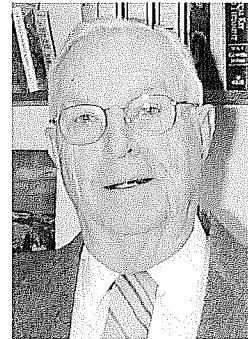




Interview with
Pastor Ernst Lehninger
April 15, 2000
Daniel Cole



Church History 331
Professor Brenner
April 17, 2000

The interview with Pastor Ernst Lehninger was conducted on April 15, 2000. (On the tape the date August 15, 2000 is mentioned, but it is actually April 15.) The purpose of this interview was to get a basic overview of the life and ministry of Pastor Lehninger. The interview was conducted at St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa, WI.

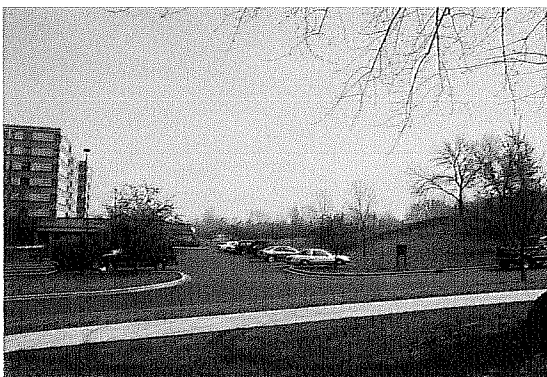
Pastor Lehninger had an interesting perspective on life at the Seminary because his father accepted a call to be a professor there in 1929, the year that the Thiensville campus was dedicated. Shortly after his family moved to the campus, the depression hit. Although this did have an effect on the faculty at Seminary, the Lord watched over them and supplied them with what they needed for daily life. Pastor Lehninger also mentioned the changes that the campus has undergone in the last seventy years. Professor Lehninger was the campus director, and as such, he often recruited his children to help maintain and develop the then barren acres. Hence, when Pastor Lehninger visits the campus, he can remember that time spent with his father planting and landscaping.

As he continued in his formal education, Pastor Lehninger did not take the same route of Northwestern Preparatory School as many of his classmates did. Instead, he went to Concordia College and then to Northwestern College. During this time, he was grateful to his father because his father paid for him to stay in the dorm at both Concordia and later at Seminary instead of insisting that he just stay at home. Pastor Lehninger felt this was a great blessing in his training to become a pastor

Pastor Lehninger graduated from the Seminary in 1942. This was during World War II, and he said that the war did not have a big effect on him or his classmates. I found this interesting because often when one talks about the war years, the main

emphasis is on what kind of difference the war made in their lives. Here, the work and calling continued despite the changes the war brought about.

During the first thirteen years of his ministry, Pastor Lehninger received a great variety of experience. He started with a full load at Winnebago Lutheran Academy. In addition to a number of classes, he was in charge of the entire athletic department. He said that this was a big challenge, but he would not trade in the experience he received for the world. Despite his load of responsibilities, he found time to court and then marry his wife, Margaret Lehninger, in 1944. From Winnebago Lutheran Academy, he was called to serve a mission congregation on the south side of Appleton. The church grew rapidly and moved from the west side of town to the east side of town, and then into quonset hut, (a first in the WELS) before Pastor Lehninger left in 1950. From this mission congregation, Pastor Lehninger moved ^{to} a congregation of 1100 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Needless to say, the workload was different, and he focus much of his time on the shut-ins in the congregation in addition to his other responsibilities, which included preaching in German. The congregation was surprised when he decided to accept another call only



Original site of LCFS. Currently Harwood Place Retirement Community

five years later. After all, their previous two pastors had been there for more than thirty years each.

His next move was to Lutheran Children's Friends Society in Wauwatosa. After only one year, the director resigned and Pastor Lehninger was made the director.

When the split between the WELS and LCMS came in the early 60's, Pastor Lehninger

was put into a touchy situation. LCFS was a joint venture between the two synods. He decided to remain as director until a solution could be found so that the children of LCFS would not be left high and dry. This led to some hard feelings with other WELS Pastors in the Milwaukee area.

In 1965, Pastor Lehninger was called to start Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services. It began in a nursing home on 76th Street where it remains to this day. Some of those who worked with him at LCFS also made the change to WLCFS when it began. Through the years, it has had five additions and has served many needs, among them:



WLCFS on 76th Street in Milwaukee

counseling, nursing care, and an

adoption service (the adoption agency was only recently discontinued). He remained the director of WLCFS until his retirement in 1991. Much of his work at WLCFS was



Wisconsin Lutheran Care Center nursing home (attached to WLCFS)

making it visible to the congregations in the Midwest. Along these lines, Pastor Lehninger claims that there are

very few congregations in Wisconsin where he has not preached.

While he was working at WLCFS, Pastor Lehninger also has had the opportunity to work with other programs. He was involved with the Wisconsin Lutheran High

School building project shortly after ^{before} the split with Missouri. He was instrumental in and was the chairman of the Special ministries program for 17 years and remembers especially



ST. John's Lutheran Elementary School in Wauwatosa

the chaplancy program which was begun in Europe. He also led the building project for St. John's grade school in Wauwatosa. In the early eighties he was in charge of building a Lutheran retirement community, Luther Haven, which was completed in 1982. Also



Luther Haven, North of Brown Deer Road

during this time, Pastor Lehninger has served as practically a vacancy pastor at St. John's in Wauwatosa.

Since his retirement in 1991, he has been active in the OWLS organization and was involved in the building of a retirement center on the south side of the

city among other projects.

Overall, Pastor Lehninger is a remarkable man whom the Lord has blessed with many varied gifts and abilities. He has served faithfully in the building up of God's kingdom and has been a great blessing to our synod. He gives us the encouragement recorded in Nahum 1:7, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." (KJV)

Appendix: Questions used as outline of interview

1. You are in a somewhat unique position since your father received a call to be a professor at Sem. Could you tell us a little bit about when you found out you were moving to Wisconsin?
2. Your family moved to the Seminary in 1929 not too long before the stock market crashed and the depression hit. What effects did that have on you and your family on the Seminary campus?
3. What are some of the favorite things that you remember about growing up on the Sem. Campus?
4. When it came time for High School and College, you did not follow the same path a lot of your classmates did with prep school and such. Could you tell me a little about that?
5. When did you decide or know that you were going to be a pastor?
6. In college and sem. You were rather involved in some extracurricular activities could you tell me about that?
7. You graduated from the Sem in 1942. Pearl Harbor had been bombed less than a year before and the country was at war. Did that have a significant effect on your class graduating from Sem that year?
8. Your first call didn't come at the time of your graduation. Tell me about that time before you received your call
9. Where was your first call, and what were your responsibilities there?
10. What were some of the useful things that you learned while teaching at Winnebago?
11. You mentioned that you had a "baptism by fire" at a Fon du lac congregation.
12. During your time at Winnebago, you left bachelor-hood behind. Tell me about how you met your wife.
13. Tell me about your next call.
14. Your Appleton congregation moved a couple times because of its growth which eventually led to first in America. What was that first?
15. At dedication of that Quonset hut the district president came to preach. How'd that go?
16. What were some of the quirks that the congregation had to adjust to with this building?
17. What was a typical day like at in the Appleton congregation?
18. From a mission congregation in Appleton, you moved about thirty miles, but there was a world of difference. Tell me about your next move.
19. What was a typical day at Grace in Oshkosh?
20. What were some of the challenges of having that big of a congregation with only one pastor?
21. How did the congregation respond when you received your next call after only five years?
22. Where did your next call bring you?
23. What were some of the programs that Lutheran Children's friends Society offered?

24. A year after you came to the Society, you were made director, could you tell me about that?
25. What were some of the daily things that you did at the friends Society?
26. The early sixes brought some major changes. What went on during those few years?
27. This ties into the last question, but how did Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services get started?
28. What were some of the problems that came with this change?
29. What were some of the typical duties that WLCFS served those first years?
30. What was the focus of your work there?
31. How did the property grow over the years?
32. How did the program grow over the years?
33. What are some of the things you think attributed to the growth of WLCFS?
34. How did your work change during the years you served there?
35. During these years you also had some other responsibilities. Tell me about your work with:
 - Wisco building project
 - Special ministries
 - St. John's building project
36. In 82 Luther Haven was finished. What led up to and got this project off the ground?
37. How did the construction and development go?
38. What were the basic goals of Luther Haven?
39. What was your role with Luther Haven?
40. That brings us to 1991, even after your retirement, you haven't let the grass grow too much under your feet. What is some of the work that you have done since 91?
41. Overall, what do you see as some of your biggest challenges or blessings over the years?