



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 1

Also in this issue:

- **Mark O. Harstad: Obituary, Words on behalf of the Synod, and Memoriam**
- **Marguerite Ylvisaker: Obituary and Funeral Sermon**
- **Let's Move! ... (in 1963) the ELS deliberates a mission opportunity in Hong Kong** by Betsy Hermanson

Announcing:

A SYMPOSIUM ON THE LITURGY AND AGENDA OF THE 1913 LUTHERAN HYMNARY

at the Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Historical Society Annual Meeting
TO BE HELD

6 pm, Sunday, June 21, 2015
Bethany Lutheran College
Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center
Anna John Silber Recital Hall

by Rev. Peter Faugstad

I suppose it was sometime in junior high or high school that my friends and I stopped talking about our favorite cartoons. That was kid stuff, and we were not kids anymore. But I would enjoy cartoons again with no stigma and no shame.

Cartoons made a comeback not long after our first child was born. Since then, Kristin and I have introduced our children to cartoons from our past along with cartoons from today. We wouldn't have guessed that one of the most

popular themes for cartoon blockbusters these days would be Scandinavian culture. *How to Train Your Dragon* was released in 2010 about a Norwegian teen and his pet dragon Toothless

(with a sequel in 2014). *Frozen*

came along in 2013, and as much as we might like to "let it go," Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, and Olaf can still be found on products wherever we look.

It would be wonderful if this renewed interest in things Scandinavian would translate to a renewed interest in the rich tradition of Christianity in those lands, but this does not seem to be happening. In Iceland, Norway's cousin to the west, plans are being made to build a temple to Thor, Odin, and Frigg. A return to paganism is happening across the Nordic lands. In Norway in particular, though 80-85% of its citizens consider themselves Christian (77% Lutheran), only 5% actually attend church regularly.

Much has changed since a century or two ago when Norway's missionaries were traveling around the world and its citizens were emigrating to new lands. Norwegian Lutherans hailing from the State Church in that era brought with



All generations enjoy visiting the snack table at the annual meeting. Last year Peggy Harstad and Carol Petersen helped serve.

them a strong liturgical, hymnic, and devotional tradition. This helped shape Lutheran worship and piety for future generations of Norwegian-Americans and influenced Christians of other nationalities as well.

This year's Historical Society meeting will examine this rich tradition from the formation of a distinct Lutheran liturgy for Scandinavians to the translation of that tradition into the English language. We hope you can join us for **A Symposium on the History of the Development of Our Liturgy and Agenda Leading up to the 1913 Lutheran Hymnary**. Presentations will include:

- Roots of the Liturgy in the Church of Denmark and Norway – Prof. Erling T. Teigen
- Traditions and Practices brought to America – Andrew Soule
- Development of the 1913 Hymnary – Rev. Peter Faugstad

We hope to see you in the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center at 6:00 pm on June 21!•

Ottesen Museum Update

by Becky DeGarmeaux

Aside from the Bible itself, hymnbooks probably have more influence on the life of the church than any other book. This year's Historical Society meeting program focuses on the hymnbooks which were a part of the worship life of Norwegian Americans before the 1913 Lutheran Hymnary was produced.



The Ottesen Museum will have a special display of many of these hymnbooks in time for the annual

meeting and Synod Convention. Please feel free to stop in at the Museum during the Convention on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday from 1:30 to 4:30 pm, or contact Museum Director Rebecca DeGarmeaux to visit the Museum during other times.

The Museum will also have a small display in the “street” in the Bethany Sports and Fitness Center during the Convention. This display will highlight some of the most recent donations to the Museum collection. Also on display will be a couple of “mystery” artifacts. A few donations in the past couple of years have questions attached to them. We'd love your help in identifying certain aspects of these artifacts. Stop by the display during the Convention to find out more.

Of course, you are welcome to visit the Ottesen Museum the rest of the year as well. The Museum's regular hours are Tuesday through Thursday from 1:30 - 4:30 or contact the Museum at museum@blc.edu to set an appointment to visit the Museum at other times.▪

No Pain, No Gain

The Blessings of Trials

by Herman Harstad

Norwegian Bishop Nils Jakob Laache wrote devotions for each day of the year in his *Book of Family Prayer* published in 1883. My mother grew up hearing those daily devotions read in Norwegian by the patriarch of the family at their Iowa farm. The English edition, translated by Mark DeGarmeaux, was published by the Lutheran Synod Book Company in 2000.

The scripture reading for Lesson 72 was taken from James 1:2-12. James begins with this provocative assertion, “My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that testing your faith produces patience.” James and Laache don't fit the mold of many best-selling inspirational books today that tell readers they can have health, wealth, and a continuous spiritual high. Jesus put things into perspective when he said, “In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Laache writes, “Troubles always come where Jesus is Lord in heart and home. ... Only patience produces perfect works. The Lord gives and takes away. He leads into the fire and out of it. ... He has promised wisdom: knowledge of His works and ways, so we can rejoice and give thanks for everything, and He has promised the crown of life hereafter. Blessed are those who have Him alone as God. He helps us come to that by our sufferings.”

Troubles are constant reminders that we are now in the kingdom of grace and are looking forward to the day when we will enter the kingdom of glory.▪

Obituary

Mark Oliver Harstad, age 66, of Mankato, died Saturday, January 17, 2015, at his home.

Funeral Service will be 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 20, 2015, at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, with Rev. John Petersen officiating. Visitation will be 3-5 p.m. on Tuesday at the church. Memorials may be directed to scholarship funds of Bethany Lutheran College. Mankato Mortuary handled the arrangements.

Mark was born September 15, 1948, in Princeton. He was the youngest of ten children born to the Rev. Adolph M. & Martha K. (Tjernagel) Harstad. He received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism

at the hands of his father at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, rural Princeton. In 1953, the family relocated to Watertown, WI, where his father served as chaplain at Bethesda Lutheran Home, an institution for the mentally and physically disabled. Growing up next door to the residents of Bethesda Home was a very important aspect of his youth. The home environment cultivated by his parents led to the development of a lively interest in music, gardening, an appreciation of nature, and history. He attended Lutheran elementary school and received confirmation instruction in Watertown. He also graduated from Northwestern Preparatory School & Northwestern College there. He remained grateful throughout life for the patient and thorough instruction he received from many faithful educators throughout the elementary, secondary, and college years. Education in the classical tradition led to a life-long interest in the study of languages and History. Music and athletics were also important aspects of his school years.

Mark attended Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato from 1970-1973. He was privileged to study under faithful teachers of Confessional Lutheranism. He served his vicarage at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Madison, WI. In 1974, he graduated from Seminary, earned the MA degree in Hebrew & Semitic Studies from the University of Wisconsin, was ordained and installed as assistant pastor at Holy Cross, and married Peggy J. Sorenson, daughter of Harold and Thelma Sorenson of rural East Grand Forks. After two additional years of graduate study at



the University of Wisconsin he accepted a call in 1976 to serve as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Brewster (Cape Cod), MA, and served there until 1979. In 1980, he joined the faculty of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and taught courses in Old Testament and Church History until 1986. Bethany Lutheran College then called him to teach Religion, History, and Hebrew at the college level, a position which he retained until Lymphoblastic Leukemia forced his retirement in 2014.

In addition to his academic duties at the college he served in various capacities in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, his home congregation, and community. He was privileged to make six trips to Latvia after the breakup of the Soviet Union to help bring the message of Confessional Lutheranism to an area of the world which had attempted to exclude Christianity for decades. In recent years the work of the ELS Historical Society occupied much of his time and attention. In the Mankato community he became active in the Mankato Suzuki School of Music, the Youth Baseball Association, and directed the Boys' Choir of Mt. Olive Lutheran School for many years.

Mark is survived by his wife, Peggy of Mankato; four children, Sarah (Christopher) Dale, a Registered Nurse of Port St. Lucie, FL, Laura (Neal) Bland, a Physician's Assistant of Broomfield, CO, Nathan Harstad, employed with American Crystal Sugar Co. of Crookston, and Peter Harstad, employed with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad of Grand Forks, ND; three grandchildren (with another on the way), Alex and Grace Dale, and Olivia Bland; siblings, Margaret (Frederick) Matzke, Peter (Carolyn) Harstad, Grace Harstad, Elizabeth Schmidt, John Harstad, Herman (Cheryl) Harstad, and Adolph (Helen) Harstad; also many nieces, nephews, other family and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters, Mary Moldstad and Lydia Wiggs.

(Interment was at Woodland Hills, Mankato, MN.)

Words spoken on behalf of the Synod by Rev. Glenn Obenberger at the funeral of Prof. Mark Harstad

Dear Peggy, children, grandchildren, siblings, other family members, brothers and sisters of Mt. Olive and community members of Bethany Lutheran College, how our hearts ache with you for your grievous loss this Sabbath past.

Let the devil be damned for all the misery and grief he introduced to our race with his opening question: "Did God really say ...?" Our synod now mourns

the passing of one of the Church's premier teachers and truly humble churchmen. Mark was bold in his teaching of "Thus saith the Lord ..." and meekly bore up under the various crosses he was placed under during his time of service to Christ's Church. God used him as an example for all of us.

When our Lord called Prof. Harstad to his position at the seminary, I was skeptical. I did not know him at all, but wondered who this upstart might be that was coming to fill the shoes of our beloved Hebrew Prof., Rudy Honsey.

It did not take long for the student body to conclude that the Lord of the Church had provided an exceptional teacher. We had many faithful and dedicated teachers as sons of the prophets. However, none were more prepared for their classes than Prof. Harstad. While he could lead us to examine the veins of every leaf whether in exegesis or church history, he had a way in all his presentations to lead us to see the entire forest of the subject at hand.

Prof. Harstad encouraged reading primary sources like the ancient church fathers and especially Dr. Luther. He repeatedly highlighted the latter's distinction of Christ's and the Spirit's work for us under the clarifying categories of Salvation Won and Salvation Distributed. He also taught us second year homiletics and followed to the letter what we had received from Prof. Otto in our first year homiletics.

One of the more unique experiences we had in his classroom was the day we read aloud a dialogue between St. Anselm and Boso the monk. Professor and students alike ended up laughing uncontrollably so that tears were streaming down our reddened cheeks struggling to catch our breath for at least 15 minutes. Dry, boring lectures were not his style.

Our synod has been blessed for decades as Mark was used by our Lord to prepare future pastors, laymen and women in the Church. In addition, he quietly, often behind the scenes, used his talents and interests to record and preserve the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod by serving various committees observing significant anniversaries and leading our historical society to acknowledge with gratefulness the evangelical heritage we all so truly cherish. We thank our Lord for these many contributions in which Mark gladly served our synod.

It is through just such educators that the lies and deceptions of Satan are challenged and opposed within the Church. The study of the truths as revealed by our Lord were more than an academic exercise for Mark. He personally believed and trusted them and was set free by them just as Jesus had promised. When circumstances in life took unexpected and disappointing turns for Mark, by the grace of God he did not wallow in self-pity but served the Lord wherever He placed him.

Though Satan and our sinful natures vex us Christians to labor and to be heavy laden under the temptations to self-righteousness, Mark, again by God's grace, clung to Jesus who promised to give him Sabbath forevermore. Jesus was and is his Sabbath. So while your brothers and sisters in the Evangelical

Lutheran Synod grieve and mourn with you over the loss of this good and faithful servant, God is to be praised for keeping His promise to Mark – he is now blessed having died in the Lord and now enjoys Sabbath-rest from all his labor forevermore. For Jesus' sake, his many accomplishments in his vocations still bless his family and church.

Blessed be his memory for Jesus' sake, indeed!

In Memoriam: Mark Harstad

by Erling T. Teigen

Prof. Mark Harstad used to tell the students in his religion and history classes at Bethany College: "There are two kinds of people in the world: those who are interested in history and those who will be." Mark always did his best to move those in the "would be" class into the "those that are" class.

At Bethany College, Mark taught Hebrew, religion, and history. All of those are steeped in history, and no approach to the sacred writings could escape their historical dimensions. Harstad was much at home in all of them, from Hebrew and the Old Testament to world history, and in his mind, the latter could certainly not ignore the previous two.

Mark's heritage, both the Harstad and Tjernagel lines of it, were people who somehow had come to revel in history, even enhancing it with a tall tale or two. The heritage was rooted in a farming community in frontier Iowa, producing some colorful characters who begged historical investigations. His maternal grandfather, an Iowa farmer, son of a Norwegian immigrant, penned, at the instigation of one of his sons, *The Follingo Dog Book*, not so much about dogs as about pioneering farm life in Iowa. And on the paternal side of the family there was an immigrant grandfather, Bjug Harstad, who played a prominent role in the Norwegian Synod and its mission to gather and minister



Mark posed with a portrait of his grandfather, Bjug Harstad, at a family reunion in Parkland, Washington, Aug. 9, 1981.

to Norwegian Lutheran immigrants in North Dakota. This Bjug, owner of such a wonderful name, became a district president in the old Norwegian Synod and founded an academy in Portland, North Dakota. Then he moved to the northwestern state of Washington to minister to the Norwegians there and founded a college for them. No wonder that later on he penned a little booklet entitled *Pioneer Days and other events briefly sketched for the 75th Anniversary of the Synod for the Norwegian Evang. Lutheran Church of America* (June 28, 1928). That bigger than life Norwegian pastor, in an effort to raise funds for Pacific Lutheran College, went on a trek to the Yukon gold fields, enduring more misery than one might be expected to bear, but didn't find much in the way of gold. He did leave a tradition for Mark's generation and the next younger one to try to emulate. That grandfather also went on to be a leader of a small band of Norwegian pastors and congregations who could not continue with their church body in a merger in 1918, and became the first president of the fledgling "little Norwegian Synod." (His sermon at the founding convention of that church was "Continuing in the Old Paths.")

All of that provided plenty of fuel for the one, two generations later, who had long since gone beyond the class of those who *would* be interested in history.

It was in pursuit of emulating grandfather Harstad's Yukon adventure, that Mark had his last adventure with history, a demanding hike (See "In Bjug's Footsteps Over the Chilkoot Trail," by Mark in *Oak Leaves*, February 2015), which was followed by months of struggle with cancer, and ended when he went on to join his fathers and the many others from the past who had been a part of his historical consciousness. And so the pinnacle of history for this history-conscious brother was to receive the fulfillment of the faith and hope that had been his goal all along.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society is indebted to Mark for his service. Mark



was blessed with an ability to mimic and to capture the essence of the Norwegian story-telling genes he inherited, and those gifts got joined to his love of history—largely in the service of our synod and historical society. He became a member of the society's Board of Directors, and was its chairman for several years. In that capacity, Mark made several significant contributions.

The 2004 annual meeting was dedicated to story telling. One of the four story-telling episodes featured Mark dressed in bib overalls, spinning the yarns told in the *Follinglo Dog Book*. Both practical and entertaining, the story-telling program demonstrated the value of that form of telling history. But it also showed Mark's ability to capture the speech of the Norwegian settlers who gradually made themselves comfortable with the language of their new land.

Along the lines of story-telling, Mark narrated a documentary on Iowa pioneer farm life. With a script by brother Peter and produced by son Nathan, the video brought together the many strands of the story about the Tjernagel pioneer called *Store Per* (big Pete). The stories about him were retold, and the realities of pioneer farm life on the Iowa prairies were relived, not sparing their many griefs and disappointments, but also capturing their firm confidence in the Christian gospel that came with them.

As chairman of the historical society, Mark presided over and played a role in a play presented at the 2013 meeting of the historical society. Written and directed by seminarian Michael Lillenthal, *The Oak Trees Still Stand* depicted the court case to settle a property dispute involving one of the found-



Mark Harstad welcomes guests at ELSHS Annual Meeting, June 18, 2011. Marguerite Ylvisaker is on the right.

ing churches of the reorganized Norwegian Synod. Alongside mostly young collegians playing the roles, Mark took the part of the elderly Pastor Ulrik Koren, while it was left to another to play the role of Mark's grandfather, Bjug Harstad. That was followed by a readers theater presented at the 2014 society meeting, in which Mark served as the narrator, and others read selections from J. A. Ottesen, C. F. W. Walther, Elizabeth Koren, and Linka Preus.

Mark also guided the ELS Historical Society into publishing ventures. In 2011, the historical society, under Mark's leadership, the Ottesen Museum, and Jack Pine Press joined together to publish Peter T. Harstad's *Store Per*. In cooperation with the Lutheran Synod Book Company (Bethany Book Store), the society also began publication of Mark DeGarmeaux's translation of U. V. Koren's collected works, with the first volume appearing in 2014.

Then there was the musical heritage which had been a part of the home life at Follinglo farm in Iowa. Most of the siblings of grandfather Peter Tjernagel mastered one or another musical instrument and they played the music of their Norwegian heritage and more. Starting with Mark's own children, the small string orchestra appeared from time to time in the Mt. Olive worship services. As a number of young people at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church began picking up instruments, Mark began to gather them together to play hymns and other music in the church services. The young players, mostly on stringed instruments, developed, and at the last historical society meetings provided music in the background for the history events. It was fitting that this talented group of young musicians should play at the funeral service.

One might expect the teacher of history, or the leader of a historical society, to be focused on printed history. But Mark put that expectation to rest with his efforts to explore the visual telling of the past, and we owe him our gratitude for his keen abilities to make our history live and to help the next generations of our church make this history their own.

In keeping with Mark Harstad's dedication to history, we have to say that one could not know Mark without knowing this background that fueled him. But at the heart of it was the history and theology of his Lord, who came to us all in *our* history to be our redeemer, to win our salvation, to distribute it to us through his word and sacraments, and we receive it with simple, childlike faith.

Blessed be his memory.▪

Obituary



Marguerite Helen Ylvisaker was born on March 2, 1936 in Winnebago County, IA, the daughter of Rev. Paul and Bergitte (Broin) Ylvisaker. On March 29, 1936, she was given the new birth of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism, administered by Rev. Ylvisaker at the Thompson Synod Lutheran Church in Thompson Iowa. Marguerite was confirmed in the Lutheran faith on June 4, 1950 at the Hartland Synod Lutheran Church in Hartland, MN with Rev. Ylvisaker officiating.

Marguerite attended elementary school in Hartland and graduated from Bethany High School in Mankato. She earned an Associate of Arts Degree from Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, and a PhD from Boston University. She is the author of the African Research Studies volume "Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade, and Politics." (African Studies Center, Boston University, 1979).

Marguerite was a long-time employee at Queens/ Scotsman in Minnesota and Illinois. She was a faithful member of Manchester Evangelical Lutheran Church for many years. She also served as a board member for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society for many years.

Marguerite died on Sunday, March 15, 2015 at St. John's Lutheran Community.

Survivors include her brother and sister-in-law Luther (Margaret) Ylvisaker; nieces and nephews Scott Ylvisaker, Mark Ylvisaker, Kristine (Pat) Malone and their children, and Karol (Kevin) Gluth.

Marguerite was preceded in death by her parents and her brother Paul.

Blessed be her memory!

(FROM *Oak Leaves* Vol. 11, Issue 2, August 2007)
Marguerite Ylvisaker is a charter member of the ELS Historical Society and has served on the board since 1999. She has served as secretary for the past several years. She is a very dedicated worker and has been a very helpful member in promoting the Society and its work. Thank you, Marguerite, for your faithful service.

Funeral Sermon for Marguerite Ylvisaker given by Rev. Shawn Stafford

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The word of God for our comfort and meditation this afternoon is recorded in Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, beginning at verse 14:

2 Timothy 3:14-15 (ESV). 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Dear fellow redeemed, family members and friends of Marguerite Ylvisaker:

Marguerite had a great love for the written word. Throughout her life, she was an avid reader. She spent many years in academia, doing research. She was a member of the book club at the Albert Lea library. She volunteered at a local school to help others learn to read. She often spoke of books she was reading and passed along good books to others.

There was one book of which she remained a student throughout her life. That was the Bible. She knew that the Bible, the Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Paul wrote to Timothy, "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings" (v. 15). The word "childhood" could be translated, "from infancy." Marguerite was "acquainted with the sacred writings" (v. 15) "from infancy." As an infant, she was baptized by her father, Rev. Paul Ylvisaker. At home and at church, her parents taught her the Scriptures.

Our text says, "continue in what you have learned" (v. 14). Marguerite continued her education in "the one thing needful," the Gospel of Jesus Christ, at Bethany Lutheran High School and College. Here at Manchester, she was an active member of the Bethesda Society, which engaged in in-depth study of books of the Bible, some which would take years to get through.

What benefit is there to "continuing" in the study of Scripture? Our text tells us of the power and the purpose of the Holy Scriptures. They "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15). There have been many useful and informative books throughout history. These books impart wisdom or make us well-informed on a certain topic. But only one book not only conveys information but has this promise of God attached to it, that it is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15).

The content of the Scriptures is Christ. From beginning to end, the Bible tells us of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures, "these are they which testify of Me" (Jn 5:39). The Bible not only tells us about the life of Jesus Christ but also of the purpose for which He came into the world, to win salvation for us.

What is it that we needed to be saved from? We needed to be saved from sin, death, and the devil. Ever since the fall into sin, recorded in Genesis 3, all people have been born with a sinful nature. This sinful nature produces sinful thoughts, words, and actions. The result of this sin is "death," "the wages of sin" (Ro 6:23). Death means "separation": physical death- the separation of the soul from the body at the end of our natural life, spiritual death- the separation of the soul from God due to unbelief and sin, and eternal death- the separation of body and soul from God forever in hell.

Jesus came to save us from sin, death, and the devil and reconcile us to God. In His temptation in the wilderness, He fought off Satan's temptations and defeated them with the Word of God, "it is written." Jesus died on the cross as our substitute, dying the death we deserved, to take away our deserved punishment of eternal death. On the third day, Jesus rose again triumphant over death. Because He lives, all who believe in Him will have eternal life. When the soul of a believer leaves their body it goes to be with the Savior in heaven. As Jesus told the penitent thief on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). Even as today we mourn the loss of our sister, our aunt, our friend Marguerite, we rejoice that she is with the Lord in Paradise. And on the Last Day, Jesus will raise the bodies of all the dead, and will take all believers, body and soul, to live eternally with Him forever in heaven. Through faith in Christ, we can look forward to a joyful reunion with Marguerite and with all believers in our heavenly home.

In order to make known to us the way of salvation in Christ, God gave us His Holy Word. The Bible was written to "to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15). It is through the Word that the Holy Spirit creates faith and strengthens our

faith in Christ. As John wrote at the end of His Gospel, “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (Jn 20:31).

All this Marguerite not only “learned” in an academic, head-knowledge sense but also “firmly believed” (v. 14). The message of Holy Scripture upheld her during times of illness, so that she was calm and confident in the face of trial. She clung to the message of Scripture as it was read and preached to her and as she received Christ’s body and blood “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” “Through faith in Christ” (v. 15), she was prepared for death, knowing that Christ had conquered death. She could die unfearing, knowing that death for the believer is the gateway to everlasting life. Her hope was not in something vague and uncertain but in the sure and certain promises of Scripture, which are all “yes” and “amen” in Christ.” Now God’s promises have been fulfilled for her as she “sees” God “face to face” and “knows even as [she] is known” (1 Cor. 13:2).

How can we have this same confidence in the face of trial and as we face death? “Search the Scriptures,” Jesus says (Jn 5:39). “Continue” in them, our text exhorts (v. 14). In John 6:(68), Peter says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Through faith in Jesus’ words, eternal life becomes ours. Gather in God’s house, where His Word is preached and Sacraments are administered. For it is through these means, that we are made “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria*

Let’s move!

Pastor Stuart A. Dorr’s heartfelt plea as the ELS deliberates a mission opportunity in Hong Kong

by Betsy (Otto) Hermanson

On Wednesday, February 27, 1963, Pastor Stuart A. Dorr, ELS Field Secretary, and Milton H. Otto, Professor at Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary, boarded a Lockheed turbo-prop Electra at the brand new Charles A. Lindberg Terminal building of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airport. They were headed for Los Angeles, the first leg of a mission journey to Hong Kong.

It was a series of coincidences that brought the two men to this journey at this time. The Norwegian Synod had made the decision to end a mission begun in Cornwall, England

after World War II. The synod had no foreign mission at this time. Then, early in 1961, a man named Peter Chang came to Bethany and wanted to begin study at the seminary.

Gertrude Simon, a deaconess in the Missouri Synod Hong Kong Conference, had brought Chang into the Lutheran Church. He, along with Simon, separated from that conference in 1957 and began the Spirit of Grace Church by renting a third floor apartment in a large building in Kowloon. They had even started a rooftop school for children of the many refugees flooding the land. They called it the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission (CCLM). There were two congregations when Chang came to the U.S. seeking more study.¹ In his absence, another man took over the mission in Hong Kong.

When Chang arrived, Prof. Otto first tutored him privately and then Chang enrolled in the seminary. He was ordained at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church on May 30, 1962, with the Rev. Stuart Dorr preaching the sermon. Chang graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary two days later, on June 1st. He received and accepted the call to serve the two congregations he had begun in Hong Kong several years before.² As Chang returned to his mission work, ELS pastors assured him of their prayers but promised nothing.

The people of the ELS were mission-minded and interest was building in establishing another foreign mission. At the 1962 ELS Synod Convention it was resolved to garner support for this mission outside of the synod’s budget. In a letter to the Bethany Faculty Women’s Club, Rev. Chang thanked the women for their May, 1962 gift of \$10. That fall, he wrote a letter to Miss Mildred Larson thanking her for two \$10 checks, one from the Mt. Olive Women’s Society, and one from a collection in the Bethany Women’s Dormitory.³

In November of 1962, Pastor Dorr wrote all pastors of the ELS on behalf of the Mission Board. He recommended sending “a commission to Hong Kong for investigating the whole matter.” He reported that the Mission Board was proceeding “. . . carefully, even cautiously, for we wish to make no beginning which we cannot hope to complete.” Dorr then added, “But if you should ask our personal feelings, they’re like this: *Let’s move!*”⁴



Milton H. Otto (left) and Stuart A. Dorr (right)

Notes from the ELS Mission Board Meeting in December, 1962 said, “efforts on our part to keep in touch” with Pastor Chang, as well as “the opportunities afforded in Hong Kong for a foreign mission field ought not to be lost.”⁵

Two men were selected to go to Hong Kong: Field Secretary Dorr and Prof. Otto. They were perhaps the two who had worked most closely with Chang in America. The men left behind their wives, Jeanette Dorr and Marjorie Otto, and a total of twelve children. We are fortunate that they wrote letters home, so that besides their official reports, the preserved letters give us a glimpse into their daily lives on this mission trip.

Otto’s first of 21 letters and cards began “Dear Mom & MERPL,” which was an acronym for his children: Margaret, Elizabeth, Ruth, Paul and Lois. He had developed this shortcut when he was President of the Synod and often gone from home; it was easily done and gave recognition to everyone. He wrote that day from their first stop, Los Angeles, where both men stayed with relatives.

A letter penned by Dorr just says “Greetings,” as he was writing with carbons to a variety of people, including children Luther, Sonja, Carla, Rebecca, Susan, Mary and Carmen.

On Thursday evening the men left Los Angeles, and after a refueling stop in Anchorage, AK landed in Tokyo at shortly after 12 noon on Friday, LA time, but in Tokyo it was 5:30 a.m. Saturday. They had crossed the International Date Line in the air and lost a day. That long flight west was strange, as it was always night. Although they were fed regular meals, Otto said it was “dark for all of 18 hours.” And Dorr said, “it is an odd feeling, when you’re not used to it, to head into continuing darkness.”

A WELS missionary, the Rev. Seeger, met them in Tokyo and gave them a brief sightseeing tour. Otto’s impressions of his first time in a city of 10 million people included “crazy winding streets, traffic jams, crazier taxi drivers, houses built one on top of the other, outdoor markets, etc.” Dorr said the taxi drivers “use their brakes as a last resort only, and I do mean ‘last’.” The men attended Pastor Seeger’s Japanese services on Sunday morning, and attended English services for military personnel at the pastor’s home that afternoon.

On Monday there was more sightseeing in Tokyo, and at six in the evening they took off on another flight. At 10 p.m. Monday night, the team finally landed in Kowloon, Hong Kong. Dorr noted in a letter that they were “filled with gratitude for a safe flight; I know about the fine pilots our plane had, but I’m not forgetting the Pilot who is above them and me.”

Dorr also wrote the Seegers a thank you letter on behalf of both men, and sent along a Japanese 100-yen note that the two had not spent. They had decided the money should go to the Seeger children, for any treat they might like.

Peter Chang, Gertrude Simon and two others were there to meet the travelers. There were also two refugee girls in the

welcoming party. They held out welcome banners of red silk, with each man’s name sewn on in white lettering. (Otto’s banner is currently in the seminary archives.) After some much-needed sleep at the Chang home, Dorr and Otto began their official duties: thoroughly examining the work of Peter Chang and Miss Simon to see if the ELS should help in their mission endeavor.

The city of Kowloon was packed with 4 million people, most of them Chinese. More people came every day, refugees from the newly established People’s Republic of China. Thus, there was congestion and there were slums. Dorr said it was an attack on a man’s senses – noisy, dirty and smelly – “like trying to eat some of that ‘31 flavors’ chocolate ice cream while cleaning out the barn.”

Otto said the city was “not as clean as Tokyo,” and “overflowing with people.” The city was trying to build housing for the many refugees. The public tenement housing provided one small room, maybe 7 x 10 feet, which often housed an extended family. Much of the work was being done by hand, even heavy construction, and many of the workers were female. Otto reminded his children to behave for Mom while he was gone, and said “you’d be surprised at what children have to do over here – even five and six year olds are carrying babies on their backs or in their arms.”

On the rooftops of these tenements Chang had started two schools, teaching a total of 383 children in morning and afternoon shifts. On Tuesday, the men visited the Spirit of Love rooftop school, and had a short tour of the city. In the evening, they spent time with Peter Chang as he gave them some history on the CCLM.

On Wednesday the men were downtown much of the day. They both visited a tailor, and ordered a suit or two. They ate downtown with the Changs: “Chinese food in Chinese style; not bad at all,” Otto said. In the afternoon, they saw several of the Missouri Synod institutions, including the seminary, and met two LCMS men.

Miss Gertrude Simon escorted the visitors on

Thursday. They visited a school (un-named), and then had lunch at a mental hospital and supper at a Russian restaurant. In the evening they met with Chang and an engineer regarding school plans.⁶

Friday, March 8th Chang took them to Lutheran Bible Institute, Hong Kong Lutheran Seminary and Lok Yuk Seminary.⁷ They had lunch and supper with Chang; Otto called it “a real Chinese dinner.” There was a welcome party in the evening at Spirit of Love rooftop school.



“We are both well and intend to do our job to the best of our ability,” Otto said in a letter written Friday night. “One has to listen to a lot of chatter and put up with a lot of extraneous matters, but we are learning things.”

Saturday, the men visited Hong Kong Island and took pictures. There was another welcome party, this time at Spirit of Grace. “We had to make a few remarks, waiting for one of the young fellows to translate as we went along,” Otto said. He also commented on the interesting young people they met who were attending Lutheran Bible Institute, including the champion high jumper in Hong Kong. (This writer corresponded with this young man for 2-3 years after the mission trip.)

On Sunday, March 10, Pastor Dorr preached at Spirit of Grace in the morning (church was full with 60-70 people) and Spirit of Love (the rooftop school and church) in the evening. There was Communion at both services. Pastor Chang served as translator for Pastor Dorr. In between services they stopped in at an afternoon service for the blind. Otto said it was startling to see “at least fifty, maybe more attending,” most holding striped canes. After evening service, both men talked with Chang until 1 a.m.

The visitors had been staying in the Chang home, but on Monday switched to a hotel for their second week, which Otto said would “be more neutral and objective in our looking at things – also it will give us a little more freedom for our in-between hours and make our evenings our own entirely, so that we may begin to put down in writing what our observations and conclusions are.” In addition, they found that Mrs. Chang was “unwell, but nothing that a few months won’t cure.” One would guess that she was expecting a baby. They moved to the Golden Gate Hotel, but said it was not as nice as the place they had stayed in Tokyo.

On Monday they went to the courthouse to check some records. In the evening Pastor Chang was to take them to supper and then, Otto said, “we meet with his whole working force here, which could be the most important contact we’ll be making here. That means his evangelists, teachers and congregational heads.”

Tuesday they met with some Missouri Synod people, which was “necessary to clear up some things.” Otto added, “we have to begin to put on paper what we suggest be done here and to think about what to report when we get back home.”

They had appointments with a few other men on Wednesday and Thursday; one was from the Lutheran World Federation. Otto mentioned they hadn’t seen much of Chang during the second week, but that it was good to be on neutral ground, and the second week was “proving to be valuable” to them as they tried to sort out all their information, experiences and impressions to form a clear picture. The deadline for their Monday takeoff was fast approaching.

Thursday the travelers had dinner with another missionary and his wife, the Thoedes. They found that Mrs. Thoede knew the Lillegards “quite well.” This visit gave them “another slant on things, and [we] also had the opportunity to show that we as a Synod were not acting irresponsibly.”

Otto wrote, “It is clear to me that not much could have been accomplished by correspondence alone. There are so many angles to consider.”

It seems the men each made one phone call home, and Otto wrote, “the pastors in Iowa raised some money for just such a thing.” He thought there would be an extra \$12 charge on his next phone bill at home. On Friday and Saturday the two spent some time packing and repacking. They each shipped a package home early, “for about the cost of a 36-slide color film.”

Dorr and Otto found it difficult to buy souvenirs for their loved ones. They found two classes of shops: the first “highly elegant, which can be most expensive.” There was a second type where “one can get some awfully shoddy goods.” The men weighed the purchases of their souvenirs carefully, because there was both a dollar limit on goods brought through customs and a weight limit on their suitcases.



On Sunday, March 17, it was Otto’s turn to preach at both morning and evening services. Again, Pastor Chang served as the translator. The visitors went sightseeing that afternoon between services.

They took the ferry to Hong Kong Island and rode a cable car to the peak overlooking the bay and the city of Kowloon. Chang had taken them there a week earlier, but it had been too hazy and foggy to see very much.

Sunday night Otto wrote “there will be quite a gang to see us off tomorrow. Then it’s goodbye to a world and kind of country we will never see again.” On Monday they took off for the Philippines.

Rev. Strohschein and his wife, who was a Tjernagel from Story City, met the plane at the airport in Manila, along with Sig Lee’s sister and brother-in-law, Frank and Betty Anderson. These two families hosted the travelers overnight and gave them a tour of Manila. On Tuesday evening they left the Philippines, touched down in Guam for an hour, and then flew off to Honolulu. They gained a day as they landed in Hawaii, re-crossing the International Date Line. Otto said, “We won’t be much good tomorrow, which will be Tuesday all over again.” He wrote three letters at that time, two on

the flight, and one when they arrived in Honolulu. They are dated “Tuesday,” “still Tuesday” and “Tuesday again.”

Early Thursday morning, Dorr and Otto were back on the USA mainland, landing in Tacoma, Washington. The McMurdies and the Theistes met them at the airport. Otto mentioned he was to stay with the Theistes. They were glad to have a couple days to recover from jet lag since both were going to preach on Sunday the 24th. The next day, Monday, March 25, they would return to Minnesota.

The first report that summarized their visit to Hong Kong had been written back in Hong Kong on March 16, and sent off with the instructions that it not be opened until they returned. There is a copy of that report in the Synod’s archives. The report listed what the men had learned about the beginning and work of the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission (CCLM). They stated their views on Peter Chang and on all the work being done in Hong Kong.

“There is no question about the sincerity of the people involved or of the fact that the Gospel is being proclaimed,” their appraisal began. But they were concerned about the loose organization of the CCLM, both tied to and yet claiming to be separate from the Missouri Synod. This gave them no independent legal status, and thus an inability to hold property. The men were also concerned about CCLM’s incomplete accounting systems and called it “chaotic financial bookkeeping.” There were no definite figures for income, or for teachers’ salaries. The writers of the report emphasized that Chang was not using any money for personal gain, and that he and his family lived on a modest scale.

Other problems listed were women’s suffrage in the CCLM and in the congregations, and the “unionistic tendencies” of Chang in regard to the teachers called to work at the schools.

The men concluded, “As things now stand we do not believe it to be wise for the ELS to support the work in Hong Kong (CCLM) at this time.” The document is signed S.A. Dorr, and M.H. Otto, and dated March 16, 1963.⁸

Was that the end of it? Was the whole trip an exercise in futility? The answer to both questions is no.

At the ELS Mission Board meeting on April 23, 1963, following Field Secretary Dorr’s recommendation, the board resolved “to recommend to the Synod Convention in June that our synod supply a pastor to work in Hong Kong in the mission field with the Rev. Peter Chang.” It was further resolved “that this pastor take charge of the religion department of the proposed high school, conduct English services, other missionary services, and serve as advisor to Peter Chang.” The emphasis was clear that the support at this time be limited to the financial needs of this supplied pastor.⁹

The recommendation was to proceed, but then Peter Chang refused the offer. In a September 1963 letter, Otto says Chang would have accepted the synod’s help “if we [the ELS] would take over the whole business in Hong Kong, lock, stock and barrel.” That, including indebtedness,

would have been a total of over \$35,000. For the synod to buy the whole property “would be quite an undertaking” as its total budget at that time was only \$99,000.¹⁰

Otto explained in a later letter “we did not propose taking over the whole indebtedness – that would have made it an ELS mission, not a Chinese Church. We believe a native organization would be better for the mission; run by them and assisted by us.”¹¹

Chang was kind in his refusal and did not seem to want to burn bridges. In a letter to Dorr in May of 1963, he said, “We shall not forget your kind offer. We will open the door wide to wait and welcome your synod to take over the CCLM at any time.”¹²

And so the project that had begun with such enthusiasm and excitement ended with a disappointing thud. Pastor Peter Chang later left Hong Kong to work in business in San Francisco. Today the South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission Limited exists partly because of the work of Peter Chang. It consists of 820 souls, with three national pastors, two WELS missionaries and one WELS teacher.¹³

Pastor Stuart A. Dorr died of a heart attack in September of that same year, 1963. Nineteen years later, Prof. M.H. Otto died of emphysema. Two lifelong friends who served the Lord with all their hearts had answered the call to search for an opening for the ELS in the mission field. They may be gone, but their work is remembered.

Our God is good. Although this proposed mission work never came to fruition, God in His mercy has since opened many doors for the ELS Synod to begin other mission projects in many places, both in the United States and throughout the world. To God be the Glory!

Endnotes

1. S.A. Dorr and M.H. Otto, Report of Visitation to Hong Kong, March 16, 1963.
2. Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Synod Archives, M.H. Otto files.
3. Letters from M.H. Otto personal files.
4. C.A. Ferkenstad; *A Half-Century of Mission Involvement: ELS Missions Before 1968*
5. Ibid.
6. Stuart A. Dorr: *Report to the Board of Missions from the Office of Field Secretary*, a one-page document with list of activities for first week in Hong Kong.
7. Ibid.
8. Report of Visitation to Hong Kong
9. ELS, Synod Archives, M.H. Otto files
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. C.A. Ferkenstad; *A Half-Century of Mission Involvement*

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