



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 16

November 2012

Issue 3

## Programs at the Ottesen Museum

by Becky DeGarmeaux

### Ottesen Museum

### Christmas in Eastern Europe

### Music, Crafts and Treats of Latvia, Ukraine and the Czech Republic

(Churches associated with the ELS through Thoughts of Faith)



sponsored by

The ELS Ottesen Museum and World Outreach Office

Thursday, December 13, 2012, 2:30 - 5:30 P. M.

4 Browns Court, Mankato, MN

What do you think of when you think of the Ottesen Museum? Do you think of rooms full of old stuff? Do you think of Norwegian things? Do you think of history? You're probably not alone.

Yes, the Ottesen Museum is home to old things, Norwegian things, and historical things, but it is also a resource. The Ottesen Museum is now offering special presentations on teaching and preserving Synod and congregational history. They include:

The History of the ELS - Based on "Growing in His Mercy" (available from the Bethany bookstore) - A tour of the Museum is combined with the basics of Synod history. Originally designed for catechism and high school classes, it's also a good refresher course for Bible classes and other church groups.

Teaching Synod History - This presentation is designed for pastors, Sunday School teachers, and Christian Day School teachers who want to

teach Synod history in the parish. It includes a detailed overview of Synod history, a discussion on why Synod history is taught, and a list of resources.

Preserving Your Congregation's History - Designed for anyone wanting to protect and/or display articles of a congregation's history. It includes the "what"s and "why"s of preservation as well as the "do"s and "don't"s of artifact storage and display. It also includes a demonstration of some of the tools used for storing and preserving artifacts and options for cataloging them.

Growing Up in a Log Cabin - Originally created for grade schoolers, but suitable for any age group, this presentation gives the participants a look into pioneer life, especially in the Midwest. Two options of "Norwegian" and "General" or "Yankee" are offered.

So, yes, the Ottesen Museum is full of many "things", but it is also a place to get a fuller understanding of the ELS and its history.

For more information on any of these presentations, contact the Ottesen Museum's Director of Programming, Becky DeGarmeaux at [museum@blc.edu](mailto:museum@blc.edu) or 507-344-7421. ■

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## **Technology Used for God's Glory: Then and Now**

From an article in the Winter 2011 *Thrivent Magazine*, *Our Common Bond: Is It Common Knowledge? Some lesser-known facts about Lutheranism's founder*, by Hope Winsborough.

"Did You Know? Cutting-edge technology was Luther's ally. Luther's message was delivered mere decades after the printing press first came into use in Germany. 'Suddenly, printing made it possible to reach a mass audience,' says Edwards [Mark U. Edwards, Jr., Ph.D. ...]. Printing presses allowed society to change in drastic ways.

"Suddenly, things such as medical books and maps could be reproduced fairly quickly. What's more, information suddenly became available to rural peasants, who typically would have someone read aloud to them.

"Luther acknowledged the technological advances at his disposal, even stating that God had divinely sent the printing press in order to spread the gospel. Luther outpublished his Catholic peers five to three...

"Since there were no copyright laws to speak of, all printers needed to do was get a copy of something and then print up their own copies. And they did just that. In fact, Luther's popularity was so great that some printers sent people to take notes during his sermons in order to print copies for distribution. It got to the point where he even had a text he was working on stolen from his desk!"

From an article in the September 2012 *Lutheran Sentinel*, *Using Technology to Spread the Gospel*, by David Jay Webber, ELS pastor in Scottsdale, Arizona

"The year 1453 saw the invention of a printing press with moveable type. A few decades later, Martin Luther and his colleagues published various editions of the Bible, and treatises promoting the message of the Reformation, which were spread through Europe on a scale that could not have been possible without the printing press.

"The year 1900 saw the invention of the first radio device capable of transmitting the human voice. Thirty years later, the first broadcast of the 'Lutheran Hour,' with Walter A. Maier as speaker, went out over the air. This was one of many examples that were to follow over the years, of Lutherans using this technology to bring the Gospel message to people at a physical distance.

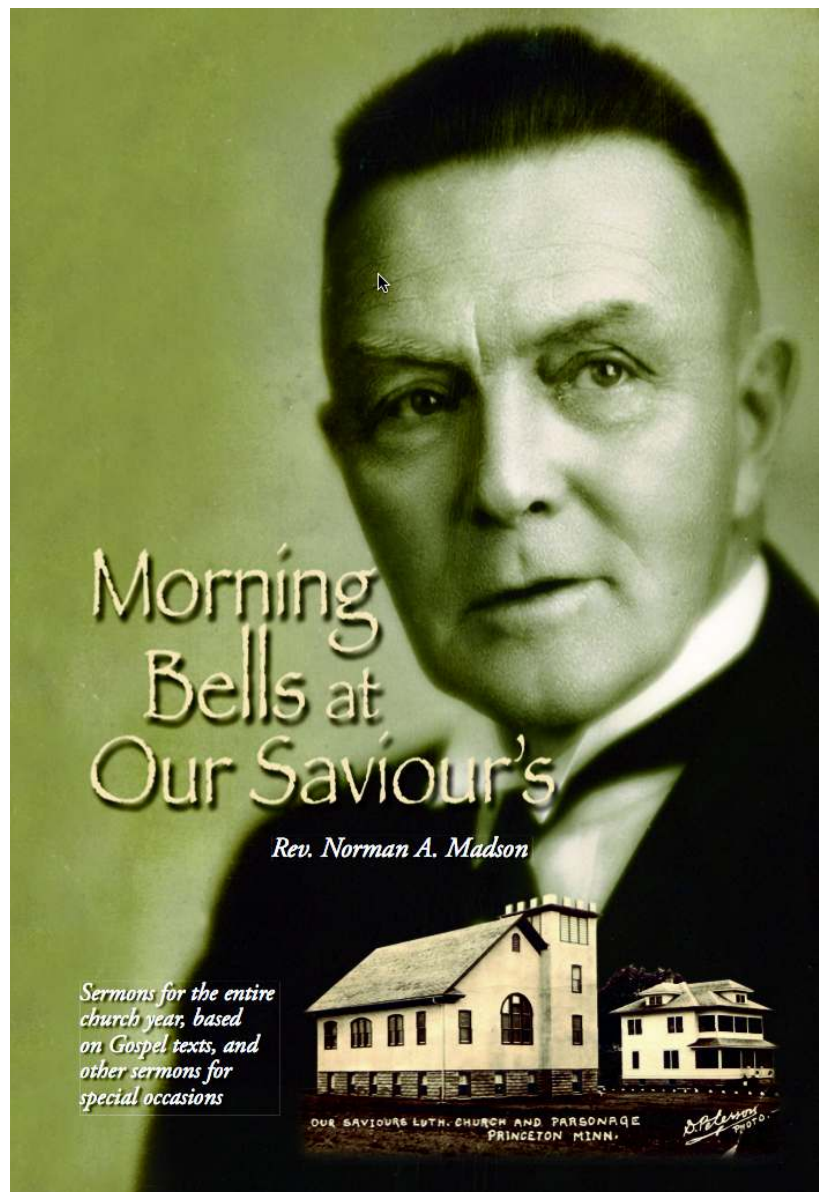
"The new communications technology of our time is the Internet. But the Internet differs from print and broadcast media in a very significant way: it is available to everyone. If someone wants to get his message out to the world,...He can go online himself and with a minimal expense—or perhaps with no expense at all—the information he wants to disseminate can be made available, either to the world as a whole...or to specific people at a distance whom he wants to reach. ...

"This new communications technology presents great opportunities that the Lord of the church—and the King of the universe—is making available to us. Let us take advantage of these opportunities—in the spirit of Luther and Maier—to His glory!" ■

The editors of *Oak Leaves* asked that I relate some of my remembrances of Thanksgiving days at Our Saviour's, where the sermon below was originally preached. I remember that Thanksgiving weekends were always looked forward to, mainly because older brothers and sisters would come home from college that weekend, and sometimes an aunt or two.

The one Thanksgiving Day that stands out most in my memory had nothing to do with the pulpit in which the following sermon was preached, but rather the old woodstove in the parsonage kitchen next door. We always had a large turkey for our noon meal that day, usually given us as a gift by the grocer in the nearby village. And we always all went to church that morning. This one year, one of my siblings (and I dare not name that person, lest I get myself into a peck of trouble) was not feeling good Thanksgiving morning, so it was agreed that he/she should remain at home to tend the turkey in the oven. When my mother left for church she gave the instruction to my sibling to not put any more wood in the cook stove. A few minutes later our aunt Laura, who was the last one to leave for services, said to my sibling: "Now be sure to put enough wood in the stove!" Who to believe? Well, my sibling decided to follow the last of the instructions, and added more wood to the fire. When we came home from services that morning, there was smoke coming out of the oven door. The 20# critter was burned real good, so good, in fact, that it was uneatable. What my mother served up for the entrée that day, I do not recall. It may have been a can of fried SPAM, of which we usually had a good supply on hand.

nam, jr



## THANKSGIVING DAY MESSAGE (A Free Text)

### PRAYER

O Lord of the harvest, Thou who withholdest no good thing, even in this world, from Thine elect, but who permittest only that to be our lot which must, in Thy never-failing counsel, serve to our eternal good, grant us grace by Thy Holy Spirit to know this, to believe it with all our heart, and then at all times to lift up holy hands in grateful acknowledgment of that grace. To that end bless our festival worship of Thee also in this hour for the sake of Thine only-begotten Son, Christ, our Savior. Amen.

**TEXT** - Psalm 31:15a (My times are in your hands;...)

## **FELLOW REDEEMED:**

Thanksgiving Day! The meaning of the occasion for which we are gathered in the house of God this morning can not easily be misunderstood. There certainly is no one here who does not understand that word “thanksgiving.” We offer thanks, if we are sincere and true in our conduct, only when we are truly grateful for favors shown us. To offer thanks when we do not feel grateful is neither honest nor right. Even among unbelievers, HYPOCRISY is frowned upon. It is a detestable vice. But how much more serious it becomes when we practice it in the name of Him who said: **“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain”** (Exodus 20:7).

The very first question we must ask ourselves, therefore, is this: Why do we observe Thanksgiving Day? Is it merely because it has become a national custom and we do not want to be seen out of step with the rest of the nation? Are we here with lips which thank, but with hearts that complain? If so, dear hearers, it were far better that we had not assembled today. It would be better to openly rebel a thousand times at what the multitudes say and do, than to offer the hypocrite’s sacrifice!

If there were nothing for which our heart could truly say thanks today, then no president of these United States, no governor of this commonwealth would have any right to summon us to offer such thanks. For then they would be guilty of urging us to sin. And when that is urged upon us, even by those who stand as God’s representatives, be it in church or state, we must ever reply with the intrepid Peter: **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). And God has most certainly condemned, yea, in the strongest terms, the sin of hypocrisy.

That there also this year, in the midst of a continued national stress, are many things, even in the material world, for which we can and ought to be duly grateful, no reasonable man will deny. If the early Plymouth colonists in the days of governor Bradford could offer thanks to a benign Providence because He had permitted some of their scanty acres of corn to be saved from the frost, and because disease and ever-hostile Indians had not entirely wiped out the struggling colony, who are we that we should fail to show a like gratitude?

Thanksgiving Day, remember, “had its origin in a narrow escape from calamity. It was dedicated not to the celebration of plenty but gratitude for the slender margin by which famine and death had been averted. It commemorated a dark hour when life hung in the balance until a meager harvest assured future existence. The devout New England colonists offered thanks for the assurance that life would go on” (Lloyd Morris in the Minneapolis Star Journal, November 26, 1933).

But we are not today going to dwell upon what God has done for us by way of material prosperity. The moment you mention that word “prosperity” there arises in many a heart a serious question in times like these. And yet, just as certainly as God’s word is to be relied upon, just as certainly it is ever true of every child of God, regardless of the times and conditions under which he lives: **“Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”** (Psalm 1:3). And why must it ever be thus? The answer is given us in today’s text. We shall do well, therefore, if we today, on the basis of this brief text, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, consider:

## **THE NEVER-FAILING SOURCE OF THANKFULNESS**

**I. My times.** It is the psalmist David who here is speaking. The psalm from which our text is taken begins with these words: **“In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be ashamed”** (Psalm 31:1). And it closes with these words of confidence: **“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord”** (Psalm 31:24).

Now, under what times and conditions was the psalmist living when he wrote these words? The opening and closing sentences give us a key to the situation. He was in danger of being put utterly to shame, he needed to have his heart encouraged and strengthened. And so great was his trouble that

there was no one else who could help him out of the difficulties than the God of his salvation. Listen to his plaintive cry: **“Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life”** (Psalm 31:9-13).

Now if these words had been spoken by a weakling, a craven and cowardly soul, ever filled with forebodings and fears, ever selfishly thinking of his own comfort and safety, you might with good reason discount no small part of his confession. But you are familiar with the life-story of the shepherd boy who became the second king of Israel. You also know that his was not the habit of making mountains out of mole-hills when it came to danger, nor selfishly looking to his own personal safety when his very life hung in the balance. Was it a coward who stepped out on the battle field single-handedly to meet the Philistine giant? Was it a selfish soul which pleaded with Joab on behalf of his rebellious son, Absalom: **“Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom”** (II Samuel 18:5).

No, when David speaks of adversities and troubles you may be certain that they are not imagined, but real. Yea, so real were they that we shudder to think of having to experience what that man suffered. Though anointed of God as the future king of His people, this faithful son of Jesse had to spend years as an outcast, often famished and forsaken, yea, even hunted from crag to cave as a wild beast of the forest – and that by a faithless and disobedient Saul. And even when he had become established as the rightful king of Israel, when the ark had been brought to Zion and the new capitol of Judah founded, he was to have a sorrow and disgrace than which there can be none greater for a father – his own son turning traitor and seeking to kill him. Can you well imagine anything more crushing than that, which was the lot of this father, a barefoot fugitive fleeing to the mountains of Moab before his own child?

And yet all of David’s sorrows, disgraces, calamities, are included in that term – “My times.” He does not leave out one single instance. He is not only thinking of the wrongs which he had suffered at the hands of strangers, the days he was famished for want of bread, the nights he spent in anguish and dread, the humiliation of being murderously hunted by his own boy, but his own INIQUITIES rise up before him telling him that he has deserved nothing better. And that, dear hearer, is perhaps the greatest of all burdens to bear. To suffer may be hard, but to suffer because of your own sins and folly is incalculably harder. You do not really understand what “hard times” are until you have experienced what is included in the term “depression of the soul.” You do not know what starvation means until you, as a father or mother, must go hungering for the love and respect of your own child.

Let there be less speaking of “our times.” That is so unsatisfactorily general. Let there be more personal confession which is definite and to the point – “my times.” For God deals with us individually, remember. It is so easy to get away from the real issue by speaking of “the times in which we live,” forgetting that “my times,” my trials and troubles, my necessities and wants, my sorrows and disappointments are something personally meant for me and for a specific purpose.

Whatever may have fallen to your lot in the year that is past, be that joy or sorrow, plenty or want, honor or disgrace, health or sickness, victory or defeat, you must not forget that all of it belongs to what the psalmist calls “my times.” Supposing they have been trying times, yea, with burdens greater than you could bear, may it not have been your greatest blessing after all? You were perhaps like the little child reaching out after the distant glittering star, imagining that you somehow could knock it down, and so you forgot to take note of the sweet flower that blossomed at your feet.

The young prodigal, no doubt, imagined that his was a blessed lot when he had gotten his inheritance even before the proper time, had gotten away from the restrictions of home and parents, had joined the company of those who knew no cares. And yet, dear hearer, when was he, after all, more blessed? Then, or in the moment when he, reduced to the utmost point of degradation and destitution, finally came to himself, and with a contrite heart resolved to return to his father? You know the answer.

The God who ruled in the lives of men then has not changed in the least. He is the same loving, all-wise, all-merciful Father still.

“He knows the time for joy, and truly  
Will send it when He sees it meet.  
When He has tried and purged thee duly,  
And finds thee free from all deceit,  
He comes to thee all unaware  
And makes thee own His loving care.”  
(ELH, #205, 4)

**II. In thy hand.** Oh, the wealth of comfort and encouragement in that blessed trinity of words: “**In thy hand.**” Where would you rather be, my dear hearer, than in the safe keeping of that never-failing hand of the Almighty? Has that hand in any way been shortened? Listen to Isaiah’s assurance: “**Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and measured the heaven with a span?**” (Isaiah 40:12). When you stand gazing out over the far stretches of the mighty Pacific or the mighty billows of the blue Atlantic, you feel that they are mighty bodies of water, as they indeed are. And yet so insignificant are they in God’s hand that He can encompass even the mighty oceans in the cup of His hand. When we study the vast expanse of the universe above us, we are again thrilled with the immensity of it all. And yet even this vast expanse is measured by the outstretched thumb and center finger of our God.

“Yes, it is indeed a mighty hand,” you say, “but can I be certain that its omnipotence will be used for my blessing?” Again listen to the Gospel testimony of the prophet: “**Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands**” (Isaiah 49:16). Our risen and ascended Lord is even now at the right hand of the Father with the marks of His suffering and death as your substitute. He died for YOU, remember. You need never fear the loving-kindness of those wounded palms. They are even now outstretched toward you, bidding you come, for all things are ready.

And those hands will never fail. He has promised us: “**Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**” (John 10:28). Is there any room for doubt and uncertainty there? Can there be any question as to the bliss in store for those who flee to that mighty, loving, never-failing hand of God? No, and a thousand times, NO! “**At thy right hand are pleasures for evermore**” (Psalm 16:11b).

In closing permit me to read a passage from our last issue of “The Lutheran Sentinel.” I would not have missed this one single article from the pen of Rev. Justin A. Petersen for the entire year’s subscription. And yet there be those among us who say they cannot afford to subscribe for our church paper. (Here was read the article entitled, THANKSGIVING FAITH, found in the November 22nd, 1933 issue of “The Lutheran Sentinel.”) Oh, may the God of truth and mercy ever give us faith to confess with the poet:

“I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea  
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;  
I will believe the HAND which never fails,  
From seeming evil worketh good for me.  
And though I weep because those sails are tattered,  
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered:  
‘I trust in Thee!’ ”

Yea, I trust in Thee!

**AMEN!**

*(Morning Bells at Our Saviour’s, Sermons for every Sunday of the church year, based on Gospel texts for the day, and several sermons for special occasions by Rev. Norman A. Madson was compiled and edited by Rev. Norman A. Madson, Jr., published in 2008, and is available at the Lutheran Synod Book Company, Bethany Lutheran College, 700 Luther Drive, Mankato MN 56001.)*

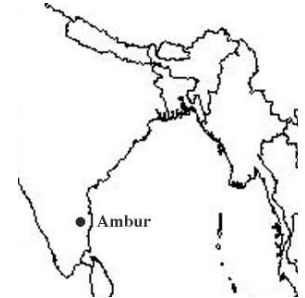
## Early Synod Mission Work in India

by Craig A. Ferkenstad

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod assumed formal supervision of the mission work in India, with the Lutheran Mission of Salvation-India, in 2005. But this was not the first time the ELS had ventured into India.

Nearly eighty years earlier, in 1926, Anena Christensen sailed across the Indian Ocean to Ambur, in south-east India, which is located 400 miles south of our present mission field in Rajahmundry.

As a 1915 graduate of the Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Anena Christensen previously had served in the Norwegian mission in South Africa at the Schreuder Mission. At this time her fellow missionaries in Natal were the Rev. Johannes Astrup and C.U.Faye; serving in Zululand, among others, were the Rev. Nils Astrup and the Rev. Hans Astrup.



Anena Christensen on left and Emma Johnson on right.

During this time, the “merger of 1917” occurred and after serving in Natal, South Africa and then also teaching in the associated mission field in Madagascar, she withdrew her membership from the merger synod. She then completed a colloquy with Missouri Synod and was recommended for work in India where the Missouri Synod had conducted a mission since 1894. She was commissioned by the ELS at a formal service on April 18, 1926 at Fairview Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and was referred to as “our representative” on the field when Pastor S.C.Ylvisker (chairman of the Foreign Mission Committee) wrote, “Let us remember her in our prayers, and let her work in India be a new bond connecting us the more intimately with this mission.” Within a year, missionary George Lillegard returned from China and for the next eleven years Anena Christensen was our only foreign missionary face. The financial contributions of the synod turned toward this new field, especially during her first years there, when financial support was second only to the Synodical Conference Negro mission.

She was stationed at Ambur and managed a Girls’ Boarding School where many children received care. An important part of the school was instruction in the teachings of the Bible. In 1934, while on furlough, Miss Christensen visited many congregations of the synod. A result was an attempt to establish a scholarship fund for the boarding school; however, this did not materialize. Upon her return, she wrote to Mrs. G.A.Gullixson about her travel in the United States using her rail road “clergy certificate.” She remained in India until 1938 when she left the field due to ill health.

Financial support of the work in India began to wane after she returned to Mankato, Minnesota. When she died in 1961, the president’s report to the synod convention made no mention of the death of this longest-tenured missionary in the first fifty years of our synod’s history. Yet in memoriam her pastor wrote, “Miss Christensen is remembered by former students at Bethany Lutheran College for her lectures based on her mission field experiences, and for her displays of Oriental clothing, jewelry and utensils. Many remember, too, her large private library, containing among others, many well-chosen theological books.”

The above is selected and condensed from “A Half-Century of Mission Involvement: ELS Foreign Mission Work prior to 1968” which will be in the December 2012 issue of *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.



## Betsy Hermanson

Interviewed by BLC student Jacob Briggs  
Mankato, MN

Date of interview: April 10, 2012



Betsy Hermanson (1946-) was born April 5, 1946, in Montevideo, Minnesota, the daughter of Lutheran pastor, Milton Otto. At the time, her father was a pastor at English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood. However, Montevideo was the closest hospital. She has lived in northern Iowa, Wisconsin and southern Minnesota her entire life. She now serves as secretary of the ELS Historical Society Board of Directors.

Growing up, Betsy recalls having a great deal of fun playing church, including baptizing dolls. It is probably safe to say that not many young girls today pretend to baptize their dolls, but she was the daughter of a pastor after all. Although her father was a pastor, she escaped having to move around several times in that she really only lived in two places. Shortly after she was born, her family left Cottonwood bound for

northern Iowa, where her father served churches at Saude and Jericho. When she was eleven, in 1957, the family moved again, this time to Mankato where her father took a teaching position at Bethany Lutheran College.

In the 1950s, Betsy's father served as president of the ELS.

Interestingly, at the time, the president of the ELS did not reside in Mankato. In fact, Rev. Otto served this position while at the same time continuing to serve the churches at Saude and Jericho. The time during which Rev. Otto served as synod president was rocky. At one time, the ELS was in fellowship with the LCMS. However, during this time there was conflict which led to an eventual split between the synods around 1960. Betsy remembers wondering why "Christians were fighting." During a service at her grandparents' LCMS church, Betsy tried to share a hymnal with her father. However, he instead crossed his arms, and refused to participate in the service. Betsy remembers being somewhat shocked that her father refused to go along with the service.

On a lighter note, Bethany Lutheran College was a very different place fifty years ago. While she was growing up, Betsy recalls that Bethany was a "big, magical place." She remembers running down the steps that descend the hill at Old Main. Later on when she attended Bethany for both high school and college, there was only "one building, and then they built the gym and that was exciting." Each dorm also only had one telephone. During her time at Bethany, she did not live in the dorms as her family lived just a block away. She did not enjoy living off campus because she felt separated from everything. Therefore, she spent as much time as possible on campus to feel more connected. When Betsy attended Bethany, evening chapel services were held every night, and she enjoyed these very much. Reflecting on how much





Bethany has changed over the years, Betsy says that there are certainly more buildings as well as more diverse students. Back in the days of Bethany High School, the majority of the student body were pastors' and professors' children and occasionally students who "needed reforming."

During her six years at Bethany High School, and College, she describes singing in the school choir as one of the best experiences of her life. In Professor Dennis Marzolf's book, *With Hearts and Lips Forever We Shall in God Rejoice*, Betsy wrote ". . . for me the end of the day was wonderful. No matter what hurts, failures or embarrassments had gone before, when it came time for choir practice all that was forgotten. It was a time of worship, of singing praise to God, pouring my heart out to Him, and then being able to rest in peace at night." Betsy's years in the choir were significant to her life in more ways than one. The person who sang behind her in the choir was a man named Ross Hermanson. Two weeks after Betsy graduated from Bethany, she and Ross were married at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, on June 19, 1966. Together they raised five children, one daughter and four sons, who are now grown and dispersed throughout the country and have given her four grandsons. Her son, Karl, is a Lutheran pastor in Oregon, Wisconsin, and her son, Erik, a band teacher, is the jazz band director at Bethany.

When Betsy first lived in Mankato, Mankato was described as the "big town" in the area. She recalls that people walked everywhere they went, and that downtown was the big shopping destination. Also, Bethany was almost "unknown" to the rest of Mankato. Today she describes Mankato as a place that is bigger, more diverse, and the regional shopping hub.

In 1918, at the reorganization of the Norwegian Synod, one of the pastors present was Lauritz Seman Guttebo. When Rev. Guttebo was serving in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, he had an assistant pastor named Milton Otto, Betsy's father. An open house was held on August 9, 1940 to welcome Betsy's father to Concordia Lutheran in Eau Claire. It was at this open house that Rev. Otto saw "an angel singing in the choir." This angel would become his wife two



Rev. Milton Otto

years later on August 9, 1942. Betsy recalls that her mother's parents, who were members of the Eau Claire congregation, thought very highly of Rev. Guttebo. As a result, Betsy now has in her possession a music stand that once belonged to Rev. Guttebo, and was given to them.

Those active in the ELS Historical Society know that Betsy is also active. Betsy became involved in the society through a friend of her son's who was looking for people to serve on the board. She accepted, as she says she has always been a "history lover." Since the 2000s, she has held the position of secretary in the society. She describes the society as "constantly improving." They also are trying to interest more people into becoming involved. Betsy also believes that preserving the history of the ELS is a "no brainer." She feels that we have to understand where we came from, to know where we are now, to know where we are going. The ELS Historical Society is fortunate to have someone such as Betsy, who understands the importance of preserving history.

On a final note, Betsy had very nice things to say about fellow members of the ELS Historical Society. When she lived in Iowa, Paul Madson was her teacher for grades one through three. Due to this, she feels fortunate to be able to work with him in the society. She also enjoys the vast knowledge stored in Mark Harstad's mind. As Betsy herself oversees a museum, the Depot Museum in Wells, Minnesota, she greatly enjoys working with Becky DeGarmeaux, program director of the Ottesen Museum, because they are both "museum people." Finally, on the topic of Dr. Ryan MacPherson, a history professor at Bethany, she also had gracious words. She says he reminds her of her father, and that he is "kind, humble, loving, and very knowledgeable." ■

## Paul G. Madson

Interviewed by BLC student Sam Stier  
Mankato, MN

Date of Interview: Spring 2012



The son and brother of pastors, Pastor Paul G. Madson (born November 3, 1927) was not unlike his family. Madson himself stated that “it was the Christian home that set the foundation for my life.” From his faith to his chores, he learned much of what he would need to know from the small farm outside of Princeton, Minnesota where his family kept cows, chickens, pigs, and planted a small field of corn. This also was the place he learned how to drive at the tender age of eleven. This was because his father was busy working with his congregations and – being that Madson was wearing braces at that time – he needed to be able to drive into town in order to go to the dentist.

When not making visits to the dentist, Madson spent much of his childhood learning the Evangelical Lutheran faith while doing chores

around the house and attending a one-room Christian day school at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. According to Madson, he was taught by one teacher and primarily by his father’s pastor assistants. He then attended Bethany for nine years as he received his high school, first two years of college, and seminary education all at the same place, graduating from the seminary in 1952.

After being ordained in 1952, his pastoral career began at Saude, Iowa near New Hampton, Iowa where he for three years assisted Pastor Milton Otto in a two-church parish, and taught the Saude Christian Day School. He taught twenty-six students at



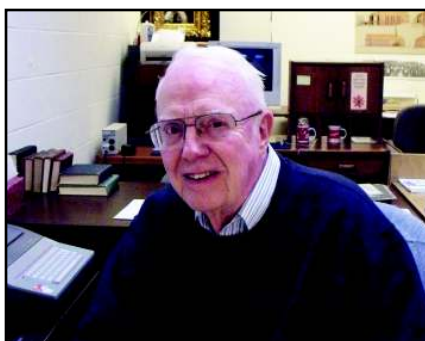
Northwestern College graduate,  
Watertown, WI, 1949

eight different grade levels and learned how to teach which was good experience for his future pastorate. From there he accepted a Call as pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington. As Madson recalled, this parish was the first one he served as full-time pastor and the people were quite patient and understanding toward their new young pastor. He served in several different places, however, with his longest stay being in Boston, Massachusetts, where he served for fourteen years. Madson served the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) for 48 years as a pastor and continues to serve today as the Synod Archivist.

When asked what he appreciated most about being a pastor, Madson replied, “The realization that it is the Lord’s work that accomplishes anything good.” He said there were many gracious people who were inviting, welcoming, and very supportive that made his time spent at every congregation a very positive experience. While in Boston, for example, Madson was given free admission to Red Sox games and became a fan of Fenway Stadium and the Hall of Famer, Carl Yastrzemski.

Madson remains very humble about his service as he remembered “how understanding and gracious the congregations were toward their pastor,” but he also noted how the location of the Boston church was “not in the best interest of the congregation.” This was because the Boston church was located very near to Harvard and was surrounded by a strong Roman Catholic community. For this reason, his congregation took “a leap of faith” and moved from the Cambridge area of Boston to the suburb of Burlington (near Lexington and Concord).

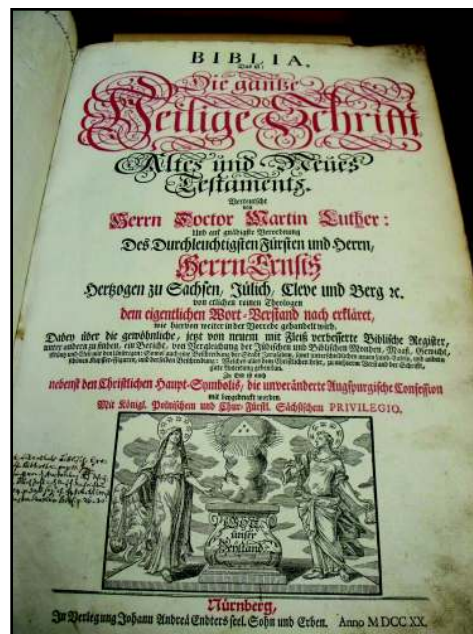
Since his pastoral career ended in 2000, Madson has done a variety of work with the ELS



Historical Society, including his active duty as the Synod Archivist. As the Synod Archivist, Madson continues to preserve, research, and work with a variety of materials that relate to the Synod’s history. He said that “sometimes the work – like recording various things – can be tedious, but it is very interesting to

search and discover different materials in the archives.” In his opinion, two of the most prized possessions in the synod archives are that of a Das Weimrische Bibelwerk (Weimar Bible from Germany; a translation into German by Dr. Martin Luther) and an original copy of a newspaper from the day after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. The newspaper is rather recent

when compared to the Weimar Bible, however. The beautifully-illustrated Weimar Bible was



reprinted numerous times until 1768. The archive’s copy was printed in 1720. The Weimar Bible was used as a study bible of Lutheran Orthodoxy. The synod archives also include many Norwegian and German works, with the majority being English works. These English works include the Synod Reports which have been compiled since the formation of the ELS in 1918 and also copies of the Lutheran Sentinel, some of which were edited by, who else?, Paul Madson!

Madson also had the opportunity to work with Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson, Peter M. Anthony, and some student interns on the book, *Telling the Next Generation*. He said that most of his work on the project was in the areas of compiling information (from the archives) and proof-reading, but his most fond memory of the project was “the fact that you are going back in the essays of other former pastors and teachers and refreshing your memory on what they had to say. It’s always good to refresh one’s memory on history.”

The ELS has been blessed by Paul Madson, and the Lord continues to bless him with the ability to serve in the church. This is an example of what it means to follow a vocation and to serve the Lord through all the channels in one’s life. ■

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