



*Carl Voss: The Lord's Servant To The Northern
Wisconsin District*

Prepared by
Paul Doletzky

for
Professor John Brenner
Senior Church History Paper

May 8, 1995

What a privilege it is to study history. If a Christian has never thought about history, especially Church history, it takes on a whole new light when he or she calls to mind the words of the Apostle Paul, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earthFrom one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:24, 26). Every person born, every person I know, every person you know, our parents, our grandparents all were created by our God. Each person was put on this earth by *him*, not by chance, but by the ruler of the universe. It is our gracious God who is in charge, working out all things for the good of his Church (Rom 8:28). It is our God, who through the means of grace, calls us and makes us members of Christ's body - the Church (Eph 2:8-9, II Thess 2:14). It is our gracious God, who in his incomprehensible wisdom and mercy, calls some to serve his Church as public ministers of the gospel (Eph 4:11-13). In studying Church history then we have the privilege of studying God's grace in action. We see in Church history the advance of God's kingdom. We marvel at how our God uses frail human instruments to carry the priceless light of the gospel to dark dying souls. One office our synod has established in order to help spread the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the office of District President. Little has been written about this office or the men who have served as, "the workhorses of our synod." For this reason I will focus on one of our gracious God's servants, Carl Voss. The Lord has called Pastor Carl Voss to serve him in his kingdom for over 40 years. Pastor Voss has served his Lord in many different ways and places. It is my intention to focus mainly on one area of Pastor Voss's ministry: his years as President of the Northern Wisconsin

District. Through personal interviews with Pastor Voss, and interviews with others who knew and worked with him, I will look at the man and his office in this way:

Carl Voss: The Lord's Servant to the Northern Wisconsin District

- I. His servant is prepared for presidency
- II. His servant serves as president
- III. His servant's service is seen
- IV. How His servant sees our situation

I.

Pastor Voss was born, September 22, 1929, in Saginaw, Michigan. His father was originally an LCMS pastor who served in the outskirts of Saginaw. Two years later, Pastor Voss's father was called to serve in Tawas, Michigan. He served there for five years and then he was called to Owosso, Michigan where Carl spent his grade school years until he entered Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Although no one pressured Carl into any profession, Pastor Voss recalled what his father said when it was time to go to MLS:

I want you to receive a Christian high school education, The Lord has also equipped you with gifts and abilities that I feel could be used in the ministry, but that is something that you will have to become aware of. If, however, you had something else in mind that you really wanted to do, or find that the ministry is not for you, that's the choice that you make. But I would like you to take the courses of study that would prepare you for the work of the ministry. Even if you don't become a pastor, the education that you receive would be a benefit for you later on.¹

Pastor Voss's response was one that I can imagine hearing from any young teenager today:

Since I didn't have anything else in mind, and at that time being the oldest of seven children, having a lot of responsibility looking over younger brothers and

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

sisters and a lot of housework and so forth, I really welcomed the opportunity to leave home and go into the dormitory where I didn't have to wash dishes anymore and all of those other things. From that perspective I really welcomed the opportunity, I didn't really get homesick at all when I went away to school.¹

Pastor Voss worked hard at MLS. He was involved in activities and worked after classes washing walls and washing down homes because they couldn't get paint during the war.

Although Carl didn't know what he wanted to do when graduated from MLS, he decided to go on to Northwestern College in Watertown. He was a good athlete and a good student.² After football season, Pastor Voss worked as a delivery boy for Benson groceries. He worked his way through college since his parents just could not afford to help him. All in all he kept a balance between work and play.

During his time in Watertown he would take opportunity to visit his father's cousin, Pastor Arthur Voss. These visits were enjoyable for Carl. He helped out around the house of his father's cousin. He had a high respect for Pastor Arthur Voss, a respect that was shared by our synod that he served in many ways, including as a District President (DP), as a synod vice president, and as a Seminary professor. Of those who influenced Carl, Arthur Voss may have been second only to Carl's father. After seeking the advice of instructors, and older schoolmates, Carl decided during his junior year of college that the ministry was something that he really wanted to continue to study for. So Carl went on to the Seminary preparing to serve his Lord in the public ministry. At the Seminary, Carl was called to teach one year at MLS. He served at MLS between his Middler and Senior years. In 1955 he graduated from the Seminary.

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

² Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, August, 1994.

The Lord used those years in school to prepare Pastor Voss in many different ways for the work he was going to call him to do. Looking back, Pastor Voss said his education was "just extraordinary."¹ He commented how school taught him how to analyze situations and bring them under the microscope of God's Word. He said that dorm life and school taught, "taught to get along with not only peers, but also teachers and instructors, and the proper relationships to maintain."² He felt that he got excellent training also through the employment he had during school and the summer months at the grocery store. Here he also learned how to relate to people and get along with them.

After graduation, the Lord called Carl to serve two congregations. One congregation was in Beatrice, Nebraska; the other was five miles outside of the community. The Lord continued to train his servant for bigger responsibilities in the five years he served in Beatrice. Pastor Voss recounted how valuable those years were.

I'm really grateful that I was able to begin my ministry in that kind of setting, because that really prepared me for the work I was called here to do in Green Bay when I was called to start this congregation from scratch. Had I received that kind of call upon graduation from the Seminary, I know I would have just bungled due to overwhelmness, being a neophyte, and having a lot of rough edges that needed to be honed down. My years in Beatrice, Nebraska, accomplished that purpose. So that when I accepted the call here in Green Bay, I felt I was prepared to do so.³

In addition to being a pastor at St. Mark's in Green Bay, Pastor Voss was elected to served on various boards before he was elected to be district president. First he was an officer in the missionary conference where he was, then served as its chairman for two years. Later he was elected to the Board of Support in 1967.⁴ From 1968 to 1974, Pastor Voss was elected to a

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 1967 WELS Yearbook

number of positions. He was chairman of the Constitution and Legislation Committee for the Northern Wisconsin (NW) District. He was on the Stewardship board for the district and had the huge responsibility of being visiting elder for the Fox River Valley Conference.¹ At the time when he started as visiting elder, what we today might call a circuit pastor, he was responsible for 50 congregations. It was during these six years that Pastor Voss let the conference know that this number of congregations was too much for one man to handle as visiting elder. So the conference made plans to divide the conference into the six circuits it has today.

All these positions the Lord used to prepare his servant for the office of district president. Pastor Voss, himself, commented that serving as a visiting elder was a very good experience and one that he really appreciated. One thing he learned as visiting elder which helped him later as a district president in his dealings with congregations was that,

You couldn't put everybody into the same pigeon hole. Each one had it's own unique situation, unique privileges, unique opportunities, unique problems, unique difficulties, so you couldn't lump them all together and say one policy fits all. You had to treat each one of them individually. Work with them and help them see what would be in the best interests of the kingdom, what would serve best in their mission as a congregation, what would serve best to bring glory to the Savior.²

Throughout the years leading up to Pastor Voss being elected as district president one can see the Lord's hand ~~involved~~. The Lord gave Pastor Voss God fearing parents to instruct, guide and encourage him to do his best and leave the idea of becoming a pastor as an option. The Lord gave Pastor Voss an extraordinary education to give him the tools to carry out the task he would be called on to do. In all this the Lord mixed in numerous ^{educational} educating experiences that would serve His purposes later. By 1974 the Lord had prepared his servant for a task others saw him capable of doing, the task of serving of the Northern Wisconsin District as its president.

¹ WELS Yearbook, 1968-1974

² Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

II. His servant serves as president

Pastor Voss was elected district president in 1974 and served for 20 years until 1994.

What exactly then did Pastor Voss do as a district president? In answering that question it is important that one understands what ^{the} duties of the district president are. The constitution says that the district president is to represent the district whenever he is called upon to do so. He is to serve as a member of the synod's conference of presidents and to also serve on the assignment committee. There ^{are} is any number of duties then to be done when a district president wears any of those three hats (For a detailed listing of the duties of the district president cf. Appendix A on the *Rights and Duties of the District Officers*.) A district president handles many details. A good example of this is the President's Report to his district for a district's convention. The DP reports all transfer of pastors and teachers, installations, anniversaries and the agenda for the convention. There are also many of other duties. The district president is responsible for filling out call lists, getting ready for assignment committee meetings, attending COP meetings, writing letters on assorted matters, and sending congratulations to congregations, schools, pastors and teachers for anniversaries. The DP must also sign documents. It is obvious that the DP must do a lot of administrative work. Now that we have an idea of what the "workhorses" of the synod are responsible to do, I will look at how Pastor Carl Voss carried out his responsibilities as DP.

The constitution of the WELS allows the DP to suspend a member of the synodical membership for cause. Cause can be anything from being guilty of scandalous conduct to being guilty of teaching false doctrine. Pastor Voss never recalled that he officially had to carry through with such discipline. But he did say, "I always let the individual know that that was an option that was open to me, however I wanted to have it resolved before such a step had to be

taken. Either resolved by the individual or the congregation."¹ Pastor Voss always felt the primary responsibility rests with the calling body.

They're the ones who called the individual. The Lord led them to call that person. The person accepting the call obligates himself or herself to fulfill the call which that congregation has stated. What I try to do always is to see to it that both the congregation and the called worker would recognize the uniqueness of that position which the Lord has given to that called worker and answers the obligations of that calling.²

Pastor Voss said in cases of discipline he would ask the circuit pastor to address the case first since that would be proper procedure. Pastor Voss said that his basic role was advice and counsel. He would work with the man on the spot. He gave this basic advice to the circuit pastor, "If it comes to the point where you feel you can't handle it or it's bigger than you can handle, I'll get myself involved. But until then, I want you to carry the ball and I'll be here for advice and counsel."³ He then revealed the wisdom behind this procedure when he said,

When the DP comes in there is always the fear on the part of the person being admonished that higher authority is coming down hard on him. They often see the circuit pastor more as a peer and feel a little more comfortable perhaps. Secondly, I really didn't want to become involved unless I had to, because I recognized that if some kind of discipline action had to be taken, that person would have a right to appeal, and that person would hardly want to appeal to me if I was involved in that discipline case. He would think I was biased already and think I wouldn't see to it that he get a fair shake with the review of the situation.⁴

President Voss was thankful that the Lord always gave him a good core of circuit pastors to work with because St. Mark's congregation was growing, and he said they needed the attention of a pastor. As a result, he was somewhat limited in his involvement with other congregations. Often what maybe another DP might handle himself, President Voss said he would often have

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

the circuit pastor handle as his representative. He was also very grateful to the vice presidents who volunteered to help out in any way they could. "I never had to twist their arms to do anything, they willingly did so."¹

President Voss said the most time consuming task for him as DP was the process of making up a call list. Whenever a request would come to him for a call list for a pastor, he would go through the entire roster of pastors listed in the synod yearbook. He said as went through the yearbook he would jot down names of individuals. He then would come up with a list of approximately a hundred names out of the 1200 in the book. He would look at those hundred names, study them and get a little more information on them from the files he had on hand.

From there I would narrow it down to 50 or 30, something of that nature. Then I would give serious consideration to those 50 or 30, and as I found helpful, I would call the individual's circuit pastor or district president to get further information on an individual. Finally I would narrow it down to about 10, and then to the four I would want to submit to the congregation.²

Many of the pastors I talked to within the district had a lot of confidence in the call lists President Voss submitted to the congregations. Although each case was different, President Voss said the whole procedure he used to come up with a call list took about 50 hours each time! The love President Voss showed for the congregations he served was evident in every hour of work he put into the call lists. I personally was amazed at the number of hours he put in to the call lists. In response to this he said, "I just felt that I owed it to the congregation to be as careful as I possibly could and seeing to it that the persons I proposed and the needs that presented themselves at the congregation would balance."³

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

As was stated earlier a person could only imagine how much work it is for each DP to prepare for their district convention. President Voss expressed that it was a lot work. He said in the last couple of years the computer really helped. One time consuming process that was not mentioned above was the lists he had to choose for people to serve on various floor committees. This was a long process because he would have to submit the list to the vice presidents and to the district council for approval. This took time because President Voss didn't want to always have the same people serving on the same committees year after year. Another big job for the DP is that he has to get all the reports from the various boards and committees and then edit them and prepare them for publication.

For a synod convention, the workload was not quite as heavy. Each DP is to submit a list of those in the district that should be received into the membership of the synod. There are no other required duties unless a DP has been asked to serve on a special committee. Pastor Voss served on the Steering Committee and served the last six years as Parliamentarian.

When I asked him specifically how much time he put in as DP, President Voss said he figured out of 365 days a year, he put in 80 days as DP.

As leaders in our synod and districts, the DP often has to deal with controversies within our synod or district. President Voss was no exception. As a member of the Conference of Presidents (COP), he worked with the COP on different issues. One controversy^{that} came up^{and} that is still going on in some parts of our synod is the proper understanding of the Scriptural roles of men and women in God's world. This issue came up when the question was raised concerning women instructors at DMLC and women instructors at WLC. When the issue arose the COP was asked to appoint a committee to deal with the issue. Then Professor Wayne Mueller served as

chairman of that committee. President Voss served on a sub committee that met with the ad hoc committee. The sub committee discussed the wording and terminology with the ad hoc committee. This was the extent of President Voss's involvement with the document produced. He noted that his district never had any real problems concerning the roles of men and women.

The biggest controversy that President Voss had to deal with as district president was the Protes'tant controversy that began at St. John's of East Bloomfield, near Fremont, Wisconsin with Pastor Floyd Brand and ended with Pastor Robert Christman at St. Paul's, Green Bay. This was the most recent conflict our synod has had with the Protes'tants. Pastor Robert Hein who was his vicar at one time said that this controversy was a very difficult one for President Voss. Pastor Gerald Free also knew that this controversy was a difficult one.¹ Because of the complexity of the situation and for the reader to get a good understanding of this controversy, I will mainly quote President Voss as he described ^{the} situation and how he as district president handled it. The controversy started when Pastor Floyd Brand and Pastor Robert Christman objected to evangelism work that was being done in the synod. President Voss recounted that,

Their objection was that the evangelism committee was trying to program the work of the Holy Spirit, and they were trying to hamstring the operations of the Holy Spirit to work just according to those methods. They objected vehemently to the methods that were suggested for use. They objected on the basis of wording that was used in the Talk About the Savior Manual when the first ones had come out. We had to agree that there were perhaps statements that were misleading and that they then were changed. But both pastors hung on to their contention that we were still trying to program the Holy Spirit. Word of their concerns reached the Protes'tant Conference and there was an article in the *Faith Life* which praised these two men for standing up against the synod and what it was doing, with the result that these two men started attending Protes'tant Conference meetings. Of the two Brand, was the one who espoused Protes'tant thinking quite prominently in his congregational work. There were those at St. John's, East Bloomfield, that were becoming quite concerned where he would accuse members of his congregation of not showing genuine repentance.

¹ Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, August, 1994.

Questions were then addressed to me (President Voss), 'How can we handle this?,' and so forth.

Finally, the circuit pastor and district officers decided it would be best to have an open meeting where these concerns could be aired. I'll never forget that!! The first one to raise any question- of course I was under the assumption that the issues that were going to be talked about at this meeting would be the way in which Pastor Brand was conducting his ministry at that congregation, but the first question that was raised, was raised by Pastor Brand himself. His first question was, 'Why does the Wisconsin Synod take a position against the Protes'tants?' So he came right out with that and I wasn't really prepared to go in depth on that. Thankfully, I had done some reading beforehand on Protes'tants so I was able to give him some answers. But I wasn't able to explain in depth all the differences between Protes'tants and the Wisconsin Synod. There were some Protes'tants in attendance, also Pastor Robert Christman who was pastor at St. Paul's Green Bay at the time." At the conclusion of the meeting, I made it quite clear that the voters would have to make a choice because now it had become quite clear that Pastor Brand was espousing Protes'tant causes and not Wisconsin Synod position. The congregation was now going to have to make a decision. 'Are they going to support Pastor Brand in his ministry or were they going to support the Wisconsin Synod?'

As a result of that meeting, the congregation ultimately decided that Pastor Brand would have to resign. Then Bob Christman accused me (President Voss) of not being brotherly with Pastor Brand, of kicking him out of the ministry (Even though it was the congregation's decision). So then Pastor Christman started writing documents, and passing them around his congregation members, attacking me. It was then that I knew he had lost his cause. When he was dealing with the issues on the basis of what God's Word had to say, then there was a real concern that we speak the truth clearly. But then when he started attacking me personally, that to me was an indication that he had lost his cause. He lost his case. Because when a person loses his case, then they start attacking personalities. I mean, I came right out and told him, I said, 'go ahead and attack me as much as you want, it doesn't bother me one bit because I'm expendable, I'm a human being. If that's what you want to do, then go right ahead, it won't phase me one bit. I'm not going to respond to your attacks on me personally.'¹

In the President's Report to the district in 1982, President Voss wrote,

He [Pastor Christman] was advised November 6, 1980 that if he felt justified in his accusations, he had the right to file formal charges with the district for its consideration and action. Instead he chose to publish a document dated November 14, 1980 for distribution to St. Paul Congregation and to others in which he charged the Synod of showing itself adverse to any real and pointed preaching of repentance, that as an organization we present ourselves as the only right people, that we are unprincipled and self-serving, that we put ourselves, our

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

own prosperity , our holiness and our own power to bless above the real Christ, and that we display the spirit of the antichrist. In meetings of the congregation January 12 and 19, 1981 it became evident that Pastor Christman would not withdraw the charges.¹

Then finally it came to a meeting in Green Bay. That was a packed meeting, and of course Pastor Christman has tremendous gifts, a gifted individual, and he had a large following. Again the ultimate decision had to be made by the congregation. The congregation wanted me to take action over against him, to do their work for them. I said that would not be the orderly way. 'You are the one who called him, you are the one who should make the judgment concerning his ministry.' I said, 'we'll help you, we'll advise you, but we want you to make that decision.' The vote that came out, as I recall, was 82-79, only 3 votes separating!²

I asked him if he was getting a little nervous there, and he said "Yes, naturally. I had already before the meeting thought about it. Even if the vote should go the way of supporting Pastor Christman, I still felt that what we as district officers had said, and done, was the God pleasing thing to do. So we just left it in the Lord's hands."³

President Voss's reverence for the divine call and love for his Savior shown when he was asked, "What was the most challenging thing about being a district president?" To which President Voss responded that it was the call lists,

Particularly when you have seven to ten call lists to get ready, that was always the most challenging thing. You wanted to be very careful that you upheld the dignity of the divine call in preparing these call lists. I wanted to be sure I was helping this congregation the best I possibly could. Because I always let the congregation know from my perspective any one of these four men is fully qualified to serve as pastors of this congregation. I was not going to come there with the name of only one person that I felt qualified and three that I felt unqualified. I felt that that was really stacking the deck and really wouldn't give the Holy Spirit room to operate there. So I wanted to give them names of individuals that then they would need the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them which would be the one who would receive the call.⁴

¹ President's Report recorded in the Proceedings of the 33rd Biennial Convention, Northern Wisconsin District, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1982. pp. 8-9.

² Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The most challenging events he recalled as trying to rally the troops behind the synodical fund drives, Reaching Out and Lift High the Cross. He would have to answer a lot of questions and always strove to keep the unity of the Spirit.

On the other spectrum, President Voss spoke of the joys of being a district president. He said the most rewarding thing was serving as a member of the Synod's Assignment Committee. He said there was a lot of preliminary work studying the characterizations of all the candidates from both DMLC and the Seminary. President Voss thought since you didn't know the candidates personally, you had to do a thorough job of studying the candidates. According to Pastor Free, President Voss was, "always well prepared. Not only in studying the biographicals and all the information, but also having a pretty good knowledge of all the congregations. It was an encouragement to see to that you were as well prepared as he was."¹ President Voss said that watching the Assignment Committee work was an uplifting thing.

The primary thing is the good of the kingdom. It's a very wholesome, Christian spirit and attitude that prevails on the Assignment Committee. It's very intense, but when you are all finished and the synod president goes through the entire roster and says, 'so and so is assigned to such and such a place,' and when he is all finished, you can't help but have that feeling of joy that the Holy Spirit, - 'Yup, put him in the right place, that's where the Holy Spirit wanted him to go!' That's the most rewarding!²

It is obvious that the DPs spend a lot of time at their duties as DP. One might wonder how they balance their duties as a pastor and as a district president. President Voss said he talked with the leadership of the congregation before he accepted the office of DP. He told them that it would put more of a burden on them. The congregation accepted it and from what Pastor James Danell, who served with President Voss for two years, said he didn't feel that the

¹ Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, August, 1994.

² Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

congregation ever regretted it.¹ President Voss not only was blessed with fine brothers in the public ministry to help him, he was also blessed with help in the congregation.

That was another amazing thing that I have seen in my years as district president, that whenever the workload of district president prevented me from doing something in the congregation, the Lord always saw to it that there was somebody in the congregation that was blessed with the gift, the spiritual gift to assume the leadership position and take over. Just amazing!! There were things that they couldn't handle, and it was probably the Lord's will, things that would have to wait until they could be handled.²

President Voss gave his congregation a great deal of attention, they never took a back seat as Pastor Danell attested, "He never neglected his work at the congregation for the sake of the district. He wasn't gone all that much."³

As one can gather from what has been presented, it becomes obvious that there are a lot of experiences behind 20 years of service. When I asked President Voss what had changed in 20 years, he said the office was still the same. The change has been that today there are more cases and casework. He talked how we are living in more complex times and there are more issues facing our people. To this he advised that pastors be on their guard and ask for advice and counsel on complex issues.

President Voss commented when asked ~~on~~ what qualities make a good district president. He responded, "First and foremost would have to be a devotion to the Word and ministry and joy, grateful that the Lord has given us that privilege. It also asks for organizational abilities, ability to communicate, ability to listen, ability to share, these are the most important."⁴

¹ Interview with Pastor James Danell, August, 1994.

² Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

³ Interview with Pastor James Danell, August, 1994.

⁴ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

As a [§]spiritual leader of our synod, I asked President Voss what he did for [§]spiritual growth. He replied that he would have his own devotions daily and had his own system. Devotion was the first thing he did every morning. In addition, President Voss made it a point to interact with the brothers in the ministry. He would regularly attend circuit meetings, conferences and participate on writing papers.

When President Voss was confronted with especially difficult times, he said he always received encouragement from the Word and from associates. He enjoyed having his office between church and the school in Green Bay. "It's accessible to congregation members, it's accessible to the kids, to the students, and then being able to listen to the students sing some of the songs they sing. . . . Also fellow members stopping in and giving you encouragement, thanking you for this or that or whatever. That was always a good boost."

President Voss, although a very busy man, didn't believe in burnout.

Really I don't believe in burn out. I really don't believe there is such a thing as burn out. I can believe there are periods of depression or periods of disappointment, yeah. But from my perspective, I never really felt I had to worry about burn out. If I got to that point where I felt that I was drained, well then, just go to the word! The promises of the word, the Psalms, Jesus' discourses in John, particularly chapters 13, 14, 15. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Tremendous ^Words! Sometimes some are asked to do more than they have the abilities to do, or have overextended themselves. But that is not burnout.¹

One important area of help that President Voss received from the Lord which some may overlook is the gift of a wife and family. Without the blessing of a supportive wife and family, a pastor can really be hindered in his service to the Lord. President Voss had nothing but praise for the family the Lord had given him. Concerning his wife, Margaret, he said, "She was a tremendous help. She raised four boys and did a lot of the work a father does. She was very

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

patient and never complained to the children about anything concerning my long hours. She supported my decisions even when she didn't agree with me. She was very good at keeping things confidential."¹ Mrs. Voss was his secretary and so she may have known many things that were going on, but she always directed people to her husband, the pastor. From my conversation with President Voss it was obvious that he had the utmost love and respect for his wife. His family as a whole also was a,

Tremendous help, not that they actively did something to help me out, but understanding, appreciating the fact that I had certain responsibilities that had to be carried out. I know it was hard, for at least the two younger boys when they were going to college and the Sem. I really wasn't able to attend a lot of the events in which they were involved. . . . I know they would have loved to have seen me but couldn't, they just couldn't. But they understood. They never held it against me for not coming and so forth. In that way, they gave me a great deal of help. . . . Whenever I saw that I could have family time, I would make the best possible use of it. I wouldn't insist that I have to have my nap. I'm not a golfer. I'm not a bowler. I'm not a fisherman in the sense that I had to get away and do these things on my own or with someone else. I always felt that any time I had I wanted to do things with my family. Any time I did get off, we would make it a point to do things as a family. We have some good memories of those times!²

From these many accounts from President Voss, I believe that one can get a feel for the type of district president and person he was. He has shown what his duties were, what some of the controversies he faced were and how he faced them. He has shown us how he worked with his circuit pastors, the people of the congregation, and how his family helped him. He told of his challenges and joys as a district president. One thing that shown through my whole interview and in every conversation I had with President Voss, was his love for the Word, his Savior, and people. The Lord gave his servant, Carl Voss, a heart that cared about the needs of His sheep. This was seen by many around him.

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, August, 1994.

² Ibid.

III. His servant's service is seen

To get a more complete picture of President Voss as a DP and an idea of how others saw him, I interviewed James Danell who was his graduate assistant for two years in Green Bay. I interviewed Pastor Gerald Free who was a former district president of the Nebraska District and worked with President Voss on the District Praesidium. He has known President Voss since his Sophomore year in college. I also interviewed Pastor Mark Voss, who is his youngest son.

If there was one thing that stood out with everyone I interviewed and talked to, they all said President Voss was very organized. I did ask each of the pastors I interviewed to characterize President Voss. It is interesting to see what things all three men observed and the different things they saw. Pastor Danell said,

He was always very calm; very level headed. Always appeared to be very much in control, to know what he wanted to do and to do it. He always gave real wise advice. He always seemed to size up a situation just immediately. He appears as a person and as a pastor, to be a little scary. He's very imposing. There were a number of people who were scared of him, and yet, he was extremely nice; very friendly; very considerate; very interested in people. He never of course forgot a name. He rarely forgot who you were, or who you were related to, or what you did. He would always help if he could. As far as a pastor, he was top notch. He was very organized. The same with his work as a DP. In district meetings he always seemed to be in control, always seemed to size up a question pretty well and never really bumbled for an answer.¹

When I asked to Pastor Danell to explain why Pastor Voss came across as imposing? He replied, "It's his size. He's a big guy. His voice is very loud and just the way he carries himself. He's very confident, not in a bad way." Pastor Danell continued,

The congregation had a great deal of respect for him. They leaned on him a great deal. They really didn't want to make any important decision without hearing from him and what his advice would be. He had tremendous respect as far as the congregation goes. He was admired for the tremendous time he put in. He was respected for the guidance he gave the congregation, especially during early and lean years.

¹ Interview with Pastor James Danell, August, 1994.

Pastor Free characterized him in this way,

As a person, a very fun loving person that a lot of people didn't get to see. An enjoyable person to be around. As a DP a little more starchy or whatever else you want to say, a little more firm. On the District Praesidium when we were relaxed, he was very relaxed. But when it was working time, he worked extremely hard. During the six or seven years on the Praesidium I saw him relax because we roomed together. I really enjoyed those times.

We worked on district matters together in an always forthright and honest manner. He was always very business like and official. He was always very well organized. He could always get a hold of anything at a minute's notice and he always treated people with respect! He was a good student of the Scriptures. A tremendous respect for the gospel, and realizing that it's gospel motivation that makes things move, rather than law. Because of his good understanding of the Scriptures, he probably at times would be ready to take short cuts where others were maybe not ready to take because of not grasping the whole Scripture as he did.¹

His son characterized him as a man of,

A lot of integrity, very well rounded, good sense of humor, extremely dedicated. If he had a fault, I think it's that he came from the old school where he did everything himself. He never had a secretary, he snowblowed the walks in the winter, and he watered the plants and all that stuff. He did the bulletin. He did the newsletter. That was just kind of his style. He liked to serve and is a hard, hard worker, a really hard worker. As DP, he never discussed it much. I know there were some sticky situations. His style is one that, 'doesn't want to cause a lot of commotion; doesn't want a lot of the lime-light.'²

Pastor Danell made an observation that matched ^{Voss's} his son's. Both described his organized style and systematic ways of doing things. They both commented on his daily schedule, Pastor

Mark Voss said,

He's extremely systematic. His day would start, he would get up maybe 6:00, 6:15 A.M., Have breakfast at 7:00 A.M. and walk across the street right after. Come home at exactly 11:55 A.M. , go back at exactly 12:30 P.M. come home at exactly 4:55 P.M., go back at exactly 6:30 P.M. and usually come home at 9:30 or 10:00 P.M. and that's is long as I can remember, it's been that way.³

¹ Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, August, 1994.

² Interview with Pastor Mark Voss, February, 1995.

³ Ibid.

Pastor Mark Voss ran into Synod President, Karl Gurgel and President Gurgel had this to say about President Carl Voss, "on the one hand he always kept them on straight line as far as orthodoxy is concerned, but on the other hand, he could easily break up a tense meeting with a funny line or a joke or something like that. He said they missed having him around. He was respected, but able to relate to those people on all those other levels."¹

I asked each Pastor to give what they saw as President Voss's strengths. Pastor Danell mentioned,

His control of names and the people that went with those names. His control of facts as to what was going on as a synod. His tremendous ability, in my mind, to immediately size up a situation and to know what the proper response was. There was no bumbling from him ever that I recall. A very decisive person and generally when he gave you some advice you can take it to the bank.²

Pastor Free said,

One thing that will be remembered is his insistence on staying in the Word at all times and doing things decently and in order. It was one thing you could always count on, he would have his Scriptures out and point to the verses. He had a keen knowledge of the original languages, which came out in our discussions. In the Northern Wisconsin District when you heard him speak, normally it was not what might be expedient for the time, but what would God want us to do in this situation.³

His son said his father was extremely intelligent and very much a people person.

As the Lord gives us all different strengths, he also gives us weaknesses. It is often our weaknesses that force to rely on our Savior when our sinful nature would rather just go its own way. The Lord also gave President Carl Voss some weaknesses. Pastor Danell explained President Voss's weaknesses in this way,

Carl didn't spend a lot of time out among the members, visiting them in their homes, and everything was always done exactly the same every year. He pulled

¹ Interview with Pastor Mark Voss, Feb., 1995.

² Interview with Pastor James Danell, Aug., 1994.

³ Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, Aug., 1994.

out the bulletin from three years ago and the one from last year and used that to make the bulletin for this Sunday. I learned while organization is all right, it's a great thing, yet at the same time don't be afraid, or it's not wrong, if you do something a little differently this year than you did last year.¹

Pastor Free said,

He liked to handle many things by letter, and maybe that was necessary because of the number of congregations. I felt that on occasion he was a little bit weak on the personal contacts. . . . I think that that is just a difference in personality and work. [It was] possible [he was] just a little quick on judgment. He could listen to someone maybe just a little more than he was willing to.²

The final thing that was important to hear from these three pastors was how they felt President Voss influenced the Northern Wisconsin District or the synod in his years as a DP.

Pastor Danell had this to say,

Our district was never on the cutting edge of anything and I guess that would be reflective of Carl. I think our district has always been well ordered. I've only been in it four years, but I think that would be reflective of Carl. Many of the things you could say about him personally, you probably could say about the district.³

Pastor Free spoke of his leadership by always pointing to the word and keeping things in order. One can only speculate how his leading by example influenced those he led. His son said he, "influenced the synod through the people going into the ministry that he influenced. He led the Northern Wisconsin District by example. He didn't encourage things he didn't do. What you see is what you get. He practices what he preaches."⁴

Although I only served only one year in the Northern Wisconsin District as a vicar, there was no question that President Voss commanded respect by his loving caring actions and knowledge. He was the leader and everyone knew it. He was very business-like when it was time to work. I saw this, but also saw his sense of humor and his great love for his Lord. The

¹ Interview with Pastor James Danell, Aug., 1994.

² Interview with Pastor Gerald Free, Aug., 1994.

³ Interview with Pastor James Danell, Aug., 1994.

⁴ Interview with Pastor Mark Voss, Feb., 1995.

Lord gave Carl Voss the talents, abilities, strength and desire to serve him in the public ministry for over 40 years now, 20 of those years as a district president. As a student I marvel at the fact that here lies a man who has more experience in the office of the public ministry than I have in all of life, and then some. It should be no wonder then, that I wish to conclude my paper with the Lord's servant giving some advice and personal reflections to us members of the Church.

IV. How His servant sees our situation

In 40 years a lot of things can change. So I asked President Voss how things changed in the last 40 years in the pastoral ministry. To which President Voss said, "In general more is expected of pastors now than 40 years ago. More expected of him as far as congregational work and activities, has to conduct more Bible classes, has to be more on top of things, there are some congregations where they want the pastor to conduct all kinds of support groups and so forth."¹

In the Northern Wisconsin District, Pastor Voss had this to say,

Here is a positive change, I really think there is a closer knit feeling among the pastors of the district now than there was 40 years ago. Forty years ago that was the synodical controversy (referring to the break with LCMS). There were a lot of harsh words spoken and there was mistrust and many didn't get along with their brothers. But now there is a closer knit feeling among the pastors. We are united in our confession, we appreciate the doctrinal purity the Lord has blessed us with.²

Pastor Voss recalled how people have changed;

People are more scared than they were 30 or 40 years ago. People are apprehensive about life in general, about their families, about their job situations, about the economy, about the wars, about the riots, about crime. There is a lot more apprehension among people today than there was 40 years ago. People didn't have to think about those things. It's all Satan's work. To me it's just another indication of the latter times where Jesus says evil will abound until the end comes.³

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, Aug., 1994.

² Ibid.

³ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, Aug., 1994.

In response to changes that Pastor Voss observed in congregations he said, "Sad to say, I have found that more and more congregations are becoming more and more parochial, looking only at themselves, rather than at wider ministry. That's one of the reasons we have the budget crunches we have to face. It's a real struggle!"¹ When asked how to reverse this trend,

We have to just keep on preaching the gospel. Preaching the gospel and saying, 'look, look at the tremendous gifts and blessings the Lord has showered upon us.' Then we wait for the Holy Spirit to lead the people to respond to his message. Because the Lord is only pleased with those offerings that come from a heart filled with faith. I don't want to have people to give in order to meet a budget or to answer some crunch. But rather as thanks and praise to God.²

Pastor Voss also observed changes within our synod. "Synod has become more service oriented. In other words, providing greater assistance in health, in service, to all kinds of situations. Special ministries, evangelism, stewardship, and all the other things that now synod is providing."³

Pastor Voss had some warnings for pastors.

The one thing I feel a pastor has watch out for is that he doesn't come to trust himself more than the power of the Word. As though everything is up to him, and he has to figure out how to do this, and how to do that. It's all up to him to come up with the program, and it's up to him to come up with the right methods. All the weight is on him, instead of leading the people to appreciate the power of the Word. Because our society is all success oriented. You have to be able to show that you are successful. That, I think, is a real present danger we have to watch out for.⁴

Pastor Voss also had some words of warning for our synod.

They need to watch out for a weakening of our fellowship principles. And also weakening of our understanding of the authority of the Word of God. It could be very easy for us to slip into a situation ethics philosophy. Because the Lord wants the Church to operate from the gospel and not from the law, it's very easy then for a situation ethics philosophy to rule, namely where love is the all important thing.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

'If you got the 'love' then you can let anything go. You don't have to be so legalistic. You don't have to be so stuck on what the Word of God has to say.' That is a real danger, that is something our synod has to watch out for. There is a fine line between a gospel oriented ministry and legalism. A gospel oriented ministry will want to use the word as a guide. A gospel oriented ministry will want to point out what happened in the days in the Old Testament when there were those who decided to go their own way rather than live their commitment to the LORD. In a gospel oriented ministry you will want to help people appreciate the power of God's grace and the power of his love to lead them. And yet at the same time they will also want to abide by the instructions of Scripture to avoid evil.¹

Pastor Voss mentioned the strengths of our synod. We have a number of strengths. He said our commitment to the Word of God as the infallible, inerrant Word was one. Another is our excellent worker training system, our understanding of mission; what we are here for. The leadership we have in synod is another strong point he talked about. "I feel that we have some excellent persons who are serving the church in the most commendable fashion."²

Commenting on our synod's weaknesses he said we have,

A laxness in using the gifts the Lord has given us in the best possible way. I don't know if it is a hesitancy because of our rugged individualism, I don't know if it is a failing to appreciate all the gifts the Lord has given us. So often I feel that, and I myself have to put myself in that category, that we don't really use the gifts the Lord has given us to their fullest possible extent. Another would be a mistrust any member would express about what the synod is doing, in other words, not really getting behind the leadership of synod, let's move on, let's move forward. There always has to be those who question this and question that, suspect hidden motives for this and hidden motives for that.³

When asked whether he thought the office of district president should become a full time position in our synod, Pastor Voss said in the bigger districts there definitely is enough work to do and enough duties that he could see it happening especially now in a time when the trials and difficulties of being a pastor are increasing. But he didn't like it. In fact, when asked by others,

¹ Interview with Pastor Carl Voss, Aug., 1994.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

if he would serve as DP if it was a full time position, he said, "I would ask not to be considered."¹ He said you lose contact with the people. He said you miss the joys of counseling people, of instructing people, of being with people in their time of need, of bringing God's comfort at the time of a funeral.

Pastor Voss was a servant of the Lord in every respect. One can see it in his dedication to his Savior and the love of the Savior he reflects in his everyday actions. A person has to thank God that he gave his Church such a fine servant and example for us all to follow. His example spoke much louder than his words. All four of his sons studied for the public ministry and they all are currently serving in the public ministry. His son Mark had this to say about his father; "I never in my life heard him speak ill of the ministry, of the congregation, or of his synod. It's what he didn't say, so I was left thinking, gee, why wouldn't I want to do that. The guy is incredibly happy, loves his work, the people appreciate him because he is a dedicated worker."² May the Lord give us all this type of joy in ministry.

It was a joy to see how our gracious God used Carl Voss as a district president. I have learned and grown through this study. I can't see how anyone can't. I think we all need to thank God for these men who work as our district presidents, and pray for them that they may faithfully carry out the tasks they have been called upon to do. May God grant us more faithful servants, servants of the word, the type of servant Pastor Carl Voss is.

¹ Phone conversation with Pastor Carl Voss, April 30, 1995.

² Interview with Pastor Mark Voss, Feb., 1995.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Danell, Rev. James. Personal interview. Aug. 1994.

Free, Rev. Gerald. Personal interview. Aug. 1994.

Voss, Rev. Carl. Personal interview. 15 Aug. 1994.

Voss, Rev. Carl. Phone interview. 30 April. 1995.

Voss, Rev. Carl. "*President's Report.*" *Proceedings: Thirty-Third
Biennial Convention: Northern Wisconsin District: Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Synod* June 1982: 8-9.

Voss, Rev. Mark. Personal interview. 8 Feb. 1995.

*The Constitution and Bylaws of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran
Synod.* Milwaukee, WI. 1971.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Yearbook, 1967-74. Milwaukee:
Northwestern Publishing House, 1967-74.

ARTICLE VI

Rights and Duties of the District Officers

Section 1. The President.

a) The President shall represent the district, shall supervise the execution of its resolutions, and shall sign all documents issuing from the district.

b) The president is an advisory member of every board, committee, and commission of the district. District presidents within whose jurisdiction the institutions of the Synod are situated shall

be advisory members of the governing boards.

c) The president shall provide for the ordination of such candidates for the ministry who shall have graduated from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary or such who shall have otherwise qualified and who shall have received and accepted a call from within the confines of the district. He shall also authorize the installation of other pastors and of male teachers called by congregations within the district. He shall issue letters of transfer to such pastors, professors, and male teachers as shall enter another synod in fellowship with the Synod.

d) The president shall supervise the work of the district visiting elders.

e) With the concurrence of the other district officers, the president shall have the power to fill vacancies in the office of secretary and second vice-president. He shall also have the power to fill vacancies on all boards and committees of the district. In case of a vacancy in the office of visiting elder, the Praesidium shall appoint a visitor. All appointments made are for the remainder of the unexpired term.

f) With the concurrence of the two vice-presidents, the president shall have the right to suspend for cause a Synod member from the synodical fellowship. Unless an appeal is pending, he shall submit a complete report of his action to the district at its next convention.

g) With the consent of the vice-presidents, the president may call a special convention of the district, or change the time and place of a convention.

h) At each regular convention of the district the president shall submit a written report on the activities of his office during the past biennium.

Section 2. The first vice-president shall take the place of the president whenever the latter shall be prevented from discharging his duties, and in case of a vacancy in the office of president shall serve as president for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Section 3. In case of a vacancy in the office of first vice-president, the second vice-president shall serve as first vice-president for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Section 4. The Secretary

a) The secretary shall record the minutes of the convention, and, with the concurrence of the president and according to the instructions of the district, prepare a report thereon for publication.

b) The secretary shall sign all documents issuing from the district; shall keep a list of all congregations, pastors, professors, and male teachers who are members of the district; shall receive the statistical reports from the pastors; shall announce all district conventions not less than six (6) weeks previous to their convening in the official organs of the Synod; and with the consent of the president may appoint such assistants as may be