provide logistical, financial, and educational support to WELS Military Services. An example of this support is in the 2017-18 school year when the LSMG offered scholarships to military veterans or those in the reserves who were studying for the pastoral ministry.¹⁴³ In addition, the LSMG helps address post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans. In May 2018 they sponsored a retreat which focused on helping those who experienced combat and suffer from PTSD.¹⁴⁴ Lastly, they support military families spiritually through services that help and encourage them to stay connected to the Word.¹⁴⁵ These services have been wide ranging, from providing catechism material and Bible studies to giving financial resources. A lasting resource that was published back in 2020 was the *Christian Service Member's Handbook*.¹⁴⁶ This was developed by WELS Special Ministries, the Lutheran Military Support group, and Northwestern Publishing House. The *Christian Service Member's Handbook* was a resource that could be used for all members but especially encouraged for military members. The book contains five sections that provide prayer, meditations and devotions, Scriptures, hymns, and the small catechism.¹⁴⁷

142. "Supporting the Military and their Families," *Forward in Christ* 102, no. 11 (November 2015): 23.

143. "Scholarships Encourage Military Veterans," *Forward in Christ* 105, no. 11 (November 2018): 23.

144. "Bulletin Board-Coming Events," *Forward in Christ* 105, no. 5 (May 2018): 19.

145. "Supporting the Military and their Families," 23.

146. "Book Nook-Another Tool in your Tool Kit," *Forward in Christ* 107, no. 11 (November 2020): 23.

147. "Book Nook-Another Tool in your Tool Kit," 23.

In the past two decades, many advancements have been made to military ministry. One final thing to note is the concern and dedication WELS has to serving military members. This can be seen in the programs and committees that deal extensively with military ministry, but also in the care to provide the best service possible to WELS members in the military. This is the reason why, in 2015, “the Conference of Presidents appointed a special committee to study and review the long-standing WELS view of the military chaplaincy and to determine whether current U.S. Army Chaplaincy Regulations have changed sufficiently to allow WELS participation.”¹⁴⁸ WELS had been referencing dated information concerning how the government’s chaplaincy program was working. It was after a thorough review that the appointed committee then made the following report and recommendation in 2016; “Though there have been significant, meaningful changes in the military chaplaincy since the 1950s, changes which have granted more safeguards for those serving in the military chaplaincy. It is nonetheless the recommendation of the Military Chaplaincy Study Committee that the changes are not such that would allow us to participate in the military chaplaincy at this time.”¹⁴⁹

Three reasons were noted for the conclusion to remain separate from the government military chaplaincy program. “The military chaplaincy continues to conflict with the doctrine of the two kingdoms... the military chaplaincy as currently constituted is built on, operates from, and supports the foundational idea that all religious beliefs are equally valid... the military chaplaincy also continues to conflict with the doctrine of the divine call.” Then the encouragement followed, that “we as a synod do absolutely everything within our power to serve our WELS servicemen and women, both active duty and retired, to the fullest extent possible as

148. *Report to the Twelve Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, May 2016, 7.

149. *Reports and Memorials for the WELS Sixty-fourth Biennial Convention*, May 2017, 10.

civilians... to encourage every congregation in our synod to seek out members of their congregation who have served in the military and to offer them any help they might need.”¹⁵⁰

This demonstrates the care and constant evaluation WELS has for its military ministry. WELS cares for military members to the best of its ability while still maintaining a scriptural stance.

The civilian chaplaincy within WELS is proof of that love and care for both God’s Word and the military.

150. *Reports and Memorials for the 2017 Convention*, 11.

CONCLUSION

As a child, I became acquainted with military life. My father served in the Navy for twenty-six years. I remember the times my father was deployed and the hardships it put my family through. I remember our bedtime prayers as a child when my father was deployed and asking God to continue to watch over him and keep him safe. I remember the joy of waiting in the airport knowing he would soon be walking down the hallway to rejoin his family.

My father says that it's not only the ones in the military that endure challenging deployments and deal with the trials of military lifestyle but the families too. This is certainly true as spouses and children have to face many hardships when a family member serves in the military. There are emotional worries, doubts, and fears. There is a toll on the parents when one of them is away. Yet, through it all, God provides for his people, supports them in times of uncertainty, and gives them the peace of his love and grace. For my family, we were blessed to have the support of our local church, Resurrection in Norfolk, when my father was deployed. The congregation showed their love and cared for our family's well-being. The pastors tended to our spiritual needs by ministering to us with the Word and Sacraments. I say this because it shows the amazing love of God and how he cares for his people affected by the military lifestyle. God blessed me and my family through the work of his church.

After tracing a portion of history of military ministry within WELS, one can see the vast efforts and care WELS has for all its members, especially those serving in the military. After the synod began to grow, WELS organized committees that oversaw this work of military ministry extensively, from the work of the Spiritual Welfare Commission to the current Military Services Committee. WELS sought the spiritual well-being of their military members by providing

devotional materials with the mailing program, which is still in effect today, although it has greatly improved by communicating through online services like emailing devotional resources and streaming worship services. These advancements have also made it easier to contact WELS members wherever they may be stationed. In addition to these services, WELS continues to administer spiritual care in person. This is why WELS equips civilian chaplains to carry out pastoral care to those who may find themselves away from their church. The synod calls men to serve both as full-time and part-time civilian chaplains. This is all done to care for WELS members in the military. Where God's people are, WELS sees to it that they are being served to the best of the synod's ability. This has been true throughout WELS' long history and continues still today.

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Manuscript and Archival Materials

WELS Synod Archives

Spiritual Welfare Commission Collection

Box 1

Box 2

Box 4

APPENDIX

Interview with Pastor Paul Ziemer the WELS National Chaplain

These are my raw notes from the interview. They are in mostly chronological order.

- Pastor Ziemer's ministry to the military began when he came out of Sem in June 1970 to serve a mission field in Norfolk, VA. The church was Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church, officially established Nov 20th 1968. The church was accepted into WELS membership in August 1969.
- When attempting to get on a military installation (Little Creek) for the first time, he received a bumper sticker that allowed him to get on any military base for a while after that. The members at the church asked him how he got it. Pastor Ziemer said it could have been dumb luck or perhaps it was divine intervention to better his ministry to those in the Armed Forces.
- He promptly, in the fall of 1970, was asked to serve troops at military installations in North Carolina, where installations were many and WELS congregations were none.
- In 1973 he was called to Luther High in Onalaska, Wisconsin.
- In 1981 he returned to the East Coast, called to serve at Grace Lutheran. He then began serving troops on the west side of the D.C. beltway—especially Fort Belvoir, Quantico, and the Pentagon. He noted that in those days he could just show his badge and enter the Pentagon and the like.

- He was asked to serve on the WELS Military Services Committee shortly before the turn of the century. Some key leaders on the committee were then Joel Jaeger, Paul Ziemer, and his brother, Carl Ziemer.
- Shortly after 9/11, he went to the Middle East war zone to attempt to minister to troops of WELS and the ELS.
- Discussions were being had concerning WELS having a person who is dedicated to doing this ministry to the military as a full-time chaplain. At the time, they had one full-time chaplain but that was in Europe. The United States ought to have one as well. The idea was to have the Board for Home Missions and a church aid in this calling of a full-time national chaplain for WELS. At the time, the Military Services Committee had around \$5000 to put into this ministry. Originally, Joel Jaeger received the call but declined it.
- In late 2006 he was called to serve as the first WELS National Chaplain to the Military. This directed his attention to three priorities: 1) Enable and oversee ministry to our deployed troops; 2) Support, enable, and encourage the ministries of our some 120 Military Contact Pastors; and, 3) Serve as the WELS liaison to the U.S. Military Command.
- Additional trips followed to the war zone, using Kuwait as a base.
- There were times during his trips to the Middle East when he received clearance due to the reputation WELS had already established. The reputation of our services to troops during Vietnam had impressed Military Command and other key military personnel. This recognition by the military aided Pastor Ziemer as the WELS'

- national chaplain. He continued to improve this relationship serving as the WELS liaison to the Military Command during his ministry.
- Pastor Ziemer and the Military Services Committee also pushed for changing the pastor's mindset when conducting ministry to the military. Rather than introducing themselves as a local WELS pastor, they were to present themselves as the civilian chaplain for WELS when addressing a military installation. This added to WELS becoming a well-known name among the military.
 - On an occasion of going to the Middle East, Pastor Ziemer met with the deputy of the chief of chaplain. WELS had spent the money in sending him over there for the purpose of reaching their troops. Initially, when he arrived, he wasn't able to gain permission to go to WELS members. They were hesitant as to not have many civilian chaplains trying to serve in dangerous hotspots. So, Pastor Ziemer, as to not waste the trip over there, asked if he could meet and talk with him concerning how WELS would best work with the military in order to serve their members. The following day, the chaplain turned 180 and agreed to work with him and help him reach WELS members. This chaplain continued to be an asset to Pastor Ziemer as he built relationships and communicated with the Military Command. For sake of security, names, dates and other detailed information cannot be given concerning Pastor Ziemer's services overseas.
 - Pastor Ziemer, through his experience of military ministry, shifted the mindset of the contact pastor being the expert in military ministry. He taught at conferences and presentations on how best to serve those in the military. "The one who knows how best to serve the military are those serving in the military. The pastor is an expert of

- theology, not necessarily in military ministry.” It was important to work with the Military Command, communicate with them, and figure out how best to serve our members serving in the military. This was all to benefit reaching and ministering to WELS members in the military.
- At the turn of the century, WELS was still quoting a 1954 Army Chaplain’s Handbook as evidence that we should not participate in the military chaplaincy program.
 - The Military Services Committee spent a fair amount of time researching the modern chaplaincy program’s directives and regulations and speaking with a large number of military chaplains and commanders.
 - It advised the Conference of Presidents that the military chaplaincy program has gone through a number of major revisions since 1954 and any current policies toward working with military command should be based upon current military policies regarding ministry to troops.