

The History of the  
Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry

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## The History of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Mt 25:40).

### The Roots of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry

The Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry traces its beginnings back to the turn of the century when Pastor William Rader of St. John's, Wauwatosa, sought to comfort hospitalized fellow-Lutherans in the Milwaukee County Institutions with the gospel.

Pastors and laymen of thirty Synodical Conference Lutheran congregations also became interested in this kind of work. They met on May 8, 1901 at Trinity School, 9th and Highland, to plan for a sustained spiritual service to those in public institutions who appreciated the gospel-message.

The Rev. Enno Duemling of Detroit accepted the position as the first resident institutional pastor and was installed at St. John's 8th and Vliet, on May 4, 1902. He began his work in the County Institutions, starting at the "Poor Farm" (Infirmary). It is difficult to form an adequate conception of the dedication of this man. For forty-four years he served the sick, the poor, the handicapped, and the prisoners. For him it was a great honor to serve "the least of these." As he himself says:

It is not an easy task to visit the sick, strengthen the weak, to encourage the faltering, to admonish

the tempted, to lift up the fallen, day after day, year after year. Problems arise, which must be solved in conformity with God's Word and fit the case. Yet what a glorious work -- soul-saving and harvesting! What a privilege to be a missionary!<sup>1</sup>

To win souls for Christ was the goal of Duemling's work as an institutional missionary. He saw hospitals and institutions as opportunities to proclaim the Lord's loving words: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mt 9:2). The tasks of his ministry included conducting services, giving religious instruction, administering baptism and Holy Communion, making pastoral and sick visitations, and committing bodies to the grave. He realized that he must wait until judgment day in order to see the fruits of his labor:

Eternity only will reveal how many dearly bought souls have been rescued from darkness and brought to light eternal as a result of the mission's faithful activities and ministrations.<sup>2</sup>

The Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry owes Pastor Duemling a debt of gratitude because he laid the foundation of it. That he worked alone for twenty-four years gave him the opportunity to do the solid groundwork. But he could not serve the growing field by himself. Sponsoring congregations realized that more help was a necessity if waiting souls were to be reached. Their concern led to the calling of Pastor John Helmes of Menasha, who began his work on January 1, 1926.

By 1937 the population of the institutions had doubled, making further staff expansion necessary. So Pastor Arnold

Schroeder of Milwaukee was called and installed on September 26, 1938. His call was timely because the Lord called Pastor Helmes to his eternal rest on April 18, 1940 and Pastor Duemling on October 21, 1946.

Faced with an ever-growing patient population as well as changes in staff pastors because of death or acceptance of a call, the Board of Directors in the next few years addressed itself to the task of supplying adequate manpower. In 1946 Pastor Edmund Puseman was called and served as an institutional pastor for three years. In 1947 Pastor William Lochner of Milwaukee accepted their call and served until his retirement in 1960. In 1949 Pastor Louis Spilker of Glenbeulah, Wisconsin, was called and served until the re-organization of institutional work in the Milwaukee area took place in 1968. In 1959 Pastor Robert Kleist of Pickett, Wisconsin, was called to assume the duties carried out by Pastor Lochner.

From 1946 Pastor Schroeder served as senior missionary and became responsible for the field-work of all the missionaries, plus whatever other duties the Board of Directors would assign. During this time many of the institutions that the staff regularly served experienced a tremendous increase. A regular schedule of services was maintained in all institutions. It is praiseworthy that this ministry also concerned itself with the individual visitation program which brought the missionary to the bedside of the failing or critically ill patient. The institutional pastor made himself available twenty-four hours a day, always ready to bring the message of Him who loved sinners and gave Himself a ransom for them.

## The Formation of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry

After the old Synodical Conference ceased its joint activities in 1963, the first steps were taken in 1967 toward the re-organization of institutional work. Whereas both Missouri and Wisconsin Synod congregations had carried out the work, plans were now laid for each Synod to conduct its own institutional program. The voting delegates of the Mission Conference unanimously approved all the recommendations of the old joint Board. As a result there was an orderly division of the field of work and a fair and equal division of its assets.

Pursuant to the suggestions a general meeting of Wisconsin Synod congregations in the Milwaukee area was called and 20 of them formed a new corporation and elected a provisioned Board. A constitution and by-laws were drawn up, and later in 1968 a permanent Board was duly elected. The name: The Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry.

The old joint Board continued to function until both groups could assume full responsibility for the fields assigned by mutual consent. The field the Wisconsin Ministry consented to serve included the State Prison and Central State Hospital in Waupun, also the Wisconsin Correctional Institution at Fox Lake; Milwaukee County General Hospital; The Mental Health Center-South Division; The Veterans' Administration Facilities at Wood; and the County Children's Home. The target date was set for October 1, 1968.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry from 1968-1979

1968

1. As of October 1 the mission efforts in institutions became known as The Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry, with about 45 congregations supporting it.
2. The challenge: "To 'go it alone' in special endeavors which it formerly prompted with the churches of the Missouri Synod."<sup>3</sup>
3. The purpose: "Our convictions and our zeal to preserve the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus for future generations move us to carry on also our works of charity as churches of the Wisconsin Synod."<sup>4</sup>
4. The Wisconsin Lutheran Ministry entitled its paper Compassion.
5. A member of one of the member congregations gave a generous gift of \$8,500 to the treasury to facilitate financial operations.
6. Pastor Robert Kleist and Arnold Schroeder accepted the calls extended to them. Pastor Jon Mahnke installed them into office on November 3 at St. James Church. Both men had experience in this area. Pastor Schroeder served institutional missions for 30 years and Pastor Kleist for almost 10 years. Pastor Schroeder was designated as "Senior Missionary."
7. The Bargain Center gave \$1,091.55 to the Institutional Ministry.

## 8. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	63
Attendance	2,849
Sunday School	802
Instruction and Bible classes	143
Communions	146
Burials	6
Sermons and Addresses (on the work)	16
Total calls made	1,676

## 1969

1. Ninety men represented 33 congregations at the first annual meeting held at St. Jacobi School on January 26th.
2. The Bargain Center gave \$3,662.76 to the Ministry.

## 3. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	239
Attendance	10,074
Sunday School	1,280
Instruction and Bible classes	110
Baptisms	4
Confirmations	1
Communions	517
Burials	4
Sermons and Addresses	82
Total calls made	7,397

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1970

1. The interests of the Institutional Ministry expanded to include the larger nursing homes and convalescent hospitals in the metropolitan area.
2. The Lord opened doors at Pan-American Halfway House, Sage Nursing Home, Regency Terrace South, and the Mill-Way Nursing Home.
3. The delegates voted unanimously to give the Board permission to call an additional member.
4. Membership increased from 46 to 54 congregations.
5. The annual meeting report revealed that congregational support remained fairly stable for the fiscal year, chiefly because the Bargain Center gave \$4,000.

6. Annual Statistics

Worship services and classes	338
Attendance	11,326
Baptisms	2
Marriages	1
Communions	460
Burials	6
Sermons and Addresses	57
Total Calls	7,706

1971

1. A call was extended to Pastor Kenneth Lenz of Livingston, Montana.



2. A complete field survey showed that the Institutional Ministry was serving County Institutions, the State Prison, the V.A. Hospital, and a number of nursing homes.
3. Total membership climbed to 55 churches.
4. Treasurer Zebell reported a deficit of almost \$3,000 in operations for eight months of the year.
5. Pastor P. Eckert installed Pastor Lenz on August 22 at St. Lucas Church.
6. The deficit of \$69.69 at the end of 1971 would have been much greater had it not been for the \$5,457.07 received from the Bargain Centers.

7. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	402
Attendance	12,734
Instruction periods	34
Attendance	288
Sermons and Addresses	58
Baptisms	2
Communions	410
Burials	12
Total calls made	9,397

1972

1. Pastor Lenz replaced Pastor Kleist as chaplain at the County Children's Home. Pastor Kleist took over the work at the Three Fountains Nursing Home.
2. A total of 58 congregations were now on the roster.

3. Services were being held at Federal, State, County Institutions, and at the following nursing homes: Bel-Aire, Milway, Mt. Carmel, Pan-American, Regency Terrace, Sage, Surfside Manor, Three Fountains and Woodstock, N.W.
4. The treasurer's report showed a growing deficit, from \$1,305 in May to \$5,120 in September.
5. The Ministry received a bequest of \$6,200 from the estate of Louis Will.
6. 59 churches were in membership.
7. The treasurer's report revealed a deficit of \$1,917.94 at the end of 1972.

8. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	590
Attendance	15,637
Instruction periods	51
Attendance	1,210
Sermons and Addresses	54
Baptisms	3
Communions	499
Burials	10
Total calls made	10,486

1973

1. St. John's of Newburg was the 60th congregation to become a member.
2. The first quarter deficit was \$2,552.41
3. In May a gift of \$1,000 greatly reduced the debt.

4. After eight months the deficit was \$4,700.

5. The Ministry honored Pastor Schroeder by joining him in an observance of his 40th anniversary in the ministry of the kingdom, 35 of those years serving in institutional work. He graduated from Concordia College in 1929 and from the Seminary in 1932. He was the first resident pastor of St. Paul's, N. 73rd and W. Burleigh. In 1937 Mount Lebanon was added to his charge, and he served both congregations until September of 1938 when he was called to the old joint Institutional Ministry to serve with Dr. Enno Duemling and Missionary John Helmes. When local institutional work was reorganized in 1968, Pastor Schroeder became the senior missionary of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry. For many years Pastor Schroeder served the Synod as chairman of the Military Services Committee of the Special Ministries Board. He has been named a Fellow in the College of fellows of the American Correctional Chaplains' Association, and a guest lecturer at the Medical College of Wisconsin

6. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	613
Attendance	13,718
Instruction periods	46
Attendance	1,150
Baptisms	4
Communions	556
Burials	7
Total Calls	10,468
Sermons and Addresses	50

1974

1. The treasurer reported a first quarter deficit of \$2,518.73.
2. The accumulated deficit for 8 months was \$2,445.
3. The Institutional Ministry honored Pastor Robert Kleist in the observance of his 25th anniversary in the ministry and his 15th in the work of institutional missions. After serving churches in Batesland, S.D. and Pickett, Wis. he joined the staff in 1959.
4. The Lord preserved the life of Pastor Schroeder even though he was stricken with a critical coronary attack in October.
5. At the close of 1974 the treasurer's report showed a deficit of \$2,984.30.

6. Annual Statistics

Chapel services	601
Attendance	13,154
Instruction periods	39
Attendance	477
Baptisms	4
Communions	518
Burials	5
Sermons and Addresses	41
Total calls made	19,381

1975

1. A pilot project began at Askot Nursing Home with the cooperation of Salem Church and its Pastor W. Tabor. The Institutional Ministry felt the need to involve more congregations

and lay people.

2. In the summer the deficit was \$2,300, and this amount excludes the accumulated deficits of previous years.
3. After thirty years of faithful service to the State Prison and Central State Hospital in Waupun and the Wis. Correctional Institution in Fox Lake, Pastor Schroeder asked to be relieved of the rigors of this correctional work. A twice-a-month trip was too demanding on him as a result of failing health.
4. The Board assigned Pastor Lenz to Waupun.
5. A dedicated group of Lutheran Collegians assisted Pastor Lenz at the Children's Home. They attended Sunday chapel services and also led fruitful Bible-based discussions with the troubled youth on Monday evenings.
6. At the delegate meeting the results of the pilot project at Askot were given. The administration of this nursing facility was pleased with the Ministry. Six lay volunteers assisted Pastor Tabor in the weekly services and visitations, aiding patients attending chapel and conducting bedside devotions. This project became a blessing both to patients and Salem's people.
7. Lay volunteers of St. John's in Wauwatosa offered their services at Sage Home. They helped the handicapped to get to the fifth floor chapel. Attendance at services doubled as a result of their work.
8. In 1975: 14,583 attended 609 services; 525 were communed; 11,059 visits made.

1976

1. At the annual meeting in January Pastor Schroeder observed:  
"The situation at the County Institutions has stabilized somewhat with a decreasing exodus from the compound to other facilities. But Convalescent and Nursing Homes continue to expand, providing greater opportunities for our services."<sup>5</sup>
2. At the same meeting Pastor Lenz noted that 11 men were studying Lutheran doctrine.
3. Pastor Schroeder asked to be relieved of the responsibilities of the office of "Senior Missionary." Since 1948 he had served in this capacity, first in the old Institutional Missions and then in the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry since 1968. If the comparison may be allowed: He was the "Enno Duemling" of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry. He still stayed on as a full-time staff member and served his usual institutions.
4. Pastor Kleist was named as the new "Designated Senior Pastor."
5. A commemorative plaque was presented to Miss Gertrude Schoknecht, manager of the Bargain Center, for the generous donations received through the years.
6. At the September delegate meeting the year to date figures showed an accumulated deficit of \$7,322 in the operating fund.
7. 63 congregations held membership in the Institutional Ministry.
8. The Ministry observed its 75th anniversary on September 19, 1976. A special service of thanksgiving and praise was held at the close of the delegate meeting. Professor Armin Schuetze preached the sermon and Pastor Arnold Schroeder was

the liturgist.

9. In 1976: 13,905 attended 603 services; 587 were communed; 26 instruction periods with 218 attending; 4 baptized; 15 buried; 44 sermons and addresses.

### 1977

1. According to the delegate meeting in September the treasurer's report showed an accumulated deficit of \$6,399.73 in the operating fund.
2. The Lord spared the life of Pastor Lenz even though a 1200 pound grain elevator collapsed on top of him.
3. The treasurer's report showed a deficit balance of \$1,253.26 for 1977.
4. In 1977: 14,363 attended 612 worship services; 659 were communed; 27 instruction periods with 318 attending; 2 baptized; 9 buried; 34 sermons and addresses were given on the ministry.

### 1978

1. There were 65 member congregations.
2. Mr. and Mrs. Norbert Netz sent a check to cover the entire amount of the deficit of \$1,253.26.
3. Pastor Arnold Schroeder announced his retirement as of October 1st of 1978.
4. The delegates approved the plan of the Board of Directors to institute three distinct programs: a ministry in county,

state, and federal institutions, a hospital ministry, and a nursing home ministry.

5. The Federation of WELS Churches had directed the hospital ministry. The Institutional Ministry plans to administer this visitation program beginning the first of the year. It will also establish a similar visitation program for the nursing homes of the Milwaukee area.

1979

1. The Hospital Ministry

Columbia Hospital - Milwaukee

Community Memorial Hospital - Memomonee Falls

Elmbrook Memorial Hospital - Brookfield

Family Hospital - Milwaukee

Mount Sinai Medical Center - Milwaukee

Northwest General Hospital - Milwaukee

Saint Alphonsus Hospital - Port Washington

Saint Francis Hospital - Milwaukee

Saint Joseph Hospital - Milwaukee

Saint Luke's Hospital - Milwaukee

Saint Mary's Hospital - Milwaukee

Saint Michael Hospital - Milwaukee

Trinity Memorial Hospital - Cudahy

Veteran's Hospital - Wood

West Allis Memorial Hospital - West Allis



2. The Nursing Home Ministry

Benjamin Health Care Centre

Glenfield Health Care Center

Marina View Manor

McMahon Residential Center

Millway and Avon Nursing Homes

Northwest Health Center

Mt. Carmel Nursing Home

Regency Terrace Residential

Sage Nursing Home

The Fruits of the Labor of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional  
Ministry

The interested pastors and laymen who met at Trinity School on May 8, 1901 would be amazed at the growth and expansion of WLIM. Member congregations grew from 20 to 30 to 40 to 50 to 60 and more. The interests of WLIM not only includes county institutions, the State Prison, and the Veterans hospital, but also a host of hospitals and nursing homes in the greater Milwaukee area. Compare the statistics recorded in 1968 with those of 1977:

	1968	1977
Chapel services	63	612
Attendance	2,849	14,363
Communion	146	659
Baptisms		2
Instruction and Bible Classes	143	318

	1968	1977
Burials	6	9
Sermons and addresses on the work	16	34
Totals calls made	1,676	11,059 (in 1975) <sup>6</sup>

The Reasons for the Success of the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional  
Ministry

The Institutional Ministry praises and thanks "amazing grace" for its success. It is aware of the truth: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it." And the Lord has built the Institutional Ministry by providing it with sincere and dedicated men, especially Pastor Duemling and Pastor Schroeder. The Lord used Pastor Duemling to lay the foundation of the Ministry and Pastor Schroeder to build it.

The work of the Institutional Ministry must be regarded as praiseworthy both in the eyes of God and men. In a visible way the Ministry expresses its concern about the salvation of "the least of these." The men of the Ministry work in institutions and homes where souls are often neglected. The Ministry recognizes and understands that the task to "preach the gospel to every creature" includes those who are sick, crippled, handicapped, and in prison. As Pastor Kleist points out:

There is no one who so readily listens to the Gospel as those who have sorrows and tears, grief and pain. In the crucial moments of life we need more than anything else the comfort of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are privileged to be the messenger of this Savior.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, however, the Institutional Ministry avoids the pitfall of championing the cause and becoming an agency of the "social gospel." "The chief concern of the Institutional Ministry is not just to make the bad good or keep people out of jail," says Pastor Lenz, "but to keep them out of hell."<sup>8</sup>

The Lord has graciously provided the Institutional Ministry with friends. Over 60 congregations are members of it. *And* the Bargain Center and donors provide financial support.

The Lord has also given the Institutional Ministry warm-hearted volunteers as aides. The Lutheran Collegians help at the Children's Home and lay workers offer their services at nursing homes.

This last point must be underscored in light of the success of the Institutional Ministry. The Ministry tries to involve lay people in its work and at the same time enlists their services not through compulsion, but through volunteerism. And the Ministry recognizes the importance of volunteer work. It not only calls on lay people to volunteer their services, but also applauds them when they respond:

In every nursing home there are patients who love the Lord and eagerly await the hour of worship. Because of physical disabilities, however, many are simply unable to get to the chapel service under their own power.

Who will be the arms and legs of the stroke victim, the paralyzed, the spastic, amputee? Who will be the eyes of the blind to lead them to that place where they will join fellow believers and hear again the saving truths of God's precious Word? Who will lend a helping hand and a word of calm assurance to the confused soul who fears becoming lost in the strange surroundings of a large nursing

home? Who will assist during the chapel service, passing out hymnals, finding the hymns selected for the patients?

Volunteers -- you are very much needed, appreciated, and from your own experience as an Institutional Ministry volunteer you already know what a tremendous difference you make. Your work as a volunteer is vital! Many, very many look forward to your Christian service, your kind word, your helping hand.<sup>9</sup>

The Institutional ministry owes all of its success to Him who volunteered His life for the salvation of sinners, including "the least of these." And what holds true of the past must also hold true of the future. The future is in the hands of the Lord. But the Ministry is confident that the Lord will open doors for them "to serve where the spiritual needs of suffering people are greatest."<sup>10</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Enno Duemling, The Lutheran Ministrant. (Milwaukee, 1946), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Duemling, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>"Transition," Compassion, I (November 1968).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>"Our Ministry," Compassion, VIII (Lent 1976).

<sup>6</sup>I was unable to find the total calls made in 1977 and in 1976. I therefore have used the total for 1975.

<sup>7</sup>"Notes from the Missionaries' Annual Report," Compassion, VI (Lent 1974).

<sup>8</sup>"Our Ministry," Compassion, IX (Lent 1977).

<sup>9</sup>"Volunteers," Compassion, X (Summer 1978).

<sup>10</sup>By the Grace of God, p. 4.

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