



A Biography of
Rev. Harold Frederick Backer

by his grandson,
Aaron Harold Glaeske

Sr. Church History
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Prof. John Brenner
February 15, 1993

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11331 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

A Biography of Rev. Harold Frederick Backer

Preface

Harold Backer was born in 1909 and died at what we might consider a young age in 1960. Until I had decided to write my Senior Church History Paper about him I knew very little about my grandfather. I certainly know more about him now than I ever have. I wish only that I could have known him personally in this life but I am confident that I will see him when we are reunited with all of God's saints in glory.

I hope that this paper will help preserve the memory of Harold Backer for those who knew him and for those, especially his descendants, who never had the opportunity to meet him. However, because this is a Church History paper, I will concentrate the large portion of the biography on his work as a pastor.

In no way do I intend this paper to be some sort of eulogy or laudatory epitaph for this man. I am sure he would not have wanted that. Rather, I hope this paper will lead the reader to recognize the grace and providence of our faithful Lord and Savior who has, does and always will provide his Church with such faithful and dedicated servants, pastors like Harold Backer.

This Biography is Dedicated to my Loving Grandmother,
Margaret Stegeman Backer
and to the man who, by his example, has kindled my desire to
serve God as a pastor, to my father,
Rev. Vilas R. Glaeske

I. Birth to Seminary Graduation

On January 19, 1909 in the very small town of Essig, Minnesota, God gifted August and Ella (nee Hellman) Backer with a son. They named him Harold Frederick. While still an infant he was made a child of the Heavenly Father through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism at Zion Lutheran Church in Essig.

Harold had two older brothers with whom he shared his early years. The oldest was Adelbert and the other was Edgar. "Aboo, Kaboo and Maboo," as Harold had named the Backer trio, spent their early years in Essig. Here they attended elementary school and in their spare time played at or near the Essig Creamery which was managed by their father.



Harold was confirmed at Zion Lutheran in Essig but shortly afterwards his family moved to New Ulm. In New Ulm, August made a living as a harness maker. This was quite a change from making butter, but here he would be closer to his Backer relatives (the composer and director, Emil D. Backer, was his cousin) and the school his sons would attend. He purchased a large house near the campus of Dr. Martin Luther High School and College. This house would eventually have a history all its own. (There are even people my age who mourn

its recent demise.) This house was the famed Waldheim House and it was where Harold and his brothers lived when they attended Dr. Martin Luther High School. In the fall of 1924 Harold enrolled at DMLHS and four years later in 1928 he graduated.

Although Adelbert and Edgar continued their education at the college and later were called as Christian Day School teachers in the Wisconsin Synod, God led Harold to pursue the road less traveled. So in the fall of 1928 he enrolled at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota to study for the pastoral ministry.

It was at this time that Dr. Martin Luther College asked August Backer if, since his house was so large and close to the campus, he wouldn't mind housing six female students on the second floor. August agreed to the proposal. Because he did, his son Harold would meet the woman of his dreams. Whether or not Harold realized at that time, only Harold knows. In his second and last year at Concordia while he was home enjoying the last few days of his longer Christmas and New Year break the DMLC ladies were returning for class. It was at this time, January of 1930, that Harold Backer met a certain lovely lady named Margaret Stegeman. However, because this was the time of the Great Depression and because no one would turn down the opportunity to work, marriage was not a consideration or practical possibility for several years. Besides, these were still the days when ministerial students typically did not marry until after seminary graduation.

Later that year in May of 1930 Harold graduated from Concordia College in St. Paul, packed his bags and headed to the new campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary which stood on an open hill in Thiensville, WI. I have every reason to assume that Harold was a good student who got along well with the other students. As one of his classmates, Erwin Scharf,

recalls, "I remember Harold as a diligent fellow." (Scharf Interview 2/7/93) Prof. Scharf also recalls that Harold's feet and 6' frame could often be found on the basketball court. In his first year he sang in the chorus. However, in the second year when Erwin Scharf and the student body organized the group into the Male Chorus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Harold decided not to be a part of such a well organized group. He certainly enjoyed to sing but why he didn't stay in the chorus remains a mystery.

He preached his first student sermon at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Waseca, Minnesota. When he began his second year, one of his friends from high school days, Otto Engel, arrived on the campus to begin his seminary training. Pastor Engel writes,

I shall begin with a memory that I had when Harold was a student at DMLC in New Ulm. This is something that perhaps you never knew. In his younger years Harold had a speech impediment. Imagine my surprise when in my first year at the Seminary in 1931 the first person that I heard preach his class sermon in the chapel was Harold Backer. After inquiring I found out that he had taken a speech course at some school that had helped him to completely overcome his handicap. It was unbelievable. (Engel Letter 2/5/93)

The dear Lord was certainly working in the life of Harold Backer and preparing him for what was to come. Finally, in June of 1933 at the age of 24, Harold and his classmates (see



Appendix I) graduated from the Seminary but only three graduates received calls immediately upon graduation. Erwin Scharf was called to teach at Winnebago Lutheran Academy. Waldemar Pless was also called to teach and coach at Winnebago Lutheran Academy. And Harold Backer was called to Emanuel Lutheran Church in New London, Wisconsin as an

assistant pastor to Walter Pankow and to teach fifth and sixth grades in the Christian Day School. There were not many calls open at this time and perhaps the height of the Great Depression had something to do with that. Prof. Scharf remembers that in these days "pastors didn't vacation, get sick or die!" (Scharf Interview 2/7/93) It just wasn't allowed.

II. The Platteville Years

There are not many if any who remember Harold's years in New London. Erwin Scharf saw him a few times at conferences but that was about it. In early 1936 Pastor Harold Backer accepted the Lord's call to serve St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Platteville, Wisconsin, a town located along the Mississippi River in the southwestern corner of the state. When he arrived in Platteville he was warmly greeted by his congregation - the janitor and one member, Mr. Kleinhammer. That was it, just the three of them. Apparently the ministry of a Pastor Ave'Lalament had been plagued with several disputes and problems. Pastor Backer had his work cut out for him but the Lord had sent and equipped his servant for the task at hand.

Later in 1936 the Lord also saw fit to bless Harold with a "helper suitable." So on the twentieth day of June in 1936 in St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Bangor, Wisconsin, Harold Frederick Backer and Margaret Wilhelmina Dorthea Huld Stegeman (b. May 23 1911), the lady he had met seven years earlier in the Waldheim House, were joined in marriage. After a brief visit to see relatives in New Ulm they returned to Platteville.



Tender Reception to Platteville Pastor And His Recent Bride

Platteville, Wis.—Special: A reception was held Tuesday evening by the members and friends of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran church of Platteville for their pastor, the Rev. Harold Backer, and his bride.

The pastor was married on June 20 and had just returned with his bride. During his absence, the congregation remodeled the parsonage, repainted and decorated the interior, laid new oak floors, etc.

The hall of the church Tuesday night was filled to capacity, nearly 225 members and friends of the congregation attended the affair. The formal reception and the program of speakers was under the direction of the Rev. Martin A. Russert, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran church of Duquesne. Rev. Russert is a close friend of the local church.

Rev. Backer came to Platteville last fall. He is a graduate of Martin Luther college of New Ulm, Minn., Concordia college of St. Paul, and the Lutheran Seminary of Thiensville, Wis.

Mrs. Backer, formerly Miss Margaret Stegemann of Bangor, Wis., is also a graduate of Martin Luther college at New Ulm. After her graduation, she taught in Lutheran parish schools. Her last position was at St. Paul's Lutheran school at North La Crosse, Wis.

The wedding took place at the bride's home-church at Bangor.

On their first Sunday back Mr. Kleinhammer

reminded his pastor, "Well, pastor, today you will have to preach to more than the janitor and me." Actually, at this time there were roughly 20-30 members who had either been reclaimed or converted. The Good Shepherd was working to restore his flock.

On February 20, 1939 the Lord blessed Harold and Margaret with the gift of a son whom they named Duane Harold. However, later that same day, shortly after he was made a member of the Heavenly Kingdom through baptism, our gracious and wise Father called little Duane Backer home to live with him in

INFANT BACKER

Platteville, Wis.—Special: Burial services for Dwane Backer, infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Backer, were held in Hillside Cemetery here. The child died shortly after birth last Friday.

glory. Duane had died of a "collapsed lung."

The Lord blessed the faithful ministry of Pastor Backer and before he accepted the call to Chaseburg and Town of Hamburg, Wisconsin, St. Paul's Church in Platteville had grown considerably. When he left there were more than 100 communicants. While he struggled to reclaim old members and worked at digging up new ones I think his ministry in Platteville could be characterized as positive, optimistic and rewarding. He was one who faithfully carried out the work

Platteville Church Will Observe 60th Anniversary Sunday

Platteville, Wis.—Special: New hardwood floors, new seats and carpets, a renovated interior and exterior and many improvements about the community center of St. Paul's Evangelistic Lutheran church are preliminary to the celebration taking place Sunday on the church grounds in honor of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the church.

The Rev. Harold F. Becker, the new pastor, has brought together all the old and many new members and the congregation which had dwindled to low prestige is now one of the most active in the city.

A special dinner in the church community hall at noon will be followed with services in the open, speaking by the pastor and several visiting ministers and a program offered by the Ladies Aid of the church.

the Lord had placed before him.

III. The Chaseburg and Hamburg Years

In 1939 at the start to what would flare into World War II Harold Backer accepted the Lord's call to serve a dual parish, St. Peter's in Chaseburg, Wisconsin and St. Peter's in the Town of Hamburg. These two towns are located on the ridge east of Stoddard along the Mississippi River Valley.



The war was a concern for people at this time, as one could imagine. People feared, at least at first, that some battles of this war might be fought on American soil. The United States Government also placed people on rations to conserve resources for the war effort. Another concern of the people at this time was the Polio epidemic. Although many survived their trip to the iron lung there were several of all ages who did not. The cares of the people were also the cares of their pastor. These too were the concerns of Pastor Backer while he served in Chaseburg and even later when he served in La Crosse.

While Harold and Margaret lived in Chaseburg the Lord blessed them with three daughters. Ruth was born on April 27, 1941, Elsa was born two years later on March 31, 1943 and two years after that Myrna was born on October 4, 1945. (see Appendix II) It was during the Chaseburg years that Harold's love for children of all ages and his concern for their



Christian education became quite evident. Whether this love and concern was brought to light because of his own daughters or whether it was simply the Lord's time for this love to be put into action, only the Lord knows. I believe it was both.

The congregation at Chaseburg had started a summer school for its children and Pastor Backer supported this program vigorously. Perhaps Pastor Floyd Mattek, in the February 3, 1993 letter he sent me, gave the best description of both the summer school and the ministry of Harold Backer.

My memories of...Pastor Harold Backer go back to 1941 when he asked my roommate and myself to teach summer school for him in Chaseburg and Hamburg. We were about to graduate from DMLC.

Note I said summer school - not VBS. His was no 5 or 10 day course, but ran for 3 or 4 weeks. It included Bible History, hymnology, Bible geography, catechism which made for a full school day, not just a few hours daily. My friend, Bill Keuther, taught in Chaseburg and I in Hamburg. When we finished at these two places we taught another group of children from the Chaseburg congregation in a public school out in the country. We finished teaching shortly before my wedding on August 20.

....It was during that summer (the summer of 1943 when he stayed in the parsonage at Chaseburg and taught summer school) that I learned to know your grandfather. He was a man who took his calling seriously - a man of love and concern for his flock - yet a man who had a very good sense of humor. He was fun to work with - a man who gave me much good advice - a man after whom I patterned my own ministry. I can still remember him saying his sermons out loud as he memorized them in the church. One of his favorite tools to work with was Luther's Small Catechism. He used it for his teaching of both child and adult.

Although Pastor Backer seemed to have an excellent program of Christian education for elementary age children he was not satisfied. Even though he did not push for a Christian Day School in Chaseburg he led by example. When his oldest daughter, Ruth, was ready for

Kindergarten he drove her to First Lutheran in La Crosse every morning and picked her up every evening. But he was not satisfied with that. He felt that there should be something for the teenagers in high school as well.

So it happened that one Sunday evening after a dinner to which the families of Pastors Otto Engel and Theodore Miller had been invited, the three pastors sat at the dining room table and began sharing their ideas of starting an area Lutheran high school. They were serious about this and decided to put their money where their hearts were. Each of them put 50 cents on the table and decided that with this money they would pay for the postage on the letters they were going to send to the area pastors and congregations in order to promote the idea of a high school. Little did they know that this would be the beginning of what we know today as Luther High School in Onalaska, Wisconsin. To be sure, they were years away from the opening day and a hard road lay ahead of them but the Lord would bless the work they had begun.

I think it is also worthy to mention that these three pastors were very good friends. Their families got together often but especially on the Fourth of July for an annual picnic in the beautiful Chaseburg hill country. During Lent they would also exchange pulpits and after services they would meet at one of the parsonages for a pleasant visit.

Pastor Backer also made time for the older members. He kept very busy visiting the shut-ins. And since many shut-ins stayed with their families this afforded him the opportunity to visit with his members in their homes.

Margaret Backer recalls that, in spite of the rough times the nation and the American people were experiencing, these were peaceful and pleasant years for the Backer family. She

recalls that no matter where Harold served he wanted his congregations to believe that they were experiencing or were going to experience their best years yet. The Chaseburg and Hamburg years were no exception.

IV. The Mt. Calvary Years

In September of 1947 Harold Backer once again answered the Lord's call and he moved his family up the River to the large city of La Crosse, Wisconsin. Here he began to serve the members of Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church. The surroundings might have changed a bit but the man did not.

Harold Backer was both a pastor and a father concerned about Christian education. At Mt. Calvary he felt the people were ready for a Christian Day School and he encouraged it. He did not force it on the people but again he led by quiet example. Often he would walk or drive his children to school at First Lutheran. Several times he would meet them at lunch break and walk them to the park for a picnic and afterwards walk them back before classes resumed. (In those days they had an hour for lunch!) He recognized that children needed a break from the books and from the house so he would often take his family out for rides in the country to see the countryside, especially in fall. His daughter, Myrna, remembered a walk they took:

One of my favorite memories of Dad was a winter evening when I was maybe 5. Mom needed something from the store and Dad was going to get it. The evening was so beautiful he decided to walk and pull me on the sled behind him down the middle of the side streets. I remember how quiet everything was. I don't remember that he talked much with me, but I felt his quiet

strength and his inner peace and his "in tune with nature" characteristics making a lasting impression on me. (Myrna Letter 2/2/93)

On July 12, 1952, God once more blessed the Backers with the gift of a daughter whom they named Mary Ellen.

Shortly after his arrival at Mt. Calvary the organist, Walter Albrecht, mentioned to Pastor Backer that for various reasons he wanted to be relieved of his duties as organist. Mt. Calvary Congregation called Betty Mittelsteadt to serve as director of music and education. This was to be the beginning of a relationship between the Backers and Betty that has endured to this day. Much of what I know of Harold Backer during these years I learned from her.

Betty described Pastor Backer as a "dreamer, planner and visionary." He had an excellent relationship with all the called workers and he was a very giving and caring man. With his convincing and winning-way attitude and personality he persuaded the members of Mt. Calvary to begin Saturday School for their children. He picked and trained the teachers to teach the Saturday School courses. Even though this program started with curtain dividers in the church basement it was a success.

"But what about the teenagers?" Pastor Backer asked. So they began High School Bible Class. In this class the teenagers had a catechism review, studied books of the Bible, had classes on marriage and weddings, the life of Luther and the life of St. Paul. Many students have good memories and reports about these classes. Betty Mittelsteadt was involved in all the education classes for the children in one way or another. She was kept busy. But in addition to education she also had music.

Betty played organ every Sunday unless she was on vacation. She directed three choirs,

the Children's Choir, the High School Girls' Choir (They had boys at first but it was obvious that all the boys wanted to do was plague the girls.) and the Adult Choir. She worked closely with Pastor Backer in the area of church music and refers to this time of her life as her best experience in church music. She remembers that Pastor Backer's favorite hymn was "Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness" (TLH 371).

During this time the Wisconsin Synod went on record as opposing the Scout organizations based on Scriptural principles of fellowship. While the Lutheran Boy Pioneers became the "orthodox" answer for the young boys in our synod nothing had been done for the girls. That problem was solved in September of 1954 when Pastor Backer and another Mt. Calvary member, Jean Masewicz, organized a girls club with the idea of completing a youth program for Christian fellowship. This was the beginning of what we know today as the Lutheran Girl Pioneers. Although, he moved to Winona, Minnesota in 1955, Harold Backer still worked on this project and finally saw the constitution drawn up on May 5, 1955 and adopted on June 22 of the same year. He was recognized as the co-founder of the Lutheran Girl Pioneers and served as its national chaplain for two years. Before he died he saw the LGP grow to 28 charter congregations from Tucson, Arizona to Mankato, Minnesota and as far east as Lansing, Michigan. Today it has grown to enormous size as the November 1, 1992 issue of the Northwestern Lutheran indicates in a short article by Judy Hansen.

While he was serving Mt. Calvary he also continued work on the area Lutheran high school. Pastor Otto Engel and Pastor Arden Stuebs best remember his work on this. Pastor Engel wrote:

During my Stoddard years I learned to know Harold Backer as a zealous and ambitious church worker who was especially

interested in youth work. During my Stoddard years I often went along with him to a meeting group that organized themselves into a society for the purpose of starting a Lutheran high school in La Crosse. At this meeting they would exchange ideas as to how to proceed, one of them was to have a high school committee appointed in every congregation that was to promote the idea of the high school. (Engel Letter 2/5/93)

Pastor Stuebs wrote:

Your grandfather was very much interested in Christian education on the elementary as well as on the high school level. He and I worked very hard on establishing a high school. We had a difficult time convincing some of the pastors to create interest in this project in their respective congregations. We would meet together privately working on programs to promote the movement in this area. One of the problems centered around where to begin classes. In the early fifties many of the business school in the La Crosse area were closed and we looked at some of these vacant buildings to see if we could use them for opening a high school with just the ninth grade. We also had a chance to start in an extra class room that was available in St. Paul's new school at Bangor, but nothing materialized. Your grandfather was a very positive man. He continued working toward that end knowing that with the Lord's blessing something would materialize. He left this area and accepted a call to St. Martin's, Winona, Minn. He still continued to help in many ways in finally establishing our present school at Onalaska. (Stuebs Letter 2/7/93)

All this work and still Pastor Backer continued to faithfully carry out his duties as a pastor. He wrote and delivered good, sound and edifying sermons. He continued to visit his shut-ins and on occasion he would even take his daughters along to sing for these people who were no longer able to join with the body of believers for worship. Many families appreciated this. It might be good to note that hospital stays were longer in these days and that meant that sick people remained on a pastor's calling list longer than they do now. As always this work was time consuming.

Pastor Backer also had a good reputation with the brothers. They appreciated his fine

people skills. This might explain why he was asked to serve as the circuit pastor for this area. Pastor Carl Mischke served in La Crosse for two years while Harold was there. His comments about Pastor Backer supported the fact that Pastor Backer was a respected man. He also recalled that during this time of rationing while he and his wife were waiting for their name to come up on a list to buy a car, Pastor Backer drove Mrs. Mischke to First Lutheran School where she taught half days. He also willingly provided rides to wherever she needed to go.

The years in La Crosse were busy yet productive. They were probably some of the best years of Harold Backer's ministry. The Lord of the Church not only blessed the people of Mt. Calvary through the work of this faithful servant but he saw fit to bless the La Crosse area congregations and our Wisconsin Synod as well.

V. The Winona Years and His Death

In January of 1955 Harold Backer accepted the divine call to serve St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota. One last time he packed up his family and moved north along the Old Miss. On February 13, 1955 he was installed. Many pastors in the Winona area had encouraged him to accept the call to St. Martin's because they felt that this congregation was a "sleeping giant" that needed to be roused. They felt that Harold Backer had the skill and experience to deal with the people at Winona. The years in Winona would prove to be the toughest of all.

Pastor Backer served with Wilmer Hoffman for about three years. During the first three years the struggles were mostly with a few select people. Two incidents come to mind. Shortly after they arrived the Backers were accused of living outside their means because they

could hire a maid and because their daughters were dressed in the most expensive of dresses. Pastor Backer pointed out that the "maid" they had seen working around the house were his daughters cleaning and as was typical they wore their bandannas over their heads. He also pointed out that the "expensive dresses" had been hand made by his wife. One other similar incident occurred in the early spring when, at a church meeting some of the members became violently upset that the pastor had removed his storm windows a week or so too early. Pastor Backer, infuriated, left the meeting. To anyone's recollection this was a first. Ruth remembered that he was white with anger when he stormed into the house. Later in the evening a few of the members made apologies.



In 1956 Pastor Backer experienced his first building project. St. Martin's spent \$155,000 to resurface their church building because the bricks were falling out of the old one. The inside remained the same.

It was during the Winona days that Wayne Mueller came into contact with Pastor Backer. Wayne was a member at Grace in Ridgeway, Minnesota but he attended St. Martin's Christian Day School. He also had several relatives who were members of St. Martin's. He wrote:

My memory of your grandfather was in connection with his contact with St. Martin's school children. It was the custom of

the school to have a mission worship service weekly in the church. During Advent and Lent this mission service was joined with the morning special seasonal worship. I remember your grandfather as a good preacher. He was Lutheresque in the pulpit, average height, slightly stocky build, square jaw, and a voice that carried well in the big church. My own pastor at Ridgeway was a good preacher with a good voice. But my impression as a child was that your grandfather was better.

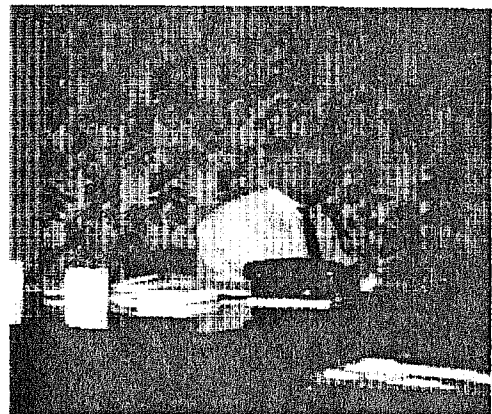
My only memories and recollections of Harold Backer are positive. Many of my relatives were members of St. Martin's church even though I was not. But I remember that the good, solid members of the congregation liked him. I remember him being described as solid, trustworthy, caring, conservative. (Mueller Letter 2/2/93)

During one of his summers he served as a chaplain for Camp Whitewater outside Altura, Minnesota at the state park. He never lost his affection for children and willingly made this trip to Altura twice a day. It was during these years that his youngest daughter, Mary Ellen got to know him. She was privileged to go with him on several walks and rides. The other daughters were enrolled and attending Dr. Martin Luther High School and College as their parents had some thirty years earlier.

Pastor Backer's ministry also saw the passing of the German services into English. Yet in Winona he would preach three Sunday services, one in English the second in German and the third was again in English.

In 1958, after Pastor Hoffman left, things changed for the worst. One of the major causes of grief

arrived in the person of the new Missouri Synod pastor from Escondido, California, Emil Geistfeld. Pastor Geistfeld was, in Margaret Backer's words, "restless." He was upset that the congregation had called him as the assistant pastor and not the associate pastor. He worked



hard to change that but I do not know if he ever succeeded on paper. Upon arrival he also demanded that the congregation provide him with a nice house. He then insisted that the congregation install a shower in the second floor bathroom. This request would later backfire on him. One morning, a year or so after the fact, he went down to breakfast to discover that the shower was being served on the dining room table.

Unlike Pastor Backer, Pastor Geistfeld did not run his family well. Several people recall that his sons were often drunk on the weekends and getting into trouble. Once they drove their car off the road and into a field owned by one of Wayne Mueller's neighbors. Another time they were thrown in jail. Pastor Geistfeld did nothing. He was more concerned about his personal agenda. He was flashy, funny, entertaining and conniving. Pastor Backer was his opposite in almost every way. This caused for tension, anger, heartache and sorrow in the heart of the "Seelsorger."

The late fifties were also the times of the Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod struggles which resulted in the eventual break up of the Synodical Conference. Many WELS and LCMS congregations felt the tensions that existed among neighboring congregations of either synod, but few fought the same battle internally as St. Martin's did. St. Martin's was originally a Wisconsin Synod congregation. However, with the arrival of Emil Geistfeld who leaned Missouri, things began to shift. There were some former Missouri men and families who had retired in the area or moved there to work. Among them was Alfred von Rohr Sauer. Pastor Geistfeld and the Missourians began to stir things up.

Harold's daughter, Myrna, understood the tension well:

As the synod controversy heated, St. Martin's strongly felt the tension being served by a dual pastorate of opposite polls. Dad

was a man of peace and harmony, soft-spoken, but of deep conviction. He did not fair well in a bitter battle for "supremacy" with Geistfeld who used many strategies to sway people his way...I wonder how many churches had a Wisc. and Missouri pastorate situation like St. Martin's. The stress and pressure took its toll on Dad's health. (Myrna Letter 2/2/93)

Pastor Stuebs was involved with some of the meetings when the WELS - LCMS debate was being waged at St. Martin's. He wrote:

I was elected first vice president of the Western Wisc. District and was asked by President Mueller to be present at one of the meetings at the request of your grandfather. Your grandfather held his own in spite of the arguments brought up by the committee from the congregation with whom we met. The assistant pastor and his followers (mostly former Mo. members) always spoke about what Mo.'s position was in the thirties but never talked about the change that had taken place in the fifties. Your grandfather presented the change that had taken place but the committee would not be convinced.

The synod's doctrinal commission was finally called in to meet with the entire congregation. I went to the meeting as a spectator, but I knew from the very outset that the assistant pastor and his committee had already convinced the congregation to leave the synod and join the Mo. Synod. (Stuebs Letter 2/7/93)

This bitter struggle would come to an end for Harold Backer even before it ended at St. Martin's. On Saturday, September 17, 1960 Harold, as was his custom, mowed the lawn and then prepared his sermon for the following day. The next day he preached all three services but afterward he was not feeling well. After the Sunday dinner with his four daughters and wife he went upstairs to lay down for awhile before taking the girls back to school. Margaret was finishing some sewing for the girls before they returned. At about 2:30 p.m. the girls recall hearing an agonizing scream...when they reached their father he was already gone, dead of a heart attack. Pastor Harold Backer, at the call of his Savior, passed from life to life everlasting on September 18, 1960 at the age of 51 years, 7 months and 30 days. He was

survived by his wife of 24 years, his daughters Ruth - a sophomore at DMLC, Elsa - a senior at DMLHS, Myrna - a sophomore at DMLHS, Mary Ellen who was still living at home and his two older brothers, Adelbert and Edgar. Funeral services were held at St. Martin's on Tuesday, September 20, 1960 at 11:00 a.m. Arnold Mennicke had the sermon and the grade school children sang as well as a sextet from DMLC.

Shortly after his death St. Martin's Congregation decided to go Missouri. Many faithful members left to join St. Matthew's congregation on the west end of town where Arnold Mennicke was the pastor. Several of the faithful have always wondered why God took Pastor Backer at a time when it seemed their church needed his leadership the most, but finally, one has to acknowledge that the Lord always does what is best for his Church and for his children. We may never understand fully why God did, what he did, when he did it, but we can look to the cross of his Son and see that for sure he does love us. In faith we can hold him to his promises that he will work things out for our eternal good and that there is nothing in this life, no, not even in death that can ever separate us from his matchless love. This love is the heart of the Gospel message that Harold Backer faithfully proclaimed as a father and a pastor. And now, exactly sixty years since he graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and was assigned to his first call, his grandson is about to offer himself as a candidate for the Lord's ministry. Many things have changed, except one. That timeless, sweet message of the Gospel has endured and God grant by his grace that we forever hold fast to it and proclaim it faithfully so that generations after us might joyfully confess:

When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
E'en then this shall be all my plea;
Jesus hath lived and died for me.

Jesus be endless praise to Thee,
Whose boundless mercy hath for me,
For me, and all Thy hands have made,
An everlasting ransom paid. (TLH 371)

Soli Deo Gloria

Bibliography

1. Bulletin from the Funeral Service. 9/20/60
2. Lutheran Girl Pioneers 25th Anniversary Book. 1979
3. St. Martin's Lutheran Church 125th Anniversary Book. 1981
4. Engel, Pastor Otto. Letter written 2/5/93
5. Mahnke, Myrna. Letter written 2/2/93
6. Mattek, Pastor Floyd. Letter received 2/3/93
7. Mueller, Pastor Wayne. Letter written 2/2/93
8. Schlicht, Mary Ellen. Letter written 2/2/93
9. Stuebs, Pastor Arden. Letter written 2/7/93

10. Backer, Margaret. Interview 1/30/93
11. Mischke, Pastor Carl. Interview 2/8/93
12. Mittelsteadt, Betty. Interview 1/29/93
13. Scharf, Pastor Erwin. Interview 2/7/93

Appendix I

A List of Seminary Classmates and Professors:

Prof. Frederic Brenner, Prof. Max Lehninger, Prof. Johannes Meyer, Prof. August Pieper, Prof. August Zich

Marcus Fleischer, Ruben Kettenocker, Harold Schulz, Fred Allerman, Erwin Scharf, Frederick Bergfeldt, Norbert Mielke, Hulmuth Rutz, Sigfried Fenske, Lewis Bleichwehl, Waldemar Schuetze, Hugo Fritze, Harold Eckert, Victor Jung, Waldemar Pless, Reinhold Roth
Adelbert Hellman (his 1st cousin)

Appendix II

Ruth Backer married Pastor Vilas Glaeske. Their three children are Aaron, Eva and Miriam.

Elsa Backer married Gary Miller. Their four children are Pamela (Wehrs), Paul, Timothy and Mark.

Myrna Backer married Pastor Jon Mahnke. Their five children are Philip (d. Dec. 1, 1968), Andrew, Matthew, Rhonda and Nathan.

Mary Ellen Backer married Richard Schlicht. Their four children are Heidi, Erica, Jeremy and Ryan.