

One Man - Many Ministries:

Recollections from the
Life and Ministry of
William G. Zell

Church History 331
Prof. John Brenner
May, 2003

John Backus

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Introduction

April 26, 2003 was a pleasant afternoon in California. The air was warm, the sun was bright, and a calm breeze was tinkling the wind chimes hanging over the patio. I was enjoying this, and also the company of my wife's grandfather William Zell. Both "Grandpa Bill" and I were currently on a week of Easter vacation, experiencing the hospitality his son-in-law, my father-in-law, Willie Grebe. The back patio of this California residence provided me with a good place and a convenient opportunity to ask Grandpa Bill to share with me some of his recollections from his years of service in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. His recollections were recorded on audio tape, and afterward were transcribed and edited by myself, mostly for the sake of maintaining proper chronology, resulting in this paper. For the sake of clarification, I have occasionally replaced some of the original pronouns with their logical antecedent. In such instances the clarification is noted with brackets []. Also contained in brackets are indications of Zell's facial expressions, which at times are important in understand the emphasis and "tone" of his words. Other than the bracketed text and the paragraph headings found in bold print, all the words in this paper are quoted directly from William Zell.

Here, then, are some of recollections which Grandpa Bill shared with me from his life and ministry in the Wisconsin Synod. Enjoy!

Many Ministries. . . Many Titles

"57 years of service. When people talk to me, some will call me 'Mr. Zell,' some will call me 'Coach,' some will call me 'President,' some will call me 'Prof.,' some will call me 'Professor,' others will call me 'Pastor,' and others will call me things I'm not going to repeat [smile]."

"Some call me 'President,' some call me 'Prof,' others call me things I'm not going to repeat "

Billy Zell: From Kid to College

"I was born and raised in the parsonage at St. Peter, Mishicot [WI]. That's where my dad went on his first call, and he spent his entire ministry there. I went to the public grade school. High school I went to Watertown, to Northwestern. My brother was two years older, and he went before I did, so it was a relatively easy choice to make.

"[Growing up], I was a ball nut, as much as I could be, despite some inadequacies in stature. When it came to gym, I would run to get out there. I just loved that. So during school I played basketball, and last two years I was on the basketball squad. I never started. I played football for 4 years and never started. When we got into college, I didn't go out as a frosh, because I was really too small. Well, after about 2 weeks I talked to [Coach] Umnus and I said, 'Can I still come out?' 'Well sure.' So I went out and I'll never forget that either. The first night out there, totally out of shape, he was trying to run some stuff, and he wanted somebody as a quarterback to run the 2nd unit, and he didn't have anybody, so he said, 'Oh, Billy Zell! You run that.' Well, I didn't know that play, they could tell me the plays, but just going through this, I was beat, just gasping for breath. Anyway, I finished the year, played football as a sophomore, and junior year I started. It took 7 years, then I finally started. By the time I got to senior year, they dropped football because of the war. They had dropped basketball when I was a junior, but they put together a schedule when I was a senior, so we could play college basketball.

"[Growing up], I was a ball nut, as much as I could be, despite some inadequacies in stature. . . It took 7 years, then I finally started."

At the Seminary: Ping-pong, Trains and German Translation

"I think back and I think in spite of ourselves, (and in spite of the fact that when I started at the Sem, this was the beginning of summer school from the war, which was not conducive to a normal Sem life,) we learned what we had to learn, but really didn't become as proficient as we could have. Everybody had jobs. I think just a matter of a couple of weeks after we graduated from Watertown, we went to the Sem and started with summer school. And without air conditioning, it was beastly hot. So we'd work all afternoon in the heat, and were supposed to study all night - no, that was not the way to do it! But we did have, I would say, a very good Sem life, because nobody was married, everybody lived in the dorms. And I, just the way the ball bounced, ended up with a very good section. My roommates were Ted Hartwig, and Carl Mischke,

and the other one was Paul Nolting, who eventually went to the CLC, but he also had some pretty good strengths, so we had a good section, which was able to take care of their responsibilities, and at the same time have a little time left over for playing doubles at ping-pong at 11 at night. I think of that and I just laugh.

"Pretty soon we were stripped to the waist, sweating like steers. We really played that game to the hilt!"

Somebody would say, 'How 'bout it?' So the four of us would go down, and Hartwig and I would take on Nolting and Mischke, and after about one-and-a-half games, we'd start pulling off sweatshirts, and pretty soon we were stripped to the waist, sweating like steers. We really played that game to the hilt!

"But the system at that time, was unusual. Cars – there were really no cars, only about 2 or three on campus. Maybe 2 at the most. So it was a matter of riding the Inter-urban [train] into Milwaukee, and the street cars and buses in town, which was extremely economical since we could get a clergy pass. The company had special cars which at one time ran from Milwaukee to Watertown, and from

"They were very fast, and very plush; you could get seasick on them because they swayed. But we could get a clergy pass, so we could ride into Milwaukee for 15 cents, and when we got in there, we'd get a 10 cent pass to anyplace in town on the busses and the streetcars. So for 25 cents you could get from the Sem to anyplace in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee to Waukesha, and from Milwaukee to Sheboygan. They were very fast, and very plush; you could get seasick on them because they swayed. But we could get a clergy pass, so we could ride into Milwaukee for 15 cents, and when we got in there, we'd get a 10 cent pass to anyplace in town on the busses and the streetcars. So for 25 cents you could get from the Sem to anyplace in Milwaukee.

The last car out left downtown Milwaukee at 11:15, which meant that your night life was already prescribed for you, because if you missed that, you couldn't get out to Mequon, except on a bus that had a ticket to Saukville, which cost a whole lot more, and didn't get into Thiensville until 2:30. Not good.

"There were parishes that still had German, but when we went through the Seminary, first year you wrote one English and one German. The second year, one English, one German. Same thing in third year. So, you had to write it and memorize it. And for some it wasn't all that difficult. For others it was a foreign language. I was probably half-way between. I had heard enough of it at home, but we were never taught to speak it at home. We went to German church, but you didn't understand what it was except that you knew from what the English service was, what the German had to be. But in school you came away with it, you could read it, you could understand a little bit of it, could pronounce it,

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as a running start. And I think our class, when we went to Watertown, we were maybe the last class that had a regular German class and a parallel German class. The ones who knew some German were put in the regular German class, and the ones who didn't know enough were put in the parallel German class. So I was put in the parallel German class where I belonged. But amazingly, by the time we got to college, we had New Testament Greek, which we translated into German. And we would question this, 'Just what is the point of this?!' And the answer

was very simple: 'It's much easier to translate Greek into German than into English,' we were told. And when we got to Hebrew, same thing. The vocabulary, which we were required to memorize, we would learn definitions in German, for the same reason: 'It's easier.' [Laughs].

"The Hebrew word *Aretz*, which is *Erde* in German, well they'd look at that and say, 'Well that's an example - see how easy that is?' Of course, it makes as much sense to say *Aretz* also means *Earth*. But they didn't buy our argument. [Laughs]

"Whatever you found in English, commentaries and so on automatically were condemned as Calvinistic. You cant trust those buggers."

"But when you went to the Sem, you still had to be able to fumble your way through German. Like I said, some had no problem, others did. Eventually they reached the point where they decided maybe we could survive quite nicely without this historical and traditional German. But those days, it was still accepted fact that whatever you found in English, commentaries and so on and so forth, automatically were condemned as Calvinistic. You cant trust those buggers.

"This debate kind of developed over the years, to what extent should you still retain German classes on any of the levels, when you knew very well that most of the students coming through would never be able to speak it from that. (Or even in more cases than you care to admit, find their way through German writings.) But out of this shotgun approach, you would always have a few who would take to this and end up in a position were they can produce stuff from German.

"Sem profs. There weren't that many, maybe six. Meyer, Schaller, Peters, Lehniger and Reim. And then Lawrenz came - I think our first year - so he would have been the sixth. And I really don't remember as far as inspiring profs, any standouts. They were capable people, but you talk about a guy like Sig Becker, I don't remember any of those,. John Meyer was still the president at the time. He was a personality in his own right. He taught dogmatics, very organized and very thorough. He'd be in his office at 5 am every morning, so I guess that was a kind of an inspiration to see him carry out his work.

"But in spite of what I say, there was something about those men, which was also a continuation from the faculty people I met as a student at Watertown, which made an impression in spite of a person's self. They were dedicated and faithful Christian men. And as far as their approach to the Scriptures and the Gospel, and the inspired message of salvation, there were no flaws in that. There were no divided opinions on

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how you read the Bible, which was conveyed to us. So that whether it was said one way or another, in class the point came home, there are not a half a dozen different ways to read a passage in the Scriptures. What is

there is for you to read and accept by faith and if you don't quite understand it and should understand it, it's explained elsewhere. I guess I say that in contrast to the reports that you heard out of St. Louis later, where there was not a oneness of mind on so many of the doctrinal theses of the Bible. Eventually that caused a big rupture."

A Tutor: Year One of Fifty-Seven

"My 1st assignment was to Northwestern as a tutor for the 1947-48 school year. I was happy to go back to Northwestern. I liked Northwestern, and I didn't have any marriage plans at the beginning of that year, that summer, so it gave me a little extra time. (And it was during that time that Marian and I got our act together, so it turned out just fine.)

"[Tutor calls] were one year, and at the end of the first year, if everything were going decently, you probably would be asked to do two. E. Kowalke, who was the President, asked me toward the end of the first year if I wanted to come back another year. I said it would not be a problem, except that I had plans to be married, so that took care of that."

A Mission Pastor on the Synod's Fringe

"I think we may have been one of the first classes in which everyone received a call. At that time you were encouraged to be ordained at the place of your first call, which was not at the tutor position; they didn't ordain us there. But when you got your first congregation, you would be ordained there. Your first installation was your ordination.

"So in July of '48 I got the call to Faith in Tacoma [Washington], which was a mission. I remember I was in the shower when the dean, Pless, came down to tell me where it was. The fringe of the synod – I was very excited. At that time, the fringe of the synod, which was considered a place that you maybe looked at as temporary, would be the Dakotas, so when you went to Washington or Arizona. . . ! When we graduated, one of my classmates Ed Schultz went out there. So the following year, after the year of the tutoring, when I went out there, he was already there, and he was a neighbor, only 50 miles away. So, he was my vacancy pastor before I got there; he's the one who installed me. It was kinda fun. That Dakota situation is completely reversed. Today, it is my understanding, that for many people, unless there's some special reason to the contrary, they consider the Dakota calls the good ones. There's less hassle, more togetherness, more community, more enjoyment of brotherly contact, all of these things.

"At that time, the fringe of the Synod would be the Dakotas."

"The congregation was small, I think there probably were between forty and fifty members. And then they worshiped in a little chapel that they had purchased from somebody else. This little chapel that they had there at the time had five pews on the right and five on the left, and each one held five people, so it had a capacity of fifty, plus five chairs in the back. It was a learning experience. It was not a new mission. they had been around a while, it also had gone through some bumpy times the last year or two, for various reasons, some of them the congregations fault, some of them the pastor's fault. I had no place to go but up, which is a good position.

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"When I first discussed the west coast weather with all its rain, they told me, 'You'll get used to it,' and before we finished, I had. I remember in the middle of winter, which was always rain, catching myself saying, (it had turned out to be a dry, cool, maybe 35, sunny day), 'Man I wish it would rain,' - 'cuz then it was warm! And they also said - we couldn't believe this - when you had this cool dry weather, they would say people get sick when you have this weather. It's gotta rain! Gotta have soakin' wet ground and fog and rain and all this, and that's healthy, but this other dry stuff - everybody gets sick. And the fact is, they were right.

"Kids would come to Sunday school walking through the rain, and yet if you had two snowflakes, nobody came to church. You couldn't risk it!"

[Laughs] Oh man, I also learned that in that country when it rained, it interfered with nothing. Kids would come to Sunday school walking through the rain, it didn't hurt 'em a bit, and yet if you had two snowflakes, nobody came to church. You couldn't risk it!

"We had one big snowfall, and it hit when my wife was in the hospital with our firstborn, so I was home alone with the dog. The dog went out in the snow, got lost, didn't come back for a whole day. I ran an ad in the paper. Pretty soon I got a phone call, about a ¼ mile up the road. They had taken it in, put it in the garage. So I went to get the dog. Brought her home. She went in her box under our four legged stove about 7 o'clock. She didn't budge till eleven. She was tired!

"In Tacoma, there were certain people who, without any effort on their part or mine, kind of came to the top and became my support. I remember one lady, anytime that I was out making calls and I wanted a break, and I wanted a pick up, I'd stop and see her. I'd sit in her chair and I'd put my head back, and I might even fall asleep. She'd be in her kitchen working around. She was a lovely old lady, a godsend."

"And I was in Tacoma long enough to realize that outreach wasn't necessarily my strongest suit. After I left there, Paul Nitz came. But the congregation after we left was back on its feet were it belonged, and was starting to move forward. Well, they probably have 200-300 members by now."

A Country Pastor in the Synod's Center

"Well, I was in Tacoma for 4 years, and then I got a call to Kolberg, in southern Door County, out in the country, a congregation of about 210 communicants, I think, and they had also just gone through a bumpy ride. The predecessor there had been there 9 months. He came there as a young fellow. He followed a man who had been there over 40 years, and he decided to change everything overnight, so 9 months later, he was gone. Everybody was edgy when we got there. But that worked out just fine. I loved the place. A little harder on Marian. Our kids were little. It was out in the country. So she didn't get out like she was used to. But I found it exhilarating. And that worked very well."

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"When we got Kolberg I had German services, which I hadn't touched for four years. Once a month, the first Sunday of the month, they had two services. A German service, and an English in the evening. Because German was in the morning, there were people coming to the German service who normally wouldn't have come to the German service. So finally after maybe 6-8 months, I convinced them, 'Well now, we have to have both these services in the morning, and have an English and a German, then you can go to whatever you want.' Well, see, then you got an honest representation. And I think after about a year we reached the point where they finally conceded. So then we had them every second holiday service - second Christmas Day, and the day after Easter. That went for a while too, and pretty soon it kind of ran out. It wasn't necessary. But when we went to the next place, Immanuel, Saint Paul, there they had German every Sunday. It's a good thing I had what I had at Kolberg. Otherwise, I really would have been hopping."

"In Kolberg we spent five years, round numbers, and during that time received a number of calls – well, see, that gets you into your thirties, and the calls, by then, there were enough calls, they were circulating pretty good. So I had calls to Michigan, to northern Michigan, to North Dakota, Ohio. Even in that short period of time, you began to realize that the centrality of WELS was building on the edges."

"But I received a call to Immanuel in St. Paul [Minnesota], and sent it back. Not long after that I received another call to Trinity in Saint Paul, which was the big downtown church. I received that call, turned that back. And shortly after that, I received a third call, and this was the second time to Immanuel, and I told Marian, well it certainly looks like the Lord is telling me its about time you get out of here. Because I figured, where I was, oh I could have gone there for a long time. Kolberg had one meeting am month, with the ladies. And I started a youth group, so that was one meeting a month. We probably had council meetings, but I don't remember them being routine, so you're talking about 2, maybe, 2 meetings a month. (You can't improve on this!) [Smile] So then I went to St Paul. From a congregation of 200, we went to one which

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was listed at 1400, with two pastors. And that was exciting. First of all from Kolberg, (where you had a farmhouse, a church, parsonage, house, school, cheese factory and its house, a general store and a tavern), to the metropolitan Twin Cities."

A Busy Minister in a Bustling Metropolis

"The first call [to Immanuel] that I had declined , George Baer had accepted. So he had been there maybe less than a year. So when I came, there was no older routine dug-in pastor there. He was two years older than I was, and I knew him very well from school. (I always appreciated our acquaintance. In fact, he played the base drum while I played the snare in the years we were there.)

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"Three services every Sunday. And unlike many places, where one person takes the whole weekend off, we always went to all the services. Simply physically, I don't think I could have managed to do that whole thing week after week, or even every other week - your voice. So one person took all the service, and the other one did all the preaching. Early English, then German, then late English. English, German, English. You preached on a Sunday, and went out to greet the people. The other person took care of all the details. When funerals and weddings came up, you took turns. People would come in, we'd take down there information for the funeral, give it to the other guy, he'd take it. Same with weddings. Classes, too , we took turns. One session one would take the grade school, the other the public school. (See, he hadn't been there very long, so you could do this).

"There were some big classes, running thirty, thirty five. At the time we moved in there, they had just almost doubled the capacity of their school. They had an older school building in which there were some temporary classrooms set up. They bought a very substantial building which was across from our parsonage, which had been a telephone exchange, and they converted this into four classrooms. And they did about 70% of the work themselves. Now see, this wasn't the kind of thing I had expected , moving into a city like that, but they were more than willing to pitch in and work themselves. So they probably had about 70 guys involved in this. From architects to carpenters, bricklayers, and just general shaggers (slave laborers). But we ended up with a 9 teacher school, with over 200 kids.

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"They had just begun a major stewardship training program when I got there, and in the course of this they moved their budget up from about \$150,000 to maybe \$200,000 and maintained it. They hired a consultant for that one, and the next year, the following year, George and I took them through again ourselves, and raised it again another 20 thousand. So they were moving pretty good.

"We were there about 3 years, and I knew by then that this was not the kind of thing that I could manage indefinitely. There was way too much that should be done which you couldn't do, and it begins to bother you. I remember coming home and mentioning it to Marian, sitting down to eat, and finding out that I could not chew my food thoroughly before I had to swallow – see, this is nerves. You start reading the signs. After that time, I got the call to Northwestern to teach German.

"I remember sitting down to eat, and finding out that I could not chew my food thoroughly before I had to swallow."

"Now, there was a fellow from St. Paul who was out of high school, who wanted to go to Northwestern. And normally to do that at that time, you had to spend at least one or two extra years to catch up on these languages. Well, he was one sharp kid, so between George and me we took him through that first year of German, which would have amounted probably to two years of high school German, and he'd come in once or twice a week and we'd go through these lesson with him., When he got to Watertown, he impressed them pretty good. So anyway, they figure, 'Maybe we'll take a shot at him, let him teach German.' So that's what happened. After three years we moved to Watertown."

From the Parish Ministry to the Prep Classroom

"It was a good move for us to go back to Watertown. I always enjoyed the campus, the school life. And I remembered thinking to myself, that with my experience (three different types of congregations), and being able to very honestly convey by word and attitude that the ministry's good, to encourage people to go for it. And it worked fine.

"But when you leave the parish ministry you lose something, you leave something, and you end up. . . You miss something. Association with the people is absolutely unique and priceless. I'm sure there is not any other circumstance under which you become so close to people so that you hurt when they hurt, and you laugh when they laugh, and you cry when they cry. It's . . . There's frustrations and there's problems, but as far as the contact with people, there is none like this. So when you go to a school, they don't thank you for what you do. Years later, maybe. But at the time, you're on one side, they're on the other, and even though they will give you all the respect you have coming (and maybe more than you have coming), the association is different. You get a little of this back when you're coaching, but not the teaching. But see there are returns from this too. One of them: you get to know all of these guys going out into the ministry. That's invaluable. And you see kids come in. One I know in particular, the only reason he came was because he was a jock, liked sports, and we had enough sports to keep him going. So they would get to the end of tertia, and I would interview them all, these were in the later years, and ask, 'What are you gonna do?' 'I don't know.' Well, some would say, 'Well, I kinda think maybe, ah, I've always wanted to do this,

"When you leave the parish ministry you lose something, you leave something."

or do that.' 'Well, give it a shot if you really mean it. But if you're just throwing it around, take a year in college. You don't lose a thing. Get your frosh year, go with your buddies. At the end of the year, then you make your decision.' So they do. And pretty soon they go with their buddies into sophomore year, then junior and senior. Then they get that far and it dawns on them, 'I could maybe give Sem a year, see what happens,' and they end up going all the way through to the ministry, and do marvelous work. I know some who decided they were going to become pastors, and by the time they were finished with high school, I would tell them, 'I'm not so sure. You may be better off. . . I think the Lord's got better plans for you.' And they wouldn't go on. And in some cases, that was just a blessing, a real blessing. I know another one who is a neighbor to Mark Schwartzfeger. Mark tells me this, 'He complains about me to this day, that I convinced him to go into the ministry, every week he's gotta write a sermon.' That's too bad . Good for him. He should do that.

"He complains about me to this day, that I convinced him to go into the ministry, every week he's gotta write a sermon."

"So I started out in Watertown in 1960, and taught prep German for three years. At that time they did not distinguish between prep and college. You were just called to Northwestern. So after three years, I was then asked to take a share of the college classes, so I taught half preps and half college.

"It had had lots of advantages, but it also had disadvantages. When the guys would go through the prep classes and get to college with the same prof, and say they had all that stuff already - same guy, same course. (So when that day did finally come that they split the faculty, that was a good move.) I had two sections of tertia and two sections of frosh. There would always be three sections of frosh, even though sometimes I had thirty in a section. I remember commenting one time when the assignments come out, that I had two sections of frosh; one was 31, one was 33. I said, 'You know, this is still kind of rudimentary German. Don't you think you're expecting quite a bit - to be able to cover 30 guys in a low level German class?' Come on. [Laughs] But I did that for twelve years. Later that surprised me. I didn't realize how long it was. But what it also did, it gave me a chance to learn to know that guys who came in from other schools, so two thirds of the frosh I always got to know very well, and that was a blessing; that was fun. I see these guys, well, Kenny Kappel, was one.

"And I think except for the coaching, I'da gone bananas."

"When they finally decided that they probably should start splitting the faculty, it was time. I stayed with these classes for practical reasons, but I also got into coaching. And I think except for the coaching, I'da gone bananas."

Coach Zell: Basketball

"So the chance to do this coaching, that that kept me alive. Teaching German, German, German, you could pretty well go to seed. Just teaching these same classes routinely. I taught only German. But this, coaching, this was good.

"I told him, 'Well, I'll give it a shot and see what happens.' So I did, and that lasted 13 years, so it was a pretty long test."

"But what happened, Rolfe Westendorf was a tutor, and he coached the prep basketball team. So he was there the first year and when he was finished, he told me, 'You gotta take that coaching job.' So Umnus asked me if I would do that, and I told him, 'Well, I'll give it a shot and see what happens.' So I did, and that lasted 13 years, so it was a pretty long test. But again, there is no way you can get inside of these kid better than that. Because when you're in a classroom, you're on this end, they're on that end. They're responsible to you. They're also in a position where they can resent or question what you're telling them to do. Well, when you get together with these guys in the gym, you're on the same side, you see, you're both working for the same thing. So it was very good!. And after that, I remember telling Rudy Sievert who set up the class schedule, 'If you want me to coach - and he knew that if I told him 'Forget it,' he was going to have to do it, cause he had done it before, and he didn't want to do it again - I don't want any Saturday morning classes.' (We still had Saturday morning classes, which meant that you'd go for a basketball game, to Lake Forest, Illinois, on a Friday night, and then come back, then get up for class, well, its bad enough that these kids come in there like zombies, but if you came in there like a zombie also, it was really as loser!) So I said, 'I'll keep on doing this, but you keep me out of Saturday classes.' Well, he managed to do that.

"If you want me to coach, I don't want any Saturday morning classes."

"And then these guys would come in from these others schools like Onalaska, and Winnebago -they had been in the Lutheran Invitational tournament and played against the preps - and they'd come into my class. I remember one kid from Onalaska who was very good, (they had an excellent team over there at Luther that year,) but the following year he was a frosh in my class, and in the last class period before dinner on the Friday when the Lutheran tournament started, he came up to my desk, and he said, 'You know, I'm not in it anymore, but I'm so excited!' He wished me good luck; Denny Lemke."

Coach Zell: Football

"At that time, Ron Roth was the tutor. Ronny Roth had the football B-team. and I went out there one day and watched them, and they had some pretty good looking kids. But Ronny Roth never played football, he didn't know beans from buckshot about football. But they just told him, you go and coach the B-team, so he went out and coached the B-team. So one day I asked Umnus, 'Would you like me to help Ronny?' He said,

"He didn't know beans from buckshot about football."

'By all means!' So I talked to Ronny, and he was delighted. I went out and first time, and all he said was, 'Professor Zell is gonna help coach, so whatever he tells you, that's what you do!' We had two games that year, that's all. (See, this was in its infancy.) I stayed with that program for 11 years. That was really fun. "

Coach Zell: Golf

"Then when we got to the spring, they started a college golf team. Carl Leyrer went out with them, and he was their coach. Well, he wasn't much of a golfer at all. But they had to have a coach to get onto the course and practice at the country club in Watertown, and then to go to the meets. So he asked me a couple times - he couldn't go, he was busy - if I wanted to go. So I went out. Well I ended up being the college golf coach too. Some of the guys I could help. But there were others who knew more golf than I did. Well, that wasn't the point. We just went out to golf. I remember thinking, 'This is gonna be great, I can go out the country club every day, I can golf, I can go to the meets and golf half the round there too.' But that turned into a loser. It took so long! I remember going. . . We had to tee off at noon. My last two classes in the morning I had to drop. We'd take off, by 11 o'clock to get down there, they teed off, then it would take them - well its supposed to take maybe four hours- well, it would take 5 hours and by the time they got through with that it would be closer to 6 o'clock, and by the time we'd get home it'd be 7 or 8 o'clock at night! What in the world is this?! With golf added, there I now had three seasons: fall, winter and spring. And this can get very long! So after a couple years of this, Don Sellnow came to the faculty, who was a very good golfer, and I asked him, 'You interested in that golf team?' He said, 'Oh, sure.' So I said, 'You got it!' So Don, he had it for years."

"Professor Zell is gonna help coach, so whatever he tells you, that's what you do!"

A "New" School, A New President

"We finally got to the point at Northwestern where they started to realize - and this would have been in the early 70's - that they should divide the faculty.

"So President Toppe came to me one day when they were going through this, and said, 'What level do you want to go to? College or prep?' I said, 'I don't know, I think I'm more comfortable with the preps.' Ok. So they called John Sullivan, who worked in the college, and I stayed with the preps. They also called a separate prep coach, Jerry Kruse. He was at MLS. One thing he wanted to do was coach basketball. Umnus told me, 'You want to stay with that prep basketball? If you don't, this could be instrumental in Jerry Kruse coming over here. So I said, 'If he wants to take basketball, let him take basketball.' So he got that. Well, then I was pretty well set. I figured, 'Ah, I'll just coach the B-team football, just have one season, and then after what's been going on, I've got it made here. So by the

"I figured, 'I've got it made here'. . . And then in '74 they split the administration and I got the president's call. "

time this came into place it was 1974, and then in '74 they split the administration and I got the [prep] presidents call.

"Well they called two fellows before me and they both turned it down. So when they finally sent me the call, I think I was about 55, I figured, 'Ah what the world, why not?' So I finished coaching the B-team that fall. There was no question that that had to go. So here I thought I had it all made, and I ended up with more work than I had before. But it worked fine.

"I kept the tertia German classes purposely. Both sections. And I think under the circumstances, you could have made a case for not doing that. But that's where I got to know all the tertianers. Otherwise you don't get to know them, you know their names and that's it. But the ones you had in class, you got to know very well. So those who made it all the way through - nobody got all the way through without me knowing them. So I could tell one kid who got through and nobody expected it, 'You did a beautiful job!' and another who'd gone through and never really pushed on the pedal, 'Well you finished here and you still have a half a tank of gas left.' But it was great.

"But I think, perhaps, what I ended up enjoying doing, was what other people may not like to do, and that was organizing things."

"As President, I had a very good relation to our faculty. They were very supportive, and whatever needed doing, and I had to have somebody else do it, they were very willing to do this. The relationship with the families was good. But I think, perhaps, what I ended up enjoying doing, was what other people may not like to do, and that was organizing things. Getting this person. . . You get the student aid, the student assistance. . . You get that in order. . . And you tell me how its working and move it along and improve it and develop it. With another person I could say, 'You work with the class scheduling.' It was finding people who liked to do some kind of thing, and they would do that. 'You got something you want to do, or do different or something? Just come and tell me and we'll talk about it' I liked to get all of these pieces to fall into place. It takes a couple years to really catch on.

"The one fear that perpetuated itself all the way through 15 years: that I would forget something."

"The one fear that perpetuated itself all the way through 15 years: that I would forget something. This nagging fear that all of a sudden, for instance, I'd come over to my office and 'Holy Fright! I have to have this at the printer tomorrow?!' [Laughs] 'I can't have it at the printer tomorrow, unless I stay up all night!'

President Zell and the Prep Penal System

"Northwestern, up until this time, had been a faculty dominated school; discipline was exercised by the entire faculty. If there were disciplinary cases, the dean would bring them to the faculty, and the faculty would decide what would happen. I don't know how far back it went and how far it lasts. I don't know what happened with the college, but I do know this: that when we split the administration, if there were disciplinary cases, it was brought to the faculty, and they would discuss this and vote on this, and decide what would happen. Now the fact of the matter was, the constitution of the school, the board regulations stipulated, that the president was responsible for all disciplinary cases. Which means that its not the faculty's job. It also means that the dean is not the one who has primary responsibility for that.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'If President Toppe would have said that to the college faculty, he would have had a war on his hands!'"

"So as we worked through this, finally, we reached the point . . . One day I told the faculty, 'You know, I'm really responsible for this. I will have the last word, so I'm going to present this to you, and you can tell me all the input that you want, but when it comes to the final decision, I will make it.' Now I remember thinking to myself, if President Toppe would have said that to the college faculty, he would have had a war on his hands! But when I told this to the prep faculty, they all said, 'Great! That's just fine! We will have opportunity to speak our pieces to our hearts' content, but we will not have to decide, and we will not get the heat, so that's fine.'

"It worked that when things came up, the dean would bring them to me, and I presented them to the faculty. I'd ask the dean, 'Tell us what we got here, so he would put it out, and they would talk back and forth and 'Okay, if you have an opinion you may speak it, but I may not necessarily follow.' And then the dean and I would look at what we had, and between us, we would decide. And I'd say, 'Okay Dean, if you want to go through with this, go that way, and if you run into trouble, you send them to me. And this was the ace, and we always kept this. So it ended up going to the faculty, ending up in the deans office, and then he would talk to them, the student, explain; talk to the parents, and tell them what was going to happen: 'You go.' 'You stay.' 'You're on probation.' (Whatever it was.) And then once in a while, they'd reach a point where they still would be kind of unhappy, and he'd tell them, 'Well, go talk to the President.' So then they'd call me and they would come to my office. But by this time, they knew what the score was, and I could tell them, 'What do you expect? We've reviewed this, we've gone through it, we've looked at it, we've compared it to other instances where we've had something similar. We realize that there may or may not be extenuating circumstances here, but, this is where were at. Now, this is what we can do. We are up against the wall, as you can see. Something is going to happen. You wanna take him home? Then nothing

"If you run into trouble, you send them to me.' This was the ace."

goes on his record, he was withdrawn. It's either that, or I'm going to say, 'You take him out,' and it will be on his record that he was dismissed for cause. We won't spell it out, but in either case, you take him home, and if he really wants to be in this place, you tell him to get his act together at home, and at the end of the year and when next year comes around, we'll talk to his pastor, we'll talk to his teachers, we'll talk to his family, and if they're ready to do it, we'll take him back on probation. And by the end of the first quarter, if he improves himself, he's off.' And almost all did that.

"The amazing thing was that these guys who would push the envelope to the limit, when it came down to getting axed, would be in tears. They didn't want to leave."

"So, it came to a point, where they knew they were going to get zapped if it was bad enough. If it wasn't bad enough, they went on probation. And if it got to be a fracture of probation, by that time we had already conveyed the message: 'You bust your probation, that's a given - you're outta here.' But the amazing thing to me, was that these guys who would push the envelope to the limit, and bitch and grind about what they could and could not do, when it came down to getting axed, would be in tears. They didn't want to leave. And almost always after being out, they would be back as fast as they could be; back with their friends, and their parents would be glad to have them out of the house again, and didn't have to feed them, and didn't have to tell them, 'You go to bed at 10:30, (which we could do: You're in bed at 10:30 period. We didn't ask. You just go to bed.) And the corollary to this, would be the other guys who would bitch and grind, and yet stay out of trouble and finally get to the end of their tenure, because their parents made them, and they would say, 'I cant wait to get out of here, and they'd be gone. Twenty years later, they're sending their kids back. And this just makes me laugh. The worst ones would send all their kids back, every one of them.

"But we did, John, in the course of the 15 years, from when they split the administration, till the time when we left - and I'm convinced its continued - we made a different school. It was altogether different. With the discipline and our own identity as a prep school. When the preps were a department of NWC, they didn't have an identity, so they created one themselves. Individually and as clicks, they made their own names for themselves, and they weren't always all that good. They didn't get the attention they needed. They didn't get the personal guidance that they needed. They would have advisors. Most of the time the only thing that they advised was their academics. It was a better school. "

"We made a different school. It was altogether different. It was a better school."

An Amalgamation on the Horizon

"What happened with the existence of the prep school, is a whole other story. They opened it up to girls, and later the attendance went way up to 325, and all kinds of kids came in there who really didn't belong, and we had all kinds of trouble the first couple years, when in one shot we shipped 18 out, but it had to be

done. And then it reached the point where we had 325 preps, and only about 200 college people, and the preps start showing their oats a little bit, and that wasn't a good thing on a shared campus, so we reached the point where it became black on white; for the prep school to stay there, it had to be smaller than the college; the college had to be number one. The prep school was the feeder to the college, and if not there, to New Ulm. It was the only way that campus could work.

"And then it came to this: When the time comes when we run out of room, we'll take the whole prep school and move it to Prairie [du Chien]. The stipulation was, and I made sure it was in there, we will move the prep school over there when the room is needed. In other words, we weren't going to move the prep school over there when there are only 135 college guys here on this great big campus. That's foolish. Well, when it reached the point for this to happen, we had to get the college up, but then the college didn't come up like it should have - it took a while for anything to happen with the college - so the prep school stayed. But they made such a fuss about this, that everybody thought we had shut the door to the girls. So the girls didn't come. Well, when the girls didn't come, the boys stopped coming too. The prep enrollment dropped too. Now you've got two small schools. There's no point in moving them to Prairie. And meanwhile, Prairie's mad, because they're left over there, and the preps aren't coming over, and they're not doing what they should.

"It became black on white; for the prep school to stay there, it had to be smaller than the college. It was the only way that campus could work."

"Finally, it reaches a point when we brought this to the Board for Worker Training, which in turn brought it in its report to the Synod. 'We will stay here, and we will also accept girls as long as they take the same course, with only a couple of exceptions, and as long as this campus is big enough.' When this news got out, pretty soon the girls started coming back. And when they started coming back, the boys started coming back. And finally it came back to this, where we now knew that we couldn't do anything on this real estate with both schools. We had to make a move. So it means move the whole prep school to Prairie. Or, move the college to New Ulm, and finally that's what happened. And people to this day still question that. But the alternative would have been to shut the prep school down and send all these kids to Prairie, which means you still have three campuses to pay for, and that in itself loomed as an insurmountable problem, so they did the painful thing and moved the college out and kept and expanded the prep school, and brought Prairie over to Watertown, and that has blossomed; and the college gone there has also blossomed. This was a very bitter pill, and I remember at the time talking to people - see I was out of there by then - and telling them, 'I don't like it any more than you do. I went to Northwestern. Watertown is a good place for Northwestern College. Since 1865! Why would you want to do it? Well, you got a better solution? See, there isn't any! I don't know of another one.

"We now knew that we couldn't do anything on this real estate with both schools. We had to make a move."

"We had one, two, three campuses going. We couldn't afford it. How do you cut this back to two campuses? Well, you can move MLA back to New Ulm, and move NPS to New Ulm, and leave NWC on its campus. Well, NWC, let's say you got only 175, 200 people on this campus. You know how many you're going to have with MLA and NPS and DMLC on one campus?! (Now, I don't know if you know this, but between DMLC and MLA, when they were together, there wasn't any love lost. Believe me, there was no love lost between the student bodies, between the faculties, between the administrations. It was very obvious that DMLC should be on that campus alone, with no hangers-on on the prep level kicking up a bunch of dust all over the place and making it difficult.) So as far I was concerned, the best thing to do was to get those kids out of here. And you can't deny it. So you want to have two campuses, how you gonna do this? Go ahead! Be my guest! [Smiling] So they came up with this, and it broke the hearts of a lot of people.

"This broke the hearts of a lot of people. But the experience since it was done proves that there were advantages to doing this."

"But the experience since it was done proves that there were advantages to doing this. Now, there are disadvantages also. One of them is, you no longer have the college right there in Watertown for the preps. It used to be we could much more easily encourage people to go from NPS to ^NMWC than from MLS and from any other school. It was simple. The NWC guys would encourage them, and [the preps] would watch them and learn to respect them. So we'd send 70% of the boys over to the college,. Well, now that's not there anymore. So when they send a high percentage to New Ulm, that's commendable. That's a feat. And I think this year from what I read, the prep graduates will have a large percentage going to New Ulm. Nearly 70%. The other thing is when you get to MLC now, whether there is any drain off from the pastors program into the shorter - I didn't say easier - the shorter teachers program, especially those who are ready to get married, and all of the sudden they're in the same class; the one is ready to go out and start paying off some debts and get started with a family, and the other has another 4 more years. Is this a disadvantage? It could be. You better be committed."

A Sister Synod Leaves the Family: The Break with Missouri

"You could kind of sense it coming already when we were in Tacoma. At that time we were still having mixed conferences with the Missouri guys in town. And every once in a while, something would surface. Some of these characters would make you raise your eyebrows, and make you wonder where they're coming from. When we went to Kolberg in Door County, there it wasn't quite as obvious, because the Missouri guys around there were pretty solid yet, and the separation really wasn't that imminent. For instance, when I left Kolberg, the Missouri guy from Forestville, six miles away, served the vacancy. When we got to St. Paul, there it became a little more

"Some of these characters would make you raise your eyebrows, and make you wonder where they're coming from."

obvious, because there the Missouri scene was stronger, and there were some more conspicuous characters, who also took the lead in some of the wanderings from what they once stood for and taught. So I never really got to know anybody in the St. Paul area from Missouri. We had people who came from Missouri in the congregation, and there were some of them that were sort of a problem,. But their real separation that eventually came, happened after I had left the parish ministry, and went to Watertown. So I was spared both the heartache and hassle of going through that.

"I do remember thinking to myself after I left Immanuel, just what that congregation would do, because the people who had been serving Immanuel for years before we got there were very Missouri oriented. For many years there was a guy there by the name of Ernst, Gussy Ernst. Pretty sound, but I don't think that the congregation realize that they weren't Missouri. And then his son-in-law came, who eventually got his doctorate in St Paul and also from Switzerland. Before he was there he was in Milwaukee at Parkside, and his practice there left a whole lotta doubt as to what kind of a Lutheran church it was.

"In our Synod, there were the ones who wanted to break immediately when it became obvious that there was something rotten in Denmark."

"The identity of the Immanuel congregation in St. Paul was kind of a toss up. When I left, somehow or another by the grace of God, that congregation stuck with WELS. Event though there were some people in some pretty strong leadership roles who had strong Missouri leadings, as well as Missouri origins.

"In our Synod, there were the ones who wanted to break immediately when it became obvious that there was something rotten in Denmark. And there were also the ones who saw this coming, but wanted to delay as long as was practical and possible, to see if somehow or other they couldn't have some positive effect on the direction Missouri was going. And I suppose the other one would be the group who weren't quite sure what to do. And I'll say this, there were also some who very definitely did not want to break under any circumstance, to the point that when that separation came, there were some who left WELS, and also took their congregations with them. The daughter of the Immanuel congregation in St. Paul, which is St. James, was one of those. The pastor who was there, he and his congregation went to Missouri. Big, big, new church. Took 'em all. So if I divided our Synod, I'd say there's two extremes, and then the ones in the middle, who were the majority, and that's the direction that the Synod finally took. They waited, and waited, and waited, and finally they moved. The ones who were impatient pulled out and became the CLC.

"I think by the time it really worked itself through, my own conclusion was that a person's attitude and convictions upon that were going to depend a whole lot on where you were."

"For me it was a tentative thing. I think by the time it really worked itself through, my own conclusion was that a person's attitude and convictions upon that were going to depend a whole lot on where you were. Out

west, there was no question that Missouri was off the track. You get out on the fringe, where the people have a little more leash to run on, they'll run on it. And it was in that district that a number of guys went to the CLC, some good friends of mine. Then you get into places like Door County, ^{where} ~~where~~ the Missouri guys were not in the majority - WELS churches were in the majority - and the guys who ~~were~~ ^{were} in Missouri were pretty straight-laced, and there you'd be hesitant to make a big move. The city of St. Paul, on the other hand, was the opposite again. There were some buggers.

"By and large, the majority were willing to recognize what was happening, but not in a big hurry to make a bolt. And incidentally, that step that WELS took at that time to step away from Missouri, totally reshaped the synod. The sentiment at that time was, 'If you ever break from Missouri, you're dead.' Now this was not necessarily only from the outside of the Synod, but also from the inside of the WELS, that 'We couldn't stand on our own feet.' The foreign mission program that we had was virtually nothing. Whatever foreign mission work that was done was done as part of the Synodical Conference. So to decide that we would not walk in step with them anymore, in the minds of many, was simply a death knell. But the consequence of it was that we developed our own mission program. We went through a number of years, particularly under the presidency of Oscar Naumann, when the opening of missions was above and beyond anything that anyone envisioned. We were opening 15-20 a year. And we were able to do it, and we were successful in getting out. I remember different stages of this, it finally came that we were represented in 50 states. We were nowhere near that before this time. And the foreign mission program as we see it today, limited as it is, was non-existent.

"The sentiment at that time was, 'If you ever break from Missouri, you're dead.' To decide that we would not walk in step with them anymore, in the minds of many, was simply a death knell."

"At that time, I think everybody had concerns about the future of the synod. I did as well, but not to the point that I was afraid that we'd go under or fail to do what we could and should do. As I think back, I thought that the men who were ahead of us, that when we would look at some of these fellows - there were enough of them that would instill confidence - the God-given gifts were there. There were some pretty strong people. So as you grow up, and especially come in from the bottom and watch these fellows operate, you don't get the feeling, 'We don't have the talents to do this.' I thought these guys were enough on the ball that, God-willing, they can make this ship float."

"As I think back, I thought that the God-given gifts were there. God-willing, they can make this ship float."

Many Ministries, Many Titles, but One Favorite. . .

"When we retired, went back to Mishicot and I started preaching around there, and ending up with a vacancy 9 miles away, and people started calling me 'Pastor.' I told one fella, a member at St. Peter there, 'You know what? I got my old title back, and I love it.' And in that congregation I'm not 'President,' I'm not 'Professor,' I'm 'Pastor.' And that's great. I love that. Because I am convinced that when you get right down to the bottom line of this, that's the office where the things really happen."

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