



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 1

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## ELS Historical Society Program 2016 Preview

by Andrew Soule

Madison, Wisconsin. Austin, Texas. Lake Havasu City, Arizona. What do these cities have in common? At one time or another they were all places where the Evangelical Lutheran Synod had home missions. At this year’s annual presentation and meeting of the ELS Historical Society come hear about the history of various home mission efforts conducted by the ELS over the years to reach out to people with the Gospel right here in America. Some of these home missions were planted in the frigid-North, some in the desert-South. Some were started by experienced pastors, some by seminary graduates, some in cities, some in rural areas. Some have even blossomed into thriving, major congregations of our synod. In any case, these home missions—their pastors and congregation members—helped to make history. Our synod has a rich history of planting missions throughout this great country and the world. Our blessed Savior’s words ring true in every time and place, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). The people of the ELS have realized this truth wherever home missions have been planted. There has always been and always will be a need for the Gospel to be preached.

At this year’s presentation of the Historical Society come hear the Rev. Bernt Tweit speak about the early days of ELS home mission work in the Madison area. Many people don’t realize that some of our Synod’s major congregations, like Holy Cross, were at one time started as home missions. Come hear the Rev. Professor Michael Smith speak regarding his time as a home missionary in Bullhead City, Arizona, as well as his time on the ELS Board for Home Outreach. A third presentation will also be given on the history of the ELS’ home mission work in Leander, Texas. This presentation will feature reflections on what it’s like to be a part of the founding of a home mission. This will include stories and personal accounts, from congregation members’ perspectives.

The ELS has a rich history of home missions! Was there a home mission planted in your own backyard at one time? Who knows? Come and find out! ■



Planning at a recent ELSHS board meeting.  
(L to R, Andrew Soule, Peter Faugstad,  
Ted Gullixson, Paul Madson, Erling Teigen,  
Cheryl Harstad, Herman Harstad, Marge Lillo,  
Becky DeGarmeaux)

## Ottesen Museum Update

by Becky DeGarmeaux

Home Missions is the topic of the ELS Synod Convention and also the ELS Historical Society Annual Meeting this year. The Ottesen Museum is planning a special display to highlight the history of five congregations in the Synod that started as Mission congregations. The ELS has, from its beginnings in 1918, made the spreading of the Gospel by starting new congregations a high priority.



Holy Cross' first building in Madison, Wisconsin



Peace in Lakeland, Florida

The Museum plans to focus on the histories of the following congregations: Holy Cross in Madison, Wisconsin; Lakewood in Tacoma, Washington; Heritage in Apple Valley, Minnesota; Peace in Lakeland, Florida; and Divine Mercy in Hudson Oaks, Texas.

It's easy to forget that some of these congregations began as mission congregations. But these and many other congregations have been started from coast to coast and from the far north to the far southern stretches of the United States. Short histories, pictures, and other congregational memorabilia will be on display from the beginning of June until the end of May 2017.

The Ottesen Museum's regular hours are Tuesday through Thursday from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm. During Synod Convention the Museum will have special hours Tuesday through Thursday from 8:30 am to 11:30 am. Make plans to visit the Ottesen Museum to view this special exhibit and all of the regular exhibits.

The Museum will also have a display in the Bethany College Sports and Fitness Center during Synod Convention which will showcase some of its latest donations. Take some time to visit us there as well. ■

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## Upcoming Anniversaries

by Craig Ferkenstad



2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of the start of the Lutheran Reformation and 2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of the reorganization of the Evangelical

Lutheran Synod. Resources for these coming dual anniversaries are available on the synod's website <[els.org/anniversaries](http://els.org/anniversaries)> which includes the anniversary logo, an explanation of its symbolism, and other items.

The synod's previously published history books are available for purchase at the Bethany Lutheran College Bookstore. They also are available in electronic form with links for purchase on the synod's website (above):

*Grace for Grace* (25th anniversary of reorganization)

*Faith of Our Fathers* (100th anniversary of the organization of the Norwegian Synod)

*Let's Look at Our Synod* (50th anniversary of reorganization)

*Our Great Heritage* (50th anniversary of reorganization)

*A City Set on a Hill* (50th anniversary of reorganization)

*Built on the Rock* (75th anniversary of reorganization)

A newly written history of the synod, ***Proclaim His Wonders***, will be published in commemoration of the centennial of the synod's reorganization in 2017. ■



# Acorns from the **ELS** Archives

by Ted Gullixson

*(The following is from a Missouri Synod pamphlet entitled "A Few Words on Lodges.")*

## Lodges

A lodge is a SECRET society. No outsider may attend its official meetings or take part in its deliberations. No outsider may know anything about its resolutions and actions, unless they be resolutions and actions expressly designed for publication.

And it is an OATH-BOUND society. With an oath—and a very grave and solemn oath it often is—he that would join a lodge must bind himself never and under no circumstances to reveal any of the lodge's secrets. Most lodges also require candidates for membership to swear that they will at all times faithfully stand by their lodge, zealously further its designs, unconditionally obey its laws and resolutions, and in every way work for the advantage and well-being of their brethren, that is, of their brethren of the lodge.

A lodge is also a RELIGIOUS society. The religion of the lodge is a religion calculated to wound nobody's religious feelings, calculated not to hurt or offend anybody. The religion of the lodge is supposed to be the sum and substance of all religions...it is a universal, a world religion. The religion of the lodge, to state it as briefly as possible, is "the universal Fatherhood of God, the universal brotherhood of man, and salvation by doing right." In this religion, the lodge thinks, all men can agree, no matter what religious party they belong to or what religious views they hold.

Despite this fact, ...one may observe things which at first glance have an appearance of Christianity. During the meetings of the lodge a Bible may be seen on the altar, or table. The meetings are opened with the reading of some portion of the Bible. Bible verses decorate the

walls of the lodge's temple or hall. The ritual contains beautiful texts from the New Testament. However, the religion of the lodge is, and always will be, the aforesaid universal world religion. Why then does the lodge have all these things which bear such a resemblance to Christianity? It does that to pay Christianity a compliment, as it were, to honor it in a way.

What does the lodge aspire to? What does it seek to accomplish? To state this in a few words is no easy matter. For there are so many different lodges. And some lean more in one direction, and some more in another. Hence one must be careful not to say anything amiss. The principal end and highest aim the lodge has chosen is to make humanity happy. Four things are mentioned by the lodge as means whereby it would make humanity happy.

1. Emancipating enlightenment of humanity.—The lodge aims to emancipate humanity, to free humanity more and more from the bonds of ignorance and superstition, and thus gradually to lead it to the knowledge of the truth. In this manner the human race is to become more and more a society of intellectually free and enlightened people, who, in proportion as this enlightenment progresses, will ever become more and more proof against deception and servitude in whatever shape or form.
2. Ennoblement of humanity.—This emancipating enlightenment of the human understanding is to make men noble-minded and thus exert a truly ennobling influence on their ways and actions.
3. Activity of humanity in a cosmopolitan way.—The human race is to put to active use its ever-increasing enlightenment, emancipation, and ennoblement, by becoming ever better and more useful cosmopolites, or world citizens.
4. Universal brotherhood of man.—The whole of enlightened, emancipated, ennobled, and cosmopolitanized humanity is to become a society of brethren who will join hands in equal brotherly love and jointly seek and secure one another's happiness.

Only the most prominent lodges have such high aims. In some lodges sociability is the main object. In other cases former associations, patriotic, for example, have brought the members together.

It is a well-known fact, and generally acknowledged, that our Christian people and members of our churches may not belong to a lodge. God in His Word forbids Christians to belong to a lodge.

The religion of the lodge is the first and principal thing that bars you out of the lodge. First, the lodge speaks of the “universal Fatherhood of God” and says, “God is the Father of all men.”

That sounds well, doesn't it? It does, but it is wicked and ungodly nonsense. For they mean that God is like a good old father who is not particular about making his children keep his word and commandments, who hasn't the heart to get downright angry and punish anybody, who is good-natured, not over-strict, who overlooks his children's faults, lets his children do as they please, and remains their good old father all the same.

The Bible teaches something altogether different. The Bible teaches that God is a veritable sun of holiness, that God jealously watches over His commandments to see them obeyed or to avenge their transgression. The Bible teaches that God had His only-begotten, eternal Son become man and the substitute of all men and had Him bear and blot out and abolish the sin and the punishment and the curse and the death and the damnation of all men. The Bible teaches that through Christ's blood and death satisfaction has been rendered to God's holiness and God's Law, that God is thus reconciled with all men and all men are redeemed. The Bible teaches that Christ by His resurrection has acquired eternal righteousness for all men, and by His ascension has opened the gates of heaven unto all. The Bible teaches that God in the Word of Christ offers this salvation to all men, and by His Holy Spirit tenderly invites them to believe and accept it. And the Bible teaches that all who believe and accept the salvation which is in Christ have forgiveness

of their sins and are God's dear children and go to heaven, and that all who do not believe, who reject the salvation in Christ, abide under the wrath of God, are children of the devil, and go to hell. This is the Gospel taught in the Bible.

The lodge further speaks of a “universal brotherhood of man,” and says, “All men are brethren.” The lodge means that all men are naturally good at the bottom of their hearts, that justly speaking, all have equal merit and equal rights, and thus are brethren. True, they say, most men must be enlightened and educated before they can realize their actual worth and make proper use of their rights.

Does this agree with the Bible? Not at all. The Bible teaches that all men are naturally wicked and born in sin. The Bible teaches that a man must be regenerated, must be born again, through faith in Christ, and that only by such regeneration does he attain real worth in the sight of God. And the Bible teaches that at the end of the world a great and total and eternal separation will take place between the children of God and the children of the world.

Therefore you would be guilty of gross disobedience to God by belonging to a lodge. And Christ says, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” Matt. 10:32,33.

Thus there can be no doubt that Christians are not permitted to belong to a lodge brotherhood, but are commanded to keep entirely and clearly away from lodges.

By the grace of God, you have the one thing that is needful. You have that which can, of a truth, enlighten, emancipate, ennoble, educate, enable, unite into a brotherhood, the whole human race and lead it to temporal and eternal happiness. You have Christ and His Word. You have, for yourself and for others, the Water of Life. To take part in a lodge is to deny all this. ■

## ***“I Move We Take Over the School”***

*“The Synod Needs Just Such a School to  
Gather Itself Around”*

Erling T. Teigen, Professor emeritus  
Bethany Lutheran College Archives

The 1927 convention of the Norwegian Synod was held at the Lime Creek Lutheran Church, five miles north of Lake Mills, Iowa. Lime Creek was the site of the organizing convention of the synod in 1918. This one too was to be of momentous importance, but not all went smoothly. There may have been some disagreements and closely divided votes among the brethren before, but on the matter to be acted upon at this convention, there were two, rather strongly positioned sides.

A notice of the proposal by the Bethany Association to turn Bethany over to the synod had been sent in May to the editor of the *Luthersk Tidende* to be printed before the convention. Through an oversight, the editor failed to print it, so it was not certain that the convention could properly discuss and act on the matter. After hearing an explanation, the assembly permitted the proposal to come before the convention, and it was given to the floor committee for deliberation.

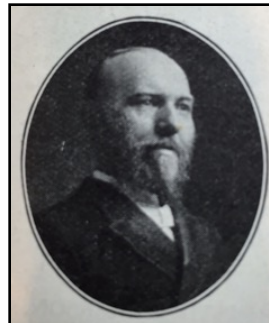
In the 1920s, much of the convention time was devoted to the discussion of doctrinal papers and not quite so much to business. The convention that year began on Tuesday, June 16, and ran until Monday, June 22. Aside from the doctrinal papers, the committee arrangement was similar to that followed by the ELS today — convention committees were appointed to review the president’s message and report and the reports of the permanent committees, including *Høiere skoler* (Higher Education). The committees, composed of pastors and lay-delegates, met to review the reports of the standing committee, and prepare appropriate resolutions to be discussed and decided by the assembly.

On Friday, the committee on the President’s report was taken up. The proposed resolution concerning the Bethany matter read:

- 1) This synod meeting should seriously consider whether or not the time has come that the Synod must establish its own institution of higher learning;
- 2) This synod meeting should carefully and seriously consider the offer which comes from the Bethany Lutheran College Association.

Recognizing the importance of this discussion, the secretary, L. P. Jensen, recorded more detail

than is usually found in the convention reports, which might be explained by the fact that he had strong feelings about the matter. Following is a translation of the secretary’s description of the proceedings from the *Beretning* (Synod Report):



L. P. Jensen

On Friday afternoon, the memorial, which had not been printed in the *Tidende* as required, was accepted for discussion and was read:

To the Norwegian Synod of the American Evang. Luth. Church:

The Bethany Lutheran College Association was organized a year ago for the purpose of acquiring and holding for the Norwegian Synod the Bethany College property at Mankato, Minnesota. During the past year the Association has secured a clear title to this property, which consists of about 16 acres of land in the geographical center of the city of Mankato, and buildings and equipment, all conservatively valued at \$400,000. The Association is agreed that the time has come to offer this school to the Norwegian Synod, and by formal resolution, adopted at its annual meeting, May 25, 1927, makes this offer now



through its officers. We respectfully ask that this convention consider this matter and take over the ownership and control of Bethany Lutheran College, in order that it may serve the Church as it could and should.

For the Bethany Lutheran College Association and its Board of Trustees,

S. C. Ylvisaker, President

N. A. Madson, Secretary



S. C. Ylvisaker



N. A. Madson

On Friday afternoon, the proposals of the Committee for the President's report, were taken up. The fourth point was in reference to the committee for Higher Education. The discussion of the matter began with a presentation by the Bethany Association, arguing that having its own educational institution was essential for the synod to carry out its mission and to survive as a confessing church body.

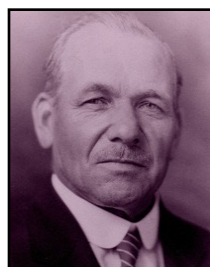
Should the Norwegian Synod have its own school? That this is an absolute necessity if we will continue as a synod ought to be clear for everyone who has the least familiarity with the church's history....

Many of our dear congregation members have already shown by their gifts to the school that they have a view of the necessity of the institution. It is already embraced with affection and interest in the greater number of congregations of the Synod. But the school will not come into its own right among us until it becomes the Synod's school. And the Synod needs just such a school to gather itself

around. Without its own school, the Synod simply cannot hope to continue as the Norwegian Synod. If, therefore, we want to continue as the Norwegian Synod, then it is important not to stand in the way as a hindrance, but to support with affection and true Christian zeal Bethany Lutheran College.

The matter was debated at the Saturday morning and afternoon sessions. On Monday afternoon it was taken up again, and Pastor S. C. Ylvisaker read a report of the financial position of Bethany with some of the following information: Assets \$314,600.00, conserva-

tively estimated, and liabilities \$51,800.00 as they stand. Pastor H. M. Tjernagel made the following motion: "That the matter at hand be referred to the congregations for thorough study and that each congregation report its decision in the matter to the Synod President

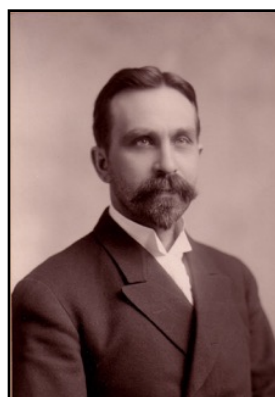


H. M. Tjernagel

before the end of this year. Furthermore it is requested of the congregations that they so far as possible look at both sides of the matter under consideration so that their final deci-

sion can have the greatest possible significance."

The time for speaking was limited to five minutes and when Pastor G. A. Gullixson had the floor, he made the following motion: "I move we take over the school" [This quotation was printed in English, in the



G. A. Gullixson

midst of Norwegian text]. Both motions were seconded. [!]

On Tuesday morning, the Bethany discussion continued. Pastor A. J. Torgerson presented the following amendment to Tjernagel's motion: "The Synod recognizes the necessity for an institution of higher learning and is thankful for the generous offer from Bethany Lutheran Association. The risk however, is not to be accepted just now; but [we] ask the Bethany Lutheran College Association to operate the school still longer and promise our moral and financial support.

The resolution was voted on when those on the speakers' list had spoken. The assembly agreed to vote on Gullixson's motion first, now formulated thus: "The Synod accepts the offer from Bethany Lutheran College Association." For the resolution, 33 votes; against, 21 votes. Two gave as reasons for not voting for the resolution that they were not against taking over the school, but that they preferred that Pastor A. J. Torgerson's amendment would be accepted. A temporary Board of Regents of seven members was elected to take care of the transfer and the schools needs and operations. It consisted of J. A. Moldstad, O. M. Gullerud, A. J. Torgerson, E. J. Onstad (Madison, Wis.), H. R. Hanson (Leland, Ia.), and G. G. Vaala (Lawler, Ia.).

One part of the proceedings that would certainly draw quick objections today is the fact that there were two motions on the floor at once, one made by Tjernagel to have the congregations study the matter before the next convention, and the other by Gullixson. The secretary notes that both were seconded, but the assembly agreed to take up Gullixson's motion first, even though it was made after Tjernagel's. In the months after the convention, Tjernagel met with the joint Association board and the new Bethany board (Regents) to discuss his objections "to the manner in which the acceptance of Bethany was brought about." However, in those minutes the discussion was not on the matter of the two motions, but about the failure to inform the delegates before-

hand of the matter to be discussed, and that matter was resolved.

In any case, it appears that for the most part, after the convention was over, everyone rolled up their sleeves and started to promote the college and work for its success.



A. J. Torgerson

The 1928 meeting of the Synod was held for the first time at Bethany. The Bethany committee, A. J. Torgerson, secretary, reported on their work.

During the past year they had worked closely with the Board of Trustees of the Bethany Association operating the college and making arrangements to officially transfer the property to the synod. They also had prepared "Rules for the Government of Bethany College" which was referred to the Board of Regents for further work. An enrollment of sixty-three was reported, double that of the previous year.

The floor committee on Higher Educational Institutions presented a series of eight resolutions having to do with the college. The most important resolution was that the Board of Regents and the synodical officers were to "accept conveyances of the Bethany Lutheran College in the name of the Synod." Members of the temporary Board of Regents elected at the 1928 convention were S. C. Ylvisaker, J. A. Moldstad, J. E. Thoen, A. J. Torgerson, G. G. Vaala, K. T. Dahlen, C. S. Olson, and G. A. Gullixson. In 1929, when "Regulations for the Governance of Bethany Lutheran College," were adopted, the same men were elected to staggered terms as the permanent Board of Regents.

So the matter was done. The synod now had "just such a school to gather itself around," as Ylvisaker had written in the Association's proposal. Today the synod preserves that purpose when it says that the college is to "function as the synod's visible center" (*Handbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, Section 412, I, C, 3). ■

# Keeping Young Sheep in the Fold of Christ

by Chaplain Don Moldstad  
Bethany Lutheran College

*I am grateful for the very detailed work of Vicar Jeffrey Hendrix in his paper "A Table in the Wilderness."*

The wonderful knowledge of Christ as our only Savior from sin and death stirs in the hearts of Christian parents, moving them to instill this same hope in the hearts of their children. The precious gift of faith given to a child at Holy Baptism must be nurtured and cared for throughout the child's life. The stage of adolescence proves itself to be the most challenging time for preserving this faith in each generation. Youthful sheep are the ones most tempted to jump out of the fold and flee from the flock.

For this reason the early founders of the Norwegian Synod quickly developed an interest in establishing Christian schools, so their youth could retain the sacred Gospel into adulthood. It is fitting that the first pastor of the old Synod, Claus Clausen, emigrated to the US at age 22 as a Christian school teacher in 1842. He was ordained one year later. Clausen found many children unbaptized, and young adults who had not yet been confirmed. There was an urgent need for educating children and youth in the faith.

Within four years of its organization in 1853, members of the Norwegian Synod were already working to establish a college for young men. The first such institution was located near LaCrosse, Wisconsin in 1861. The following year, Rev. Ulrich V. Koren arranged for its relocation to Decorah, Iowa, where Luther College still resides today. (Years later, Luther would become the pattern for Bethany Lutheran College when the Synod took ownership.)

This same love for the education of children and youth lived on among those who gathered at Lime Creek in 1918 to re-organize the old Synod. There were more Christian day schools among the handful of congregations which formed our ELS than in all of the hundreds of churches who entered the merger in 1917.

In the early days of the newly formed tiny Synod there was very little organized youth work on a national level. Many of the congregations were small, rural, far apart and surviving on meager offerings. However, there were some gatherings of youth in local circuits, especially Iowa and Minnesota. One elderly member remembers a youth chorale union event organized in Iowa where the Bethany choir director gathered about 70 singers. There is mention of a "Young People's Organization" (or "Association") as far back as 1936.

The first formal youth board organized by the Synod was in 1949 under these three goals: 1) establish national youth conventions, 2) revive the youth choral union, and 3) make suggestions for educational work among local youth societies in congregations. The following year, a fourth objective was added: to encourage our Synod youth to attend Bethany College. The first Young People's



A young Dennis Marzolf directing the Youth Honor Choir.

Convention was held at Norseland Lutheran Church with 80 teens in attendance. By 1951 the YPO developed a constitution and elected officers. By 1954 the YPO began publishing a paper called the "YPA Quarterly," under the editorship of Rev. Robert Moldstad, seminary student and president of the YPA. The name was finally changed to Lutheran Youth Association in 1955.

Around 1950 the Synod's youth board decided to start a youth camp in the Minnesota-Iowa region. The first camp brought about 50 students together in 1952 at Lake Shetek at the cost of \$15 for the week. Children were invited to bring a camera, musical instruments, a phonograph and a flashlight. The following year an ELS camp was started in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, known as Camp Indianhead, run by local Wisconsin congregations.



In 1960 the Synod approved the creation of a position of Synod youth director, but the full-time position was never filled. By the early 1960's pastors in the Chicago area also sought to establish a camp. Along with some key laypeople they developed an association which purchased 23 acres of land in Michigan, today known as Camp Lo-Ray. Through the years other camps have developed in the states of Washington, Florida and Texas.

Synod Youth Conventions grew in popularity in the 1960's but waned in attendance by the mid-1970's. During the mid-1980's a new surge of interest in national conventions began to rise. The Synod's youth board began planning larger, longer and more elaborate annual gatherings in somewhat exotic locations in the US. In the past 20 years they have established a pattern of holding a convention at Bethany every four years.

In the 1960's the board published a quarterly youth newspaper, which continued for many years. Another resurgence of interest in a youth publication brought about the publication of "Young Branches" in 1986, which continues in circulation today. Through the years members of the board have sought out a variety of ways to effectively help youth remain in their faith, as well as providing aids for pastors, youth leaders and parents.

Dr. Martin Luther once wrote: "If an injury that really hurts is to be done [to] the devil, it must be inflicted through the young people who are reared in the knowledge of God, spread God's Word, and teach it to others." We pray God's continued blessings on His work among the youth of our Synod so that by His powerful Word the devil is continually dealing with injuries. ■



Pastor Charles Keeler teaching a youth Bible study at an LYA Convention.

## A Life Remembered

### Colonel Donald L. Heiliger (USAF Ret.) (1937-2016)

#### Remembering God's Word

by Herman Harstad

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker ordered all U.S. and Wisconsin flags be lowered to half staff on Monday, March 28, 2016 in honor of retired Air Force Col. Donald L. Heiliger, age 79, who died on March 23, 2016 at Wm. S. Middleton Veterans Hospital. The funeral took place at Holy Cross Church (ELS) in Madison on March 28. With military rites and a missing man formation flyover, burial followed at Roselyn Memorial Park, Monona, Wisconsin.



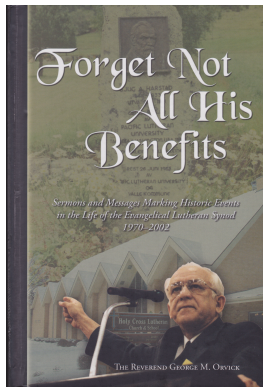
During the Viet Nam war Heiliger was an F-105 pilot. On May 15, 1967, he went on a night bombing mission of heavily defended railroad yards. He was shot down and deployed his parachute and was soon in enemy hands. He spent nearly six years in the notorious "Hanoi Hilton" along with other U.S. pilots including Senator John McCain. The prisoners were treated harshly and were not allowed to have Bibles.

Heiliger was a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Madison. As a child and young man until his confirmation, he was required to memorize Bible passages, Luther's Small Catechism, and hymns. As we know, confirmation is a time when Lutheran Christians make a public profession of the faith that was generated by the Holy Spirit at baptism. Pastors lay their hands on the confirmands' heads and recite passages such as "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps 119:105) Heiliger once spoke at Bethany where his wife had attended college and expressed gratitude for the high expectations pastors have of confirmation students to do their memory work. He was thankful his brain's memory bank was full of encouragement from God's word. At one time the imprisoned Americans were allowed to meet together at Christmas and he was able to recite Luke 2 from memory. In a Wisconsin Veterans Museum 1999 interview posted on the internet, Heiliger said, "I always worry. I tell kids...you've got to memorize certain things that are going to get you through because you're going to come...[to] a crisis in your life and, if you don't have it, you commit suicide and things like that because you don't have something right then to grab on to."

Thank God Donald Heiliger no longer needs to walk by faith because he now can see his Lord and Savior face to face. ■

Editor's Note: Following is a slightly condensed sermon by **Rev. George M. Orvick** from his book, ***Forget Not All His Benefits***, published in 2007 by The Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

## Message to Confirmands February 3, 1980



Text: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:1-2).

Fellow Redeemed, and especially you young people who will soon be confirmed, Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I was both pleased and amused a few weeks ago when I received this little plaque from one of the confirmands. It reads: “Please be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.” Now this is very true and contains a message that can be applied to all of us.

... The pastor must surely be patient with the confirmands. There are many new things to learn and it takes time. Learning isn’t always a matter of the head. The heart also must be involved. I’ll never forget a story that the dean of the seminary told us. It was about a boy in confirmation class who couldn’t learn. At long last the pastor gave up. He said to the boy, “Take your hat and go home.” Slowly and sadly the boy got his hat and went to the door. But stopping there he turned around and said to the pastor, “I may not have it up here, but I’ve got it down here.” And the pastor realized that having something in your heart, and deeply believing it is really what we are trying to achieve. And so he told the boy to come back to class. Yes, we all need to be patient with each other, in every relationship.

But the second part of what this plaque says is really what we wish to speak about on the basis of our text today: “God isn’t finished with me yet.” Let us see what this means for all of us.

First, ... there is something in you that is finished, completed, and perfect. ... It is your justification. ... The Explanation of the Catechism teaches that “I am justified” means that God by grace has declared me righteous, pardoned, and forgiven. Our text brings this out...[but] Do we not fail to measure up to God’s law which demands perfection? The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death. ... But here we are told there is no condemnation to them who are in

Christ Jesus. What happened? What changed it? Scripture tells us, ... The law couldn’t make us perfect and acceptable to God, because our flesh is so weak it couldn’t keep the law. Therefore God did something. He sent His own Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh, for our sin, and God condemned Him on the cross as the one who bore our sins.

Since all sins were laid on Christ and He was condemned, ... *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:6). Isn’t this one of the most gracious and beautiful promises you have ever heard? You and I, who deserve to be condemned, are scot free.

Now this is the part that is finished in us, and we want to make this very clear. You can’t be partly justified, or partly forgiven. Either you are or you aren’t. Some may get confused on this point and may be miserable on account of their confusion. Some may think: Pretty soon I’ll be forgiven or justified when I improve a little bit. I’m on pretty good terms with God now—He loves me and, if I behave a little better, then he’ll forgive at least most of what I have done wrong.

That’s terrible. That is not Christianity. That is a tool the devil uses to torment us. There is something finished in you. God has already justified you and it became yours when you became a believer. God declared you—not half forgiven, not two thirds, but fully and freely righteous.

This is good news, the unconditioned Gospel, built solely and alone on Christ. *“God was in Christ, reconciling the World unto himself”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). He has declared the whole world righteous. But it doesn’t do any good unless you believe it. For the true believers there is complete forgiveness, justification and righteousness. ...

Now ... God wants you to live like one of His own people. ... This is the part that isn’t finished. God wants you to walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. These words describe the Christian’s life. To walk after the flesh means to be concerned only about the things of this world, this life, this earth’s sinful pleasures, this earth’s money, goods, philosophy, lust, evil thoughts, words and deeds. If this is your only concern you are walking after the flesh. And we read here: *“To be carnally minded is death”* (Romans 8:6).

To walk in the spirit means first of all to have faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; to care about spiritual things; to care about forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace, joy, love, service to God and our fellow man, the preaching and spreading of the Gospel. This doesn’t mean that you don’t care about house and home and making a living. No indeed. But it means you place your faith and love for Christ as number one in your life. This is a sign you are a Christian. To be spiritually minded is life and peace.

... He is working in us through the Word to help us grow in grace and knowledge and holiness. Peter said, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). ... God is trying to make a finished product out of you and me. He wants us to grow perfect in love for Him and others; more conscious of avoiding all that is sinful; more fervent in prayer; more kind, gracious and understanding; more rich in good works. All of this is called our sanctification.

Now this is not so easy to do because we have the old Adam, our sinful nature, which doesn't want to be made holy. It fights and rebels. Luther says we have to fight back. That is, fight against the sinful nature. Don't let it get the upper hand. "Although we cannot kill the old man in us at once yet we are to plague him with so many blows, scourging and thorns, and pierce him with nails that finally he bows his head and dies. For they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof."

What is he saying? Don't let the sinful nature get the best of you. ... When you hear the Word and go to the sacrament, God uses these means as His tools to perfect, shine up, purify your hearts.

Yes, we have to be patient. Such a process doesn't happen all at once. In fact we won't be perfectly sanctified until we get to heaven. Then our souls will be free, and when our bodies rise again they will be new and glorified and perfect.

So dear class and friends: There is something that is finished and something that is not finished. Your justification, your forgiveness is complete. ... But your sanctification, your walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh, that is something that isn't finished yet, but God is working in your hearts to help you grow and develop, all your lives, until we are perfectly purified in heaven. Amen. ■

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## Early Pioneer Church Work Beginning a Centennial Series

by Chr. Anderson

Submitted by Craig Ferkenstad

From a *Lutheran Sentinel* 1952 issue

When we are preparing to observe the one hundredth anniversary of the Norwegian Synod, our thoughts go back to the humble beginnings of church work among our people. One hundred years ago a considerable number of people had already emigrated from Norway and had formed settlements, especially in northern Illinois, Wisconsin, northeastern Iowa and southern Minnesota.

When these emigrants left their homeland very few of them had given much thought to the matter of what kind of church conditions they would find here. Many of them had probably shown very little appreciation of the work of the church in their home country. But they had not been here long before they realized how much they were in need of the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments in building their homes and raising their families.

When the first trained ministers of the Word, after much difficulty and great sacrifice, came to minister to the settlers in their primitive homes, they received a hearty welcome. It was not difficult to organize congregations in those days. However, it required diligent and strenuous work to reach and to serve the flocks that were scattered over this large area.

In order to give some idea of the character of this work, we quote the following from a lecture delivered by one of the pioneer pastors, the Rev. H. A. Preus, in Christiania in 1866: "A great deal of the activities of our ministers is in many respects like that of a missionary; this is especially true of the pastors who are stationed in the outlying districts, where the immigration is still going on in full force. Imagine then a minister who is called to serve six or seven congregations a considerable distance apart; he begins his work among them and thinks that he has his hands full and cannot cover all the work that is required. Then some fine morning he receives a letter or a deputation from a new settlement, and again he receives word from another place. They inform him that there is a large number of countrymen who are without a minister and spiritual care. They ask him kindly to come and visit them. He answers that he is not able to do all the work needed in the congregations which he already serves; he cannot understand how he can manage to serve them also.

"Then they begin to describe their dire need: They have lived there two, three, four, yes, even up to seven years, and have not yet been visited by a single Lutheran pastor. Perhaps one or more sectarian preachers have visited the community, but the settlers did not want to leave the church in which they have grown up. In all these years they have not partaken of the Lord's Supper; many of them have children, some quite old, who are not baptized. Since they have no one to preach God's Word to them, to instruct, warn and comfort them, a large number of the people have already become indifferent to God's Word and His Church. And many of the young people who have grown up without any instruction in the Christian faith lead a life in riot and revel. Yes, it is heart rending to hear, and still more to see, the sad conditions which exist in such places."

These pioneer workers could not turn down such an appeal. Despite the little time they could spend in each place for indoctrination and setting things in order, they succeeded under God's grace remarkably well in establishing true Christian congregations over a wide area. The Lord guided them to build up a Church founded on God's pure Word. The result of the work of these pious pioneer pastors and congregations is the inheritance which we have enjoyed unto this day. Let us not fail to be thankful to God for these blessings! ■





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