

The Life and Ministry of Pastor Paul Kuske

Jesse Johnston

Church History

December 6, 2010

Paul Kuske was born in 1930 and grew up in rural Minnesota. His father was a pastor, but as part of his pay he also sharecropped on 40 acres of the church's property. That meant that Paul had plenty of room to run around and that he was exposed to life on the farm. Even though Paul grew up during the depression, the family always had plenty of food because of the land allotted to them by the church. For grade school, Paul attended a one room school where he finished two years ahead of schedule. After one year in the public high school, he transferred to Northwestern at the encouragement of his older brother. He would later graduate from Seminary, without having served any time as a vicar. Perhaps the faculty was rushing Paul through, because he was called back to Northwestern as a tutor after graduation.

Life as a tutor was busy. In those days there were only two tutors, so one would be on until midnight, and the other would have the night off. During his time back at Northwestern, Tutor Kuske was also courting his future wife, Lois, who was going to school in Milwaukee. After two years back at Northwestern, Tutor Kuske was asked to remain a third year, but he had plans to marry and the board at Northwestern would not provide an apartment for him and his wife. Tutor Kuske declined the position for the third year, and he and Lois were married in the summer of 1955. Shortly after the two were married, Pastor Kuske and his wife went to Moline, Illinois for a summer, where he spent much of his time going door to door making cold calls. They must have been friendlier times, because he does not remember getting any doors closed in his face.

Because of his mission experience, Pastor Kuske seemed a prime candidate to start a new mission congregation. The nucleus in Maumee, Ohio had been meeting together for a year when Pastor Kuske arrived. The congregation met for several years in his house before the church proper was built. Pastor Kuske recalls Saturday evenings spent rearranging the furniture in the living room for Sunday morning worship and his wife's fear that someone would open the

cupboards and find a mess. Within a few years, the congregation was thinking about building. In order to fund the building of the church, Pastor Kuske sought direct loans from congregations and individuals from the synod. Thirty-thousand dollars and some sweat equity later, St. Timothy's was erected in Maumee. As he recalled the building project, Pastor Kuske repeated some good advice from the mission counselor, "It isn't that you have to do huge jobs, but do something so that people can see that you are there, and alive, and active." The building of the new sanctuary attracted several new members.

After several years at St. Timothy's, Pastor Kuske accepted a call to be Dean of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS). At age thirty, he was not only the youngest faculty member, but he was also the youngest dean MLS had ever seen. As dean he also taught a variety of classes including 9th and 10th grade Latin and 12th grade religion. It was not until he sat in at the first faculty meeting on the night before school that he was told what classes he was going to teach—so much for preparation! During his early years at MLS, Dean Kuske dealt with the lack of dorm space. Some of the MLS students would live in WELS members' homes around the city. This was essentially a rental situation. The difficulty was that it was hard to properly vet all the dorm homes. Some of the people imposed strange rules on the students who stayed in their homes. Sometimes the people with whom the students stayed made them feel uncomfortable. Despite the difficulties and challenges involved with this situation, it allowed more students to attend MLS until a new dormitory could be built.

Dean Kuske emphasized the importance of appearing fair in dealing with the school children. The students respect fairness. His philosophy as dean was: "Helping young people reach Christian maturity." He put this philosophy to use as he also encouraged his students to go on to public ministry. Over his tenure, he saw a vast improvement in the percentage of students that went on from MLS to Northwestern or Doctor Martin Luther College (DMLC). His first

year at MLS, only two students went on to Northwestern, and neither made it through the first year. As time went on, however, MLS was sending approximately 60% of the student body on to either Northwestern or DMLC. Dean Kuske served for 10 years in his first term as dean of students. During that time he not only fulfilled his obligations as dean, but he also helped coach football. He felt that this was important because it gave him connections with the kids, especially those whom he felt had the most potential for class leadership. By making connections with class leaders, he was better able to influence the attitudes and actions of the class. One of Dean Kuske's goals while at MLS was to make a significant influence on at least one student a year to enter the ministry. He saw this as his opportunity to magnify his own ministry through the education and encouragement of others.

After spending his first 10 years at MLS, Dean Kuske relinquished his duties as dean and spent the next 10 years simply as professor. Professor Kuske taught a variety of different classes during that time including 12th grade religion, 10th grade religion, 12th grade Latin, German, and Civics. Twice during those 10 years he was chosen as interim dean. After those 10 years as "just a Prof," he was officially the dean again four more years. One of the major changes he made in those last years as dean was the study hall schedule which is still employed. Rather than having a two hour study hall in the evening, the schedule had a variety of time slots which you would sign up for in the afternoon or evening. You simply had to fill your quota of study halls for the week. The number of study halls you had to attend was based on your grade point average and your age. One of the reasons for doing this was because of the amount of extracurricular activities in which the majority of the students participated. Evenings often became so filled with other activities that some would hardly ever have a set study hall. The faithful would still get their homework done, but those who lacked self-discipline did not have the study supervision required for their academic advancement.

While Professor Kuske was serving at Seminary, he and his wife had the rest of their six children. Life for his kids while he was at MLS was good. The students were like aunts and uncles to the younger children, although it was apparently hard for the dean's daughter to get a date. The life of a dean was busy and money was sometimes tight, but the Lord always provided for the family.

After his 24 years at MLS, Pastor Kuske was called to Beautiful Savior in Grove City, Ohio. There had been some issues with the previous pastor there, so the congregation was in a bit of turmoil when he arrived. Pastor Kuske was also elected to the position of 1st vice-president of the Michigan District shortly after his return to the parish. That position meant lots of trips back to Michigan. Meanwhile, he was dealing with the problems in his own congregation as well. For 7 years the congregation had been struggling under their previous pastor, and the majority of the laymen were burned out by the time Pastor Kuske came to the church. He compared the church to a fibrillating heart—"it's making a lot of motion, but nothing important is happening." Shortly before he left, Pastor Kuske started to see signs of a revitalized life in the congregation. He served Beautiful Savior for 12 years, before going to work part time for the Lutheran Association for Church Extension (LACE).

LACE had been in the background of Pastor Kuske's ministry for many years. It was formed in October of 1960, when a small committee, including Pastor Kuske, rejected the suggestion that an association should be formed which would put money down for property where future churches could be built. After disposing of the first suggestion, however, the men discussed among themselves the possibility of starting a loan agency for churches. The thought behind LACE was that it could make money available from which to draw for churches with building projects without the need to go to the banks. Pastor Kuske describes the purpose of LACE as helping "teenage" congregations. The Church Extension Fund (CEF), an agency

similar to LACE, uses much of their money for brand new mission congregations. These are high risk loans, but the CEF is able to make the loans because 50% of their money comes from donations. LACE generally makes smaller loans to congregations looking to make additions. In this way it might be considered a more conservative group than CEF. One of the programs which LACE offers is a designated certificate program. This program encourages the members of the congregation to put up the majority of the money for the church loan through the purchase of their own LACE certificates. This often greatly reduces the interest payments for the church because many of the members choose to forfeit their interest. Their interest then goes as credit toward the church's loan.

In the summers of 2003 and 2004, Pastor Kuske took some time off from LACE and did some instruction of three seminary students in Bulgaria. Pastor Kuske would teach through a translator, though the students did know some English. While he was in Bulgaria, Pastor and Mrs. Kuske, who was also with him, had the chance to see some of Europe in their free time.

Pastor Kuske served various roles at LACE including office manager and programmer. In 2005 he left LACE and served a dual parish in Standish and Sterling, Michigan. This was a part time social security call. During his time there the two congregations amalgamated. Pastor Kuske served that call until 2010, when he moved to Cincinnati. After moving, he accepted a part time call to assist with shut in visits, Bible classes, and catechism instruction at Beautiful Savior Church in Cincinnati.

The ministry of Tutor/Pastor/Dean/Professor Kuske had many facets. He was a tutor, pastor of a brand new mission congregation, dean of students, professor, pastor of a medium sized congregation, administrator of LACE, and an amalgamator of two congregations. As we look back at his life and ministry, we thank God for him and his many years of service to our synod and to our God, and we ask that the Lord would continue to bless his work.