

*Pastor Carl W. Voss:
Redefining the "Lambeau Legend"*

Chris Esmay
Professor Brenner
Senior Church History Project
April 27, 2000

Pastor Carl Voss: Redefining the “Lambeau Legend”

Pastor Carl Voss, born September 22, 1929 in Saginaw, MI, is a man whom the Lord has blessed with tremendous insight, knowledge and innumerable gifts. I first became interested in Pastor Voss when I served my vicar year in Ft. Worth, Texas. At the time, the subject of this paper was serving a semi-retired position in Scroggins, Texas (the third congregation he served in 44 years of active ministry). I will always remember him from our circuit meetings and pastor conferences. When he arose to speak everyone listened – a theological Alan Greenspan, if you will. My experiences in Texas with him, my more recent research of the man’s work, and finally the interview conducted with him in his Watertown home have all led me to summarize Pastor Voss as a man thoroughly trained in, equipped with, and constantly exhibiting a passion for the Word. His son, Pastor David Voss, echoes these sentiments:

I realize that my father’s ministry has had an impact on a lot of people, but it certainly is not the result of any systematized approach on his part. There is nothing fancy or flashy about my dad. Just steady work with God’s unfailing Word.¹

This command of and love for the Scriptures is clear throughout the reports he gave as district president of the Northern Wisconsin District from 1974-1994. The following excerpts from his first and last years as district president define his approach to ministry:

The real beginning of wisdom does not depend on how others or how we see ourselves; the real beginning of wisdom is to see ourselves as God sees us. God’s Word shows that we are dead and helpless in sin and transgression. The Word of God teaches us above all to see and know our God as the Lord who has so loved us sinners that in Jesus’ blood and righteousness we are God’s children and heirs of eternal salvation.²

We came into the world totally and completely separated from him because of sin. Not only that, but we came into the world belonging to the old evil foe, satan himself. We were satan’s disciples, his lackeys and dupes, as far away from Christ as heaven is from hell with a great chasm separating them which no one could cross on his own. But in his great mercy God provided for us the crossover, the cross of his one and only Son, whom he sent from heaven, born of a woman to be the sinless God-man who alone could serve as our substitute, doing what we could never do....³

Indeed, Pastor Voss is not about appearance. He is not about appeal. He is not about the “cutting-edge.” He *is* about law and gospel. There is much for us to learn from this. As human beings, so unfortunately permeated by the sinful human nature, the last

¹ Email from dlpjamvoss@worldnet.att.net to esmay@mindspring.com, 4/15/2000, 7:52 P.M. (cf. App. C).

² 29th Biennial District Convention proceedings of the Northern Wisconsin District, 1974, p. 7.

thing we do is “approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). We tend to look to ourselves, to others, to society in general for some sort of self-worth, satisfaction and serenity. When this happens in our personal lives and especially in ministry the result is always despair, despondency and even depression. I learned from Pastor Voss that the solution to these feelings is, as indicated from his statements cited above, to look to God’s Word. The solution is to review his promises, to memorize them, to cling tenaciously to them at all times.

While letting our light shine we cannot concentrate on what we are doing, on our own royal ego’s, but must have this end in view that with our good deeds we praise our Father in heaven. More than one light has gone out when the bearers of that light become more concerned about themselves, about how they appeared in the eyes of others, about the measure of applause they would get for themselves, rather than concerned about the glory of the Father of lights and the mercy he showed in calling us out of darkness into his marvelous light.⁴

God grant that I and others keep this in mind when God blesses us with happy times and when he blesses us with hard times.⁵

Pastor Voss had his share of difficult times while serving as district president. I was particularly interested in the problems he faced with Pastor Brand and Pastor Christman in Fremont and Green Bay respectively. As we discoursed about the events surrounding the issues these men raised against the WELS,⁶ once again I was impressed with the way he stood not on argumentation nor persuasion but the Word (note on the video his recollection of conversations with Pastor Christman). In fact, his close friend and associate of 4 years on the presidium of the Northern Wisconsin District, Pastor Gerald Free, had this to say regarding the way Pastor Voss dealt with strife and controversy:

President Voss showed excellent leadership abilities, and was known for his deep concern for doctrinal matters. It was our privilege to room together at out of town meetings, so we became very close friends. His concern for the truth of God’s Word and that all things be done decently was evident at all times. President Voss was asked to serve on numerous committees due to his concern for doctrine and good command of the original languages. It goes without saying that he was a respected leader... Not only did God give him a love for the truth of God’s Word, but also gave him the gift to preach God’s Word with clarity and dedication.

³ 39th Biennial District Convention proceedings of the Northern Wisconsin District, 1994, p. 4.

⁴ 35th Biennial District Convention proceedings of the Northern Wisconsin District, 1986, p. 6.

⁵ I was struck by a statement in Tappert’s Book of Concord which stated that the Holy Spirit works under cover of great human weakness (p. 532). What a comfort to know that despite our failures and inadequacies that LORD gets his work done. It is he and he alone who is our strength and our fortress (Ps 18). Let us not listen to our feelings but his feelings for us!! Let us not look to our power but his incomprehensible power coupled with his love that directs it for our benefit.

⁶ Cf. Appendix A, p. 66 (the 1982 Biennial District Convention proceedings).

Whenever doctrinal problems arose within a congregation, within an area, or among called workers, you could look to his leadership based solidly on God's Word.⁷

Another priceless gem I mined from my research of and interview with Pastor Voss was his deep-seated respect for our nation and for the synod. At times, we are tempted to bash the way our country and the way our synod is being run. We tend to complain rather than thank God for the variegated blessings he has given us through these two organizational structures. Pastor Voss, throughout his ministry, gave both public and private reminders to always pray prayers of thanksgiving for our nation and synod coupled with petitions for continued blessings on their operations. As pastors it is very important for us to do this in our study's as well as to encourage our members to do so in their personal time with the Lord in prayer. In the wake of America's bicentennial celebrations, Pastor Voss states:

...may God find us responding with thankful expressions for the rich mercies and favors with which He has blessed our land; may He move us to remember our nation in our prayers, pleading that He keep it in his grace-filled care. How dependent we are upon the blessed leadings of His grace for both our individual and national well-being!⁸

Pastor Voss' appreciation for our nation and synod is borne from a thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical and secular history. The latter is clear from his '76 report. The former is exemplified in his 1992 report to the Northern Wisconsin District in convention. Here he discussed at length the lessons learned from our forefathers who, 100 years prior, formed *The Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States*.⁹ Pastor Voss aptly pointed out that we do not learn just from the mistakes of the past. We also learn from the positive examples to be modeled in the future. My conversations with him again brought to my attention the importance of studying history and incorporating the lessons of history into our personal lives and into the operations of a congregation – always normed by the Word and the history God records for us here.

I was also moved by Pastor Voss' *attitude* toward the ministry of the gospel. Although his work schedule demanded 16 hours of the day, including his responsibilities to his presidency,¹⁰ family, parish and LES, he maintained a firm conviction that this was a

⁷ Letter from Pastor Gerald Free to Chris Esmay, dated April 18, 2000. Cf. Appendix B.

⁸ 30th Biennial District Convention proceedings, 1976, p. 5.

⁹ Cf. page 4 of interview questions.

¹⁰ Page 55 of the 1986 District Convention proceedings noted that Pastor Voss' congregation was the largest served by a district president up to that time – approximately 1200 souls! This in addition to other boards he served on as indicated by Pastor Gerald Free (cf. Appendix B).

privilege and not an obligation. The following is a telling summary of his approach to numerous “irons in the fire”:

Hence, we approach this whole matter of concern with the thanks that He has considered us worthy by His grace to take on additional responsibilities, and that He has assured us of His all-sufficient grace to meet them.¹¹

When I asked him how he was able to shuffle all the graces God entrusted to him, he responded by saying that the Lord made clear to him what need to be done that day. He did not worry about other duties that piled up. He simply focused on what was before him. When he went home to spend time with the family he did not bring those items into the house. Surely, a good reminder for us all! Often I become so tightly wound about all that needs to be done that it is, ironically, hard to do anything. Pastor Voss helped me to see that it is imperative to work in a concentrated, piecemeal fashion. More importantly, his words instilled in me that ministry is not a burden. It is not a job. It is a priceless privilege. It is a blessing in every way. To appropriate this attitude we must begin (or at least incorporate into some part of) our day with a diligent study of the Word – God’s conduit for peace of mind and power to accomplish *his* blessed work. I pray that I, together with all who read this paper, remember the words of the Apostle Peter in his first epistle, 5:2, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – ***not because you must, but because you are willing***, as God wants you to be...eager to serve” (emphasis added). God grant we approach each day and each task with the recognition that all he gives us to do is a grace, a gift from the overflowing *favor Dei*.

An ongoing problem that Pastor Voss dealt with in his tenure as district president and that we face today is low church attendance. I asked him how one might seek to alleviate the disturbing percentages our synod publishes every year. He replied by saying that it all begins in the study. The pastor must faithfully read, study, digest and apply to his own *sitz im leben* God’s Word. We are to diligently prepare our sermons, not flooding the flock with every gem in the text but narrowing in on one key point that all, even a 1st grader, can understand. This was something I needed to hear. For I tend to run the gamut, trying to incorporate God’s entire counsel into every sermon. It is with that key point that we are to exposit, illustrate and apply in such a way that people see what Jesus means to them. To such a preacher they certainly will return Sunday after Sunday. After all, God has placed us in the pulpit. He has given us the task to preach his gospel to the best of our

¹¹ 31st Biennial District Convention proceedings, 1978, p.8-9.

ability without placing stumbling blocks in the Spirit's path. It is God who has also given us his promises to bless our efforts (Is 55:10). God grant that we never neglect work in the Word – that which has “given us everything we need for life and godliness...” (2 Peter 1:3). It truly boggles the mind, as Pastor Voss pointed out to me, that God would do all this and that he would use us in this most holy task despite that fact that every member of our body is used in service to sin. How can we not be moved to share this love with others, a love so high, a love so deep, a love so intense! Let us follow the words of Christ's cousin, the Apostle John, in his first epistle, 4:16, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”

There are many times in our lives when all of us, even those who work with the Word for a living, wonder why we are here. At times we question our purpose for existence, longing for peace of mind in the tasks we have undertaken. Personally and corporately with our congregations we need to ask and answer these questions. The answer is encapsulated in the synod's, congregation's and individual's “mission statement.” In the 1982 president's report to the district, I noticed that Pastor Voss delineated the latter.¹² In his home, I asked him to summarize for me the purpose we are here. Exhibiting a command of Dr. Luther's writings, he quickly pointed to Luther's explanation to the second article. In his typical mellifluous style Pastor Voss stated:

He [the Lord] has blessed us with the faith that grasps its priceless gifts of full forgiveness for all sins, full freedom from all fears, and full deliverance from all death and damnation that we might live as His own in His Kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. He has chosen us...to participate with Him in the blessed activity of extending the Gospel's saving rule and influence in the hearts and lives of all whom the King has redeemed. What marvelous mercy! What gratifying grace! What lavish love!¹³

My reading of and conversation with Pastor Voss taught me to remember this personally. He taught me to remember this publicly in our sermons, Bible classes, counseling sessions and other points of contact with members who often ask the great question “why?”. The words of Dr. Luther provide the brilliant answer based on the greater brilliance of the Word!

There are many other lessons learned from Pastor Voss I could delineate here. However, I would like to conclude with the concluding advice he gave to me when I asked him what he, as a man blessed by the Lord with many fruitful years of service in his

¹² Cf. Appendix A.

¹³ 31st Biennial District Convention proceedings, 1978, p. 7.

kingdom, would say to a man such as myself just beginning. He told me to remember that the Lord is the one who called us. He is in control. He has given us his promises to hold him to. Remember his power. Remember his promises. Repeat them daily in your mind. Renew your heart with the blessed assurance of Psalm 23:3, "He guides me in paths of righteousness *for his name's sake.*" Indeed, ministry is not about us. It is about the Lord, the almighty Creator of the universe, the all-loving Shepherd of his creation. We go out now not in fear, anxiety and sadness. We go with boldness, trust and joy. Words and emotions cannot adequately express what selfless concern our God has for us. My prayer is that this translates into a life spent in selfless service to him!

INJ, Chris Esmay

Questions for Pastor Carl Voss

(note: in the footnotes all of the district proceedings references are from the Northern Wisconsin District.)

- 1) Biographical Information: What is your date of birth? Place of birth?
- 2) Briefly describe the family into which you were born: What was the occupation of your father? How many siblings and what occupations did they pursue?
- 3) Professor Brenner commented that your father was quite a character. What did he mean by that? (He referred to your dad's experience with Henry Ford.)
- 4) August Pieper's mother was said to have a tremendous influence on her 4 boys, desiring each serve their Lord as a pastor. What influence did your parents have on your decision to become a pastor?
- 5) Tangent to this, what other impetus (be it event or circumstance) did the Holy Spirit use to inspire in you the desire to serve as a pastor?
- 6) What schools did you attend, including elementary, secondary, post-secondary and Seminary?
- 7) Discuss 3 or 4 highlights of your education at NWC and WLS. What did you enjoy the most?
- 8) Where were you assigned at graduation? What other congregations did you serve in your ministry and for how long?
- 9) In the early part of your ministry, the problems with Missouri came to a head. What is your recollection of that stormy period in our synod's history? In hindsight, what were the positive and negative results? What valuable lessons were learned?
- 10) Describe 3 or 4 experiences that stand out in your memory of active ministry.
- 11) What were your biggest challenges?
- 12) History has recorded for us the ministry of a man named William Carey who spent 7 years in India without a single convert to Christianity. Many of us would be tempted to quit in similar circumstances. Did the devil ever attack you with similar temptations and feelings of despair?
- 13) How would you advise a fellow brother in the throes of despair, plagued by feelings of inadequacy and failure?
 - For example, Pastor Jim Hanson made 1660 evangelism calls in Sault Ste Marie without any resulting growth. This area was eventually reduced to a preaching station.¹
- 14) As a candidate for the ministry, I too am tempted to despair. There seems to be so much work ahead, so many challenges, so little time. I often wonder if I will be able to do the work. What is your advice?
 - How do the following statements you made relate to these concerns: "We need a people who never tire of asking, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?', even recognizing it as a miracle of grace that they can ask the question."²
 - "While letting our light shine we cannot concentrate on what we are doing, on our own royal ego's, but must have this end in view that with our good deeds we praise our Father in heaven. More than one light has gone out when the bearers of that light become more concerned about themselves, about how they appeared in the eyes of others, about the measure of applause they would get for themselves, rather than concerned about the glory of the Father of lights and the mercy he showed in calling us out of darkness into his marvelous light."³ Was failure to heed this admonition a reason why, on average, 8-10 resignations were reported to the district each biennial convention? In fact, the 1990 convention proceedings reported a combined 20 pastor and teacher resignations!!⁴

¹ 31st Biennial Convention proceedings of the Northern Wisconsin District, 1978, p. 24.

² 30th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1976; President's Report, p. 6.

³ 35th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1986; President's Report, p. 6.

⁴ 37th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1990, p. 20.

Let's discuss in greater detail your years as district president for the Northern Wisconsin District from 1974-1994 while serving at St. Mark's in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

- 15) In 1975 the NIV was being worked out. What was your district's role in that? How did you personally feel about implementing the NIV in place of the beloved KJV?
- 16) In 1975 there was also a concern for the declining enrollment at NWC. In fact, it was predicted that in the mid-80's there would be a drastic shortage. Those fears never really played out. In 1984, you reported, "Seventy-four teacher candidates and seven pastor candidates remain unassigned."⁵ Similar concerns were voiced when the amalgamation of NWC and DMLC was being discussed in the early-90's. Looking back on these times, does it reveal a lack of trust that the Lord of the Church will provide workers in his kingdom in spite of our anxieties and mistakes?
 - Concerning recruitment you stated: "...let us bend every effort to supply these schools with the needed facilities, the instructors, and the students from our homes so that the purpose of sharing the Gospel with all the world will never falter for lack of sufficient number of workers, well-trained to do the work."⁶ How was this applied in your own home in lieu of the fact that your sons all elected to prepare for the ministry?
- 17) In 1978, the synod proposed moving MLA to a new campus in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. Was it a good idea from your vantage point? Similarly, what did you think about the amalgamation of our synodical colleges in 1995? Do you still feel that way in 2000?
 - Concerning the MLA proposal you said: "Hence, we approach this whole matter of concern with the thanks that He has considered us worthy by His grace to take on additional responsibilities, and that He has assured us of His all-sufficient grace to meet them."⁷
- 18) It seems from the '74-94 District proceedings that, on average, 15 pastors accepted calls out of the district and 15 to the District. What was your advice to a pastor holding two calls – his own and to another parish?
- 19) In the '78 convention, there was a good deal of discussion devoted to the "tax unemployment compensation liability."⁸ What were the core issues here?
- 20) Tangent to this, what is your view of the United States and it's government. Often, we tend to get down on our nation, failing to appreciate the variegated blessings God has given to us through it.
 - In 1976, the bicentennial of our country, you reported: "...may God find us responding with thankful expressions for the rich mercies and favors with which He has blessed our land; may He move us to remember our nation in our prayers, pleading that He keep it in His grace-filled care. How dependent we are upon the blessed leadings of His grace for both our individual and national well-being!"⁹
- 21) In the 1980 biennial convention the special subject of concern was the treatise, "The Role of Man and Woman According to the Holy Scripture," presented at the 1979 Synod convention.¹⁰ What was your reaction to this study? What is your advice for the men going out today who will certainly wrestle with these same issues?
- 22) On April 27, 1980 St. Mark's in Green Bay dedicated it's school building.¹¹ How did the addition of an LES affect your ministry? What ought the relationship of a pastor to an LES be?

⁵ 34th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1984; President's Report, p. 7.

⁶ 33rd Biennial Convention proceedings, 1982; President's Report, p. 6.

⁷ 31st Biennial Convention proceedings, 1978; President's Report, p. 8-9.

⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

⁹ 30th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1976; President's Report, p. 5.

¹⁰ 32nd Biennial Convention proceedings, 1980; President's Report, p. 7.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

- 23) This brings me to my next question. Prof. Brenner defines our district presidents as “the work horses of the synod.” How were you able to meet your responsibilities as a district president, pastor of a sizable congregation with an LES, husband and father? How many hours a week did you work? (How many hours a week do you think a pastor should work?) What often had to be sacrificed at the expense of prioritization?
- Your son, Pastor David Voss, has this to say in the matter: “He spent a lot of time at church, committed to the work the Holy Spirit set before him. But you could also set your watch by his daily routine. He would walk in the door of the parsonage for lunch promptly at noon. I know that he stopped off every so often to watch the Packers practice during training camp in July, but it wasn’t a regular practice of his.”¹²
 - In 1985 the recommendation reached the convention floor that you be assigned a vicar, noting that your congregation of 1200 souls was the largest congregation served by a district president up to that time.¹³
- 24) Agree or disagree: The ministry is not a job but a way of life.
- 25) In the 1982 district convention you quoted the Synod’s mission statement. How did you incorporate the latter into your ministry? In other words, did you constantly remind your flock the importance of remembering our purpose as a church?
- 26) What is your memory of Pastor Floyd Brand and St. John’s congregation in Fremont as well as Pastor Robert Christman who served St. Paul’s in Green Bay? Charges that the WELS displayed the spirit of the Antichrist¹⁴ had to have created a trying and tumultuous situation. How did you guide the affairs to a peaceable solution given St. Paul’s exhortation in 2 Cor 13:11, “...be of one mind, live in peace”? What was the final outcome?
- Was the situation similar in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Most, dismissed in 1992 from membership at Emanuel, New London?¹⁵
 - St. Peter’s, Sturgeon Bay withdrew the call of Mrs. Susan Uecker in 1993 for disciplinary reasons as noted in the 1994 convention proceedings.¹⁶ Was this situation an echo of the Ft. Atkinson suspensions that led to the Protes’tant Controversy in the 1920’s?
- 27) React to this statement: The Protes’tant Controversy has taught us to value today the brotherhood pastors share.
- 28) The 1982 convention proceedings delineate the problem of low SMO’s. Up to and including the last year of your tenure, 1994,¹⁷ the same concern was raised. It was recorded in ‘82, “our district continues to have the lowest per communicant giving of all districts, both for missions and for all-purpose giving...our subscriptions...an average of \$33.05...fall far short of the Synod average of \$41.62.”¹⁸ This continues to be a problem today. How did you seek to alleviate the shortcomings? How would you advise pastors serving parishes with the same stewardship problems? In general, how is one to approach congregational stewardship?
- 29) In the early 80’s there were many discussions about a new hymnal to replace TLH. Was this a difficult transition for you and your congregation? Concerning this matter the 1982 convention reported, “the church of today must always be concerned for the church of tomorrow.”¹⁹ Yet, we often hear those famous seven words, “we’ve never done it that way before.” How did you handle the tension between yesterday’s generation and tomorrow’s changes? To what degree are we to preserve tradition and for what reasons? For example, today there is constant talk of the need to incorporate contemporary music into our worship

¹² Email from dlpjamvoss@worldnet.att.net to esmay@mindspring.com, 4/15/00, 7:52 PM.

¹³ 35th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1986, p. 55.

¹⁴ 33rd Biennial Convention proceedings, 1982, p. 66.

¹⁵ 38th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1992, p. 47.

¹⁶ 39th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1994; President’s Report, p. 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

- so that we do not lose out the back door those who are unfamiliar with our Lutheran chorale's and German traditions.
- 30) April 28, 1985 was the 25th anniversary of St. Mark's in Green Bay.²⁰ How long did you serve there? What kind of growth did the congregation experience? How active was your outreach program? What role did you play in the latter?
 - 31) In 1989 the synod in convention adopted a "Mission-Objectives-Vision" statement to be applied on the congregational level. How did you make use of this in your congregation? In particular I note the 4th objective: "'4. To encourage and equip each other for the application of our faith in lives of Christian service, for the Lord, his church, his world.'"²¹ How did you incorporate the laity in your ministry? In keeping with Eph 4:12, 13, what efforts should be made to use members' gifts in the ministry of the Word?
 - 32) Included in the "Objectives" was the earnest desire to increase average worship attendance from 40% to 60%.²² We have the same problem 10 years later!! Without sounding "church growth," what are some ways we can alleviate this problem and "up the percentages"?
 - 33) You reported in your 1990 President's Report a dire concern over the changing family structure in America (e.g. single women raising children).²³ In fact, you mentioned the potential need for women evangelists to these single moms. How did these changes affect your ministry? How will it affect ministry tomorrow?
 - 34) Tangent to this, how did you address the needs of your own family, given the demands on your time inquired of earlier?
 - Your son, Pastor David Voss, evaluated your time spent with "mom and the boys." He writes, "He'd say that it wasn't enough time—just as any WELS pastor would. But I recall a family vacation to Nebraska... West Virginia... Ohio... Chicago... His commitment to public school catechism classes on Saturday mornings meant that he rarely saw his four sons play football at Northwestern during our combined 32 years (!) on that campus. But there were rare occasions when he cancelled class to get to a game."²⁴
 - 35) What is your memory of the proposed New Synodical Conference with the ELS and other confessional, orthodox bodies around the world?²⁵ What was your take on the proposal?
 - 36) In 1992 our synod celebrated the centennial of *The Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States*. You seem to have an appreciation for church history since a good portion of your President's Report was devoted to the formation and activity of this body, coupled with a commentary on the examples they set for us: "Our spiritual forefathers have served us well in leaving us a fine example to follow as we go about our work. They treasured the fellowship into which the Holy Spirit had led them; they gave themselves into promoting, preserving, defending and extending it; they gave warnings when warning was needed, encouragements when encouraging was needed...they did so as the Gospel moved, guided and led them. *We make no apology to anyone for doing the same, nor is an apology needed. We just go ahead and do it because the Word asks this of us.*"²⁶ What did you mean by the sentences I placed in italics? In general, what is your view of Church history and the value it has for ministry today?
 - 37) As I poured over the convention proceedings of various years, I noticed references made to the activity of the Wisconsin Protestant Legislative Council whose task was to monitor secular legislation.²⁷ How, if at all, did this organization benefit our synod? Did our

²⁰ 35th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1986, p. 17.

²¹ 37th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1990, p. 6.

²² Ibid., p. 7.

²³ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁴ Email from dlpjamvoss@worldnet.att.net to esmay@mindspring.com, 4/15/2000, 7:52 PM.

²⁵ 37th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1990, p. 45.

²⁶ 38th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1992; President's Report, p. 5.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

- involvement with this group ever come close to a violation of Scriptural fellowship principles?
- 38) The 1992 district convention proceedings make mention of discussions with the ELS over the moment of the real presence in the Holy Sacrament of Communion.²⁸ Did you take part in these? What is the answer you gave to those who asked you about “the moment”?
- 39) Though we touched on this briefly before, describe in greater detail your reaction to the 1992 Feasibility Study Committee’s report on the proposed amalgamation of NWC and DMLC.
- Evaluate the following three statements made by your district which summarize the latter’s concerns: 1) “we believe there was insufficient information....”²⁹ This phrase was applied to virtually every issue of the proposal. 2) “the decision of the 1993 Synod Convention to amalgamate is one of the most important decisions since the break-up of the Synodical Conference.”³⁰ 3) “Resolved, that we call upon our district presidents to cast a vote in the Conference of Presidents in favor of convening a special convention of the synod to reconsider the amalgamation of Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College on the New Ulm campus.”³¹ Pertaining to #3, what was your reaction to the resolution? What was the C.O.P.’s reaction?
- 40) What led to your decision to step down as district president in 1994?
- 41) Pastor Voss, your son, David, notes that your ministry “has had an impact on a lot of people.”³² I would like to conclude our session with a personal note that echoes your son’s words. You have had an impact on me as well. As I sit before you today I simply marvel that God has given you the grace to go so far and to accomplish so much. What is your parting advice to me and men like me just beginning?

²⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹ 39th Biennial Convention proceedings, 1994, p. 37.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

³¹ Ibid., p. 38.

³² Email from dlpjamvoss@worldnet.att.net to esmay@mindspring.com on April 15, 2000, 7:52 PM.

1982

In the name of the Triune God, Who has created us, redeemed us, and sanctified us to be His own for time and for eternity, esteemed brethren:

Before we begin the work assigned to us it does us well to reflect for a moment on the purpose for which we do our work. God has spelled out that purpose for us in His Word which urges us to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." It urges this for the most wondrous of reasons, declaring that in Christ we are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9).

Thus, we have assembled together, committed to a common purpose served by common objectives. In its 1969 convention our Synod publicly and formally approved a statement which enunciated this purpose and objectives. The statement bears repeating.

"The continuing purpose of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as a gathering of Christians, is to serve all people in God's world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures" (1969 Reports and Memorials, page 125.)

What a treasured blessing that we share this purpose in common with each other! Each of us can carry the confidence that each lay delegate, teacher, and pastor stands solidly behind that purpose and stands determined to have it fulfilled, as God grants the ability and the means. Each of us recognizes that to come together for any other purpose would only be a waste of precious time. This in no way seeks to minimize other pressing issues which might and ought concern us, but it does underscore that as a group of confessing Christians, we must give this one purpose our wholehearted interest and our undivided attention.

A number of objectives serve for the carrying out of that purpose. These also are aptly stated on the same page referred to above:

"The objectives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are:
1. To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people."

Very significantly, this objective receives first consideration, not because it is the first in importance with other objectives taking on a lesser importance, but because it is the first among equals, the "primum inter pares." That position it rightfully maintains because of Christ's great mission command, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all" (Mark 16:15). Recognizing the validity of making this their first objective, many of our congregations in the publications of their yearly budgets give their mission goal for the year first listing. We pray to God for the time to come when the actual contributions given by the congregations of our district will clearly evidence that this district of the Synod serves as the leader of all ten districts in its adherence to this objective, just as it is the leader of all ten districts in the number of baptized souls and communicant members.

The second objective goes hand in hand with the first and states:

"To uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired,

inerrant, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions."

In sharing the Gospel with others we dare not be so taken up by numbers and statistics that we come to adulterate the Gospel for the sake of making it more palatable to the general public and for making it "easier" for people to identify with us. God's Old Testament directive still has its place today. "Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28). Only then can we have the certainty that the successes we enjoy come as true Gospel successes and in answer to the Lord's promise that His Word will achieve the purpose for which He sent it.

The third objective highlights training the public servants of the Gospel: "To provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions."

How dependent all of us are on this stated objective for the staffing of our classrooms and the manning of our pulpits. What each of our congregations could not do well on its own, all of us can do together, as a Synod, namely, erect, maintain, and operate training centers where our future teachers and pastors can receive a thorough grounding in the truths of the Gospel and in the application of these truths so they can minister ably to souls redeemed by the Savior's blood. If we value highly the training of future workers as it is carried out in our Synod's seminary, colleges, and preparatory schools--and there is no reason why we should not--then let us also bend every effort to supply these schools with the needed facilities, the instructors, and the students from our homes so that the purpose of sharing the Gospel with all the world will never falter for lack of a sufficient number of workers, well-trained to do the work.

Such a corps of workers, faithfully using their God-given gifts and talents, will assure the carrying out of the fourth objective:

"To assist in counseling and equipping all members of the Synod for ever greater service to the Lord, to each other, and to the world."

It would take more than the time we have available to list all the many, many agencies functioning, the methods available, and the materials produced to provide the counseling and the equipping of our Synod's members for their works of service. It truly amazes that when a particular gift and talent is needed for a particular task, the Lord sees to it that someone, somewhere, and somehow becomes available to answer the need for the benefit of His believers. And yet, it is not really surprising, not when we have a God Who has promised to open to us the windows of heaven and shower us with the gifts of His grace.

With all the gifts He grants, He also sees to it that we can follow through on the fifth objective:

"To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow men in need."

This stated objective makes it clear that the love which God has planted in our hearts through the Gospel will show itself in visible, tangible

ways, just as the Scriptures encourage, "Let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Rightly could the world shame and condemn us should we neglect this exercise of love. More importantly, how could we hope to win souls to Christ and convince them of the power of His love should we neglect love's action. We would lead them to conclude that if His love does not power us enough to look after people's earthly needs, it certainly would not have power enough to take care of their spiritual, eternal needs which are far more critical. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people!" (Galatians 6:10).

Let our love's actions also serve as a demonstration of our sincerity to carry out the sixth objective:

"To foster confessional unity of faith among Christians throughout the world."

Our distinctive Christian witness to the truths of the Gospel does not in any way prevent us nor deter us in giving an answer to everyone who asks us the reason for the hope that we carry. Then neither must we make ourselves the obstacle by remaining aloof from those who would make honest inquiry. While indeed we must exercise all due caution lest we put ourselves in a compromising situation which would contradict a faithful Christian testimony, yet when we exhibit a genuine joy in the Gospel of our salvation before one and all, we will find many an opportunity to speak our positive witness in a helpful, meaningful way.

In one fashion or another, all six of these objectives will evidence themselves as we conduct the business of this convention. May we find it a joy to serve these objectives as we go about our respective tasks. It is in the light of these objectives that the following report is being presented.

The past twenty years have brought an unparalleled measure of rich and lavish blessings from the grace of our merciful God. During that time He has permitted us to take the gospel in all its truth and purity to every area and state of our land as well as to fifteen foreign lands. These successes with which God has crowned our labors we must recognize as truly miraculous. And still the Lord is making plain that He has even more in mind for us. Each blessing He brings us also brings responsibilities, weighty responsibilities; and that, for a purpose, namely, that through diligent use of His gifts we can gain firsthand evidence that He makes us more than equal to the tasks that confront us. Letting that approach guide us, we know that our present Synod-wide venture of faith, "Reaching Out To The World With The Word," the theme for our \$10 million capital fund drive and the theme for this convention, will see even more miracles of grace happening among us. To be sure, this will not happen by itself. It's going to mean diligent work on our part. It will mean making the offering an item of highest priority. Convinced that this is the Lord's work, not ours, we will devote quality time and effort to it. The synodical director for the drive, Pastor Daniel Malchow, will favor us with further information about the drive. We are most grateful also to our district's first vice-president, Pastor Clarence Koepsell, who has consented to serve as our district director for the drive. The kind and devoted way in which he is carrying out his responsibility bodes well for the involvement of our district in this synod-wide effort. We express our gratitude to the congregation he serves, Grace, Oshkosh, for permitting him to devote his time and effort to this drive. Let us pledge him

our full cooperation and wholehearted support, demonstrating our determination to "share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all the world."

Our 1980 convention gave attention to the Synod's Commission on Higher Education's thesis on The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture and reacted favorably to the district committee's recommendation that the Synod elect or appoint a committee to make a thorough study of the passages which speak of the calling of man and woman in Scripture, especially in view of certain questions that have been raised" (1980 District Proceedings, page 67-A). Following the 1981 Synod convention a ten-man committee, one from each district of the Synod, was appointed to serve. Pastor Arno Wolframm, Manitowoc, was appointed from our district. This committee is submitting a study document for consideration by the districts. It asks that district responses to the document be placed in its hands by October 15, 1982. The Conference of Presidents suggests that each district appoint a committee to study the document, receive responses from individuals within the district, formulate a response in the name of the district, and submit it to the Synod committee. This matter is being referred to the Floor Committee on Doctrinal Matters for its consideration, with the request that it prepare appropriate resolutions for convention action, which will serve to "uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired, inerrant, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions."

This same objective the district praesidium kept in mind as it dealt in matters which disturbed St. John Congregation, Fremont, and St. Paul Congregation, Green Bay. On October 13, 1980 the praesidium and the circuit pastor, Rev. John Brandt, attended an open meeting at St. John Church for the purpose of discussing the issues that had surfaced in its midst. It became clear during the meeting that St. John's pastor, Rev. Floyd Brand, was promoting a course in his ministry that disturbed and offended the faith of a goodly portion of its membership and that he was giving his moral support and encouragement to the efforts of another church group, the Protestant Conference, a group not within the fellowship of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At its October 16 meeting, the congregation adopted a resolution requesting that Pastor Brand cease and desist from fellowship and communication with those not in fellowship with the Synod and that he uphold the confessional position of the Synod. When Pastor Brand announced his refusal to abide by the resolution, the congregation voted to withdraw his call. On November 6, 1980 the praesidium notified the congregation that it concurred in the action taken and on November 10 informed Pastor Brand that he was no longer eligible for a call to serve a congregation of our Synod, since he does not share with the Synod a unity in doctrine and practice based on the Word of God.

In the meantime the pastor of St. Paul Congregation, Green Bay, Rev. Robert Christman, who had attended the October 13 meeting at St. John, Fremont, addressed a letter, dated October 21, 1980, charging malfeasance on the part of the district president in the handling of the matter at St. John, Fremont. He 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 own prosperity, our own holi-

5. WINNEBAGO CONFERENCE

FULL-TIME

Pastors: St. Paul, Manchaster
Lester Groth St. Lucas, Kawaskum
LeRoy Ristow Emmanuel, Montello-4SE

Teachers:

Michael Hettig
Robert Koepke
Allen Krause
Merlyn Kruse
Steven Rhode
Stephen Schafer
James Schmidt
Elroy Schroeder
Eric Trogue
Steven Westphal
Gary Becker
Larry Klukas
Timothy Schroeder

PART-TIME

Pastors: Immanuel, Neenah
John Brandt Immanuel, Oshkosh
Allen Capek
Paul Hoenecke
Daniel Jensen
Robert Diener
Orvin Sommer
Delmer Hallmeyer

Teachers:
Gerald Hildebrandt
William Radue
David Lauber
Raymond Spangenberg

UNEXCUSED OR UNREGISTERED

Pastors: Congregations:
St. Paul, Berlin
Zion, Kingston-5SE
Peace, Wautoma

Teachers:
Orville Breikreutz
John Lipfert
Vincent Neumann
Roger Wessel

Pastor Kenneth Edenhauser, Chairman
Teacher Richard Huebner, Secretary
Pastor Larry Nast

Pastor Mark Hannemann
Mr. Royal Uhlendrauck
Mr. Henry Pieper

ADOPTED

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

OUR COMMON PURPOSE

WHEREAS 1) our district president has eloquently reminded us again of the common purpose for which we have been brought together; and

WHEREAS 2) our district president has also pointed out the blessings which our gracious God continues to shower on us; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that we join him in praying for diligence on our part in meeting the responsibilities that go with these blessings.

PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS

WHEREAS 1) in the past biennium the district president has made appointments which have been accepted as outlined in his report; therefore, be it
RESOLVED, that these appointments be ratified

REPORT OF DISTRICT OFFICERS

WHEREAS 1) the district officers have carried out their appointed work faithfully in the past biennium; and

WHEREAS 2) we find the financial report of the district secretary to be in good order; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that we accept the report of the district officers with our thanks.

MATTERS CONCERNING
ST. JOHN CONGREGATION, FREMONT
AND ST. PAUL CONGREGATION, GREEN BAY

WHEREAS 1) Pastor Floyd Brand of St. John Congregation, Fremont, in effect chose to sever fellowship with WELS by giving his moral support and encouragement to the efforts of another church group, the Protestant Conference, a group not within the fellowship of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and

WHEREAS 2) Pastor Brand refused to abide by a congregational resolution "to cease and desist from fellowship with those not in fellowship with the Synod, and that he uphold the confessional position of the Synod"; and

WHEREAS 3) Pastor Robert Christman of St. Paul Congregation, Green Bay, charged the District President with malfeasance in the handling of the matter at St. John, Fremont; and

WHEREAS 4) Pastor Christman, in a letter dated October 21, 1980, charged the WELS with displaying the spirit of antichrist; and

WHEREAS 5) these charges were never substantiated; and

WHEREAS 6) Pastor Christman, in his document of November 14, 1980, in effect chose to sever fellowship with WELS by publicly declaring himself in fellowship with the Protestant Conference, a group not within the Synod's fellowship; and

WHEREAS 7) teachers Michael Hanke and Melvin Koss in effect chose to sever fellowship with WELS by accepting calls to serve in a school not in fellowship with our Synod; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, a) that we herewith express sorrow over these severances of fellowship with our Synod; and be it further

RESOLUTIONS

APPRECIATION

RESOLVED, b) that we support the action of the district praesidium in the handling of these matters; and be it further

RESOLVED, c) that we commend the patient and evangelical efforts of the district praesidium, through frequent letters and meetings, to heal the rift and preserve the unity that once existed, based on the Scriptures; and be it finally

RESOLVED, d) that we pray the Holy Spirit of Truth to lead these former brethren to share with us again a confession of doctrine and practice based on the Word of God.

GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMATION OF NEW DISTRICTS

WHEREAS 1) the growth in the Synod has led to the geographical enlargement of district lines in somewhat haphazard fashion, with little regard for area characteristics and their impact on the work of the church; and

WHEREAS 2) the 1979 convention of the Synod called for the appointment of a committee to study the matter of guidelines for the formation of new districts; and

WHEREAS 3) the 1981 convention of the Synod resolved that the proposed redistricting plan be submitted to the ten districts for study and reaction; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, a) that we commend the committee for its detailed and comprehensive report; and be it further

RESOLVED, b) that we support the nine points listed as the committee's rationale for redistricting (RTTDD-page 144); and be it further

RESOLVED, c) that the committee be open to suggested changes that may be presented by the districts; and be it further

RESOLVED, d) that the committee consider uniformly naming all districts without using state names; and be it finally

RESOLVED, e) that the committee feel free to consider proposals that might affect the realignment of the three Wisconsin districts.

Pastor Paul Wilde, Chairman
Teacher Kenneth Kolander, Secretary
Pastor Gerhard Schapekahm

Mr. Harvey Zeitler
Mr. Bryan Purchatzke
Mr. Paul Schmitz

ADOPTED

WHEREAS many persons and groups have worked to make this convention a success; therefore be it

RESOLVED, a) that we express our appreciation to:

1. Pastor Larry Ellenberger and Vicar Ricky Johnson for conducting the opening service;
2. Pastor Orvin Sommer for his sermon at the opening service;
3. Miss Elsa Manthey for playing organ at the opening service;
4. The members of Bethany Lutheran Church who devoted their time for the opening service;
5. Pastors John Brandt, Marvin Putz, Ed Stelter, Paul Kolander, and Eugene Kock, who led us in our daily devotions;
6. Teachers Robert Sonntag, Paul Kassulke, Arvon Peter, and Pastor Harlyn Kuschel for playing the organ at the daily devotions;
7. Pastor Robert Voss, our essayist;
8. The area grade school students who served as pages;
9. The ladies who did the typing;
10. Mr. Elwood Lutze for the printing of convention materials; and be it finally

RESOLVED, b) that the convention, by means of letters through the secretary, express our thanks to the following:

1. Manitowoc Lutheran High School for the use of its facilities;
2. Bethany Lutheran congregation for the use of its church for the opening service;
3. The Manitowoc Lutheran High School Ladies' Guild and the ladies of the federated congregations for the serving of meals;
4. The Manitowoc Lutheran High School faculty and all who aided the faculty in making the arrangements for the convention.

GREETINGS TO MISSIONARIES AND CHAPLAIN

WHEREAS 1) several members of our District are serving our Lord in foreign fields; and

WHEREAS 2) these people and their work are very much in our thoughts, especially during the days of this convention; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that our secretary send our greetings to the following people commending them to the grace of our Lord: Pastors Richard Poetter, Roger W. Falk, and David Haberkorn, Japan; Pastor Michael Hintz, Malawi; and Pastor Richard Froehlich, Civilian Chaplain in Europe.



April 18, 2000

Mr. Chris Esmay
8439 N. Servite Drive #103
Milwaukee, WI 53223

Dear Chris:

Just a day or so ago you inquired about Pastor Carl Voss. You said you were doing a paper on him and asked for information from our school days, as well as our time in the active ministry, particularly the Conference of Presidents.

We spent three years together at Northwestern College in Watertown, and two years at the Seminary. Since he attended high school at MLS in Saginaw, we never did become close friends, but we did play on the same football team in college. He was an aggressive player and enjoyed it a great deal. He played end and did it quite well. -- At the Seminary we were in different sections, but one can remember enjoying good times in the dorm. He was also a student leader, and my memory tells me that he served as president of the student body.* He never was really quiet, so everyone could hear him in the dorm.

Then when we graduated from the seminary we were assigned to the same district, namely, the Nebraska District. After about 5 years he accepted a Call to St. Mark Ev. Lutheran of Green Bay, WI. Our paths didn't cross for the next 15-20 years until we each were elected president of our respective districts, namely, Northern Wisconsin and Nebraska.

President Voss showed excellent leadership abilities, and was known for his deep concern for doctrinal matters. It was our privilege to room together at out of town meetings, so we became very close friends. His concern for the truth of God's Word and that all things be done decently was evident at all times. President Voss was asked to serve on numerous committees due to his concern for doctrine and his good command of the original languages. It goes without saying that he was a respected leader.

In the late 1980's it was my privilege to accept a Call to the Northern Wisconsin District and to serve with him on the presidium of the Northern Wisconsin District. Again it became evident that God had given him great gifts to serve as president of the district. His love for each called worker, plus the congregation, and especially God's Word became so evident. Not only did God give him a love for the truth of God's Word, but also gave him the gift to preach God's Word with clarity and dedication. Whenever doctrinal problems arose within a congregation, within an area, or among called workers, you could look to his leadership based solidly on God's Word.

It is hoped that the above will be of some help to you as you prepare your paper. Should you desire more information, please do not hesitate to ask.

Have a blessed Easter,

Gerald E. Free

Gerald E. Free, Pastor

GF/cjw

*Hope all is
going well at CH
Seminary!*

Appendix C

From: David Voss <dlpjamvoss@worldnet.att.net>
To: esmay <esmay@mindspring.com>
Date: Saturday, April 15, 2000 7:52 PM
Subject: Re: Your father

Chris,

Here goes. It won't be much--at least for now. However, my parents are in Remus right now for the Confirmation of my brother's son tomorrow. We're going up there after church here. Perhaps some stories will refresh my memory a little more.

> incorporating such thoughts as what you remember growing up

{ Nothing spectacular here. I realize that my father's ministry has had an impact on a lot of people, but it certainly is not the result of any systematized approach on his part. There is nothing fancy or flashy about my dad. Just steady work with God's unfailing Word.

, his approach to fatherhood,

My parents applied God's Word to daily life, of course. So his approach to fatherhood was living his God-given role as outlined in Scripture, Eph. 6:1-4 in particular, I guess. They were strict and didn't put up with a lot of nonsense.

his work schedule,

He spent a lot of time at church, committed to the work the Holy Spirit set before him. But you could also set your watch by his daily routine. He would walk in the door of the parsonage for lunch promptly at noon. I know that he stopped off every so often to watch the Packers practice during training camp in July, but it wasn't a regular practice of his.

time spent with the family,

He'd say that it wasn't enough time--just as any WELS pastor would. But I recall a family vacation to Nebraska in a tent camper borrowed from members; a side trip to West Virginia when visiting relatives in Ohio; spending a few days in a hotel in Chicago as a family to visit museums and eat Chinese food and see the Cubs play. His commitment to public school catechism classes on Saturday mornings meant that he rarely saw his four sons play football at Northwestern during our combined 32 years (!) on that campus. But there were rare occasions when he cancelled class to get to a game. When the family was still relatively young, we would pack up picnic lunches and head to one of the nearby local county park--just because it was a nice day to eat outside.

way he handled

> congregational and family problems

He didn't cut corners. The four boys attended LES on the other side of Green Bay because St. Mark didn't have a school at that time. So when

Sunday afternoon Christmas Eve rehearsals conflicted with basketball games for the LES, we were not allowed to play, but had to stay--even though we knew our parts forward and backward. Dad wanted his family to set the right example.

, study habits

Disciplined, I'm sure. But I don't really know. Dad never told us how to serve as pastors. When we ask him for guidance, he is quick to offer some sage advice. * The fact that each of his sons pursued the ministry is pretty powerful testimony to the fact that our father loved his work for the Lord, and found deep satisfaction in it. * He never pressured his sons to become pastors, but was clearly ecstatic that they did.

, etc. It doesn't have to
> be more than a paragraph or two - just what comes to your head when you
> think of your dad.

I may write more later. Today is the first chance I've had to give any attention to your request for information. We'll see what comes to mind next week.

Please greet Kerri for Laurie and me. God's blessings as you wrap up your studies at WLS.

In Christ,
Pastor Voss