

*THE REV. FREDERICK K. SCHMUGGE:  
A REFLECTION ON LIFE IN FOUR  
LUTHERAN CHURCH BODIES*

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THE REV. FREDERICK K. SCHMUGGE: A REFLECTION ON LIFE IN FOUR  
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As one first glances at the name of the man to whom this paper is dedicated to, one might wonder just who he is. You will not run across his name in the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, or any other Synod for that matter. His name will not be heard in discussion of important church fathers or theologians. Just how then does this man, Frederick K. Schmugge, warrant a church history paper to be named after him? Where does he fit in the timeframe of the Lutheran church? The timeframe that this man covers, and more significantly, the territory that he covers is what warrants a paper to be written on him. He was a Lutheran pastor and a Lutheran layman who was involved with four Lutheran church bodies: The Missouri Synod; The Evangelical Lutheran Synod; An Independant Lutheran church; and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to which he belongs to today. He has endured as a Pastor or layman since 1948--the year he graduated from the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and he has been a dedicated father to me for the last 25 years.

As it has been indicated, Frederick Schmugge's life has been far from normal. He has had the experience of being a Lutheran pastor, and he has also had the experience of being a Lutheran layman. It will be the goal of this paper to look at his life, a life which has had many experiences and seen many changes in the Lutheran church. We will see why he first decided to enter the ministry; why he left it; why he

has been associated with so many church bodies; and what changes he has seen in the various Lutheran synods from his unique vantage point of Pastor and layman. The majority of information from this paper comes from an interview with Pastor Schmutz conducted by this writer, and also first-hand information which the writer experienced as he saw his dad go through life as a pastor and layman in four different church bodies. The paper will be written objectively, so that I'm not always referring to the subject as my "dad."

Frederick Karl Schmutz was born on February 6, 1921. His parents were faithful Christians who had the blessing and chore of raising ten children! They made sure that all the children went to church and Sunday School to learn about the Savior. Frederick had no idea as a young boy that some day he would grow up to be a Lutheran pastor. As he grew up in the "big city" of St. Paul, Minnesota, Frederick realized that he enjoyed experimenting with many things. He held all sorts of odd jobs as he grew up, and he developed a keen interest in drawing and art work. It didn't seem like he was on the road to becoming a pastor.

As a high school student he attended Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul where he took a pre-college prep course, thinking that he might be an engineer of some sort, whether a technical, electrical, or mechanical engineer--he didn't know what lay ahead of him. Upon graduation in 1939, Frederick enrolled at Concordia Junior College in St. Paul, a Missouri Synod college, still not knowing what he wanted to do for his future vocation. What was his reasoning for attending Concordia? Pastor's answer: "I figured I could take my first

two years of college there just as well as anyplace." It was at Concordia where he was first really encouraged to pursue the ministry. The professors there encouraged Frederick to take the pre-theological courses. It sounded like a good idea to him, since the Synod and the school practically paid the whole cost of tuition if you were on this program. Frederick did pay the price, however, for taking these courses. Because he didn't have the proper Latin, German, Greek, and Religion background from the public high school he attended, Frederick was forced into taking an extra year of schooling to cover these courses. He also paid the price in a literal sense. Because these were post-Depression days, Frederick's family of twelve didn't have money to spare for his education. This meant that Fred would have to work besides going to school. After school hours he would head off to work at a porcelain<sup>a</sup> shop where he worked the 4:00 PM - 12:00 AM shift, forty hours a week! During the summer, he earned his pay working on a street car track crew, and also as a janitor at his church, Mt. Olive Lutheran. During this difficult period Frederick was a faithful student, and was one of the top students in his class at school.

It was during this time that Frederick received much encouragement from his local Wisconsin Synod pastor and from his parents to become a pastor. This was the beginning of the future for Frederick Schmugge. Seeing that he had the necessary gifts and talents given by God to become a minister, upon his graduation from Concordia Junior College in 1944, he decided to enroll at the Missouri Synod Seminary (Concordia) in St. Louis. He was leaving a (high school and

*College?*

entering a Seminary which was staunch in conservatism and faithful to God's Word. The Seminary had such distinguished professors as Dr. Arndt and Dr. Fritz. As Pastor Schmutge looks back at his Seminary days he mentions that at the time it didn't seem like too much liberal thought was around. Perhaps there was some liberal thinking with Professor Caemerer who had different ideas of how the Holy Spirit worked in an individual. His teaching didn't seem to be too dangerous to anyone at that time, though.

Attending the Seminary wasn't easy in those days. World War II was still under way, and that made everyone's life a little different. As Seminary students, the men in St. Louis were exempt from the draft, but to keep that status in tact they also had to attend school in the summer months. This was the scene for Frederick's first two years at the Sem.

Frederick continued to do well in school, and was given a difficult assignment for his vicar year. He was assigned to serve two parishes in Danbury and Webster, Wisconsin. His supervising pastor was in charge of an additional two churches. Needless to say, it was a complete experience for Frederick. He preached every Sunday, conducted Catechism class, and was in charge of most other meetings. His "bishop" would come by occasionally to check up on him, usually when there was a Ladies Aid or Voter's meeting. All in all, it was a very good learning year for Frederick. He would go back to Sem, marry his Walther League sweetheart, Doris, and look forward to a permanent call in the pastoral ministry.

Upon his graduation from the Seminary in 1948, Frederick

was assigned to Trinity Lutheran Church in Albany, Texas. It was a church of approximately 100 communicants, most of them German farmers. What was Pastor Schmutz's first reaction on receiving a call which sent him out of the Midwest, and was such a distance from home? He says, "We joked about it, being called to 'foreign missions,' but it was a nice place to live, and we were excited to go there." The church in Albany was begun actually as two churches, one north and one south of Albany. Services were started in 1907 by the Rev. C.M. Beyer who came from Big Spring to preach the gospel to these people. Before Pastor Schmutz would serve here, ten pastors would precede him, and eventually the north and south church would unite into one.

Probably the most significant accomplishment of Pastor Schmutz's stay in Albany was the dedication of a newly remodeled church building. The dedication service was held on February 18, 1951. In the informational folder that was handed out, it was noted that this new church was one "which the members of the congregation and all the people of Albany can be proud." Practically all the work on the building was donated, and much of the material used was second-hand. As a result, the entire cost of the remodeling program amounted to only \$3,500. It indeed was a building dedicated to "the glory of God."

It was in that same year of 1951 that Pastor Schmutz decided that his talents were more suited to engineering work instead of the full-time ministry. In September of 1951 he resigned as pastor of Trinity. According to Pastor, the reasons for leaving were mostly a result of stress. The

constant writing and memorizing of sermons week after week became too much of a burden for him. He felt, as many pastors do in their early years, that his talents weren't suited for the ministry. Thus, the interesting life of Frederick Schmugge would continue--however, not as a Lutheran pastor--at least for awhile!

At first, Fred thought that he might get into some sort of carpentry or handyman work, since he was good with his hands and had learned much of that sort of work from his dad. However, as he and Doris returned to St. Paul, he ended up somehow at Honeywell Corporation in the quality control department. He worked for them for 7 1/2 years, and soon after that became employed by Univac. They began training him for engineer work. During this time he was sent back down to Texas where he taught at Shepherd's Air Force base in Wichita Falls. Here he taught servicemen how to operate the computers for the guidance system of the Titan I missile system. Before they left for Texas they were blessed through adoption with their first child, Betty Anne. Being one who didn't ever stay long in one place, Frederick led his family back to Minnesota where they would spend the next twenty years. Upon their return to Minnesota, another child, Karl Michael, would be adopted in 1962.

In the early years back in Minnesota, the Schmugge family belonged to two different Missouri Synod churches during this time, one being Messiah Lutheran and the other named King of Kings Lutheran. During most of this time, especially while attending Messiah Lutheran Church, Pastor Schmugge didn't realize that there was tension growing

between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod. It wasn't until a vacation trip back to Texas when Frederick was asked by a pastor friend what was happening to the Missouri Synod, and whether he should join the Wisconsin Synod or not. It was at this time that the liberal thoughts of the Missouri Synod first became apparent to Pastor Schmugge, and he started exploring the situation.

In 1967 the Schmugge family once again moved, this time to Afton, Minnesota. Here they joined a Missouri Synod church called St. Peter's--a country church which still had an older conservative pastor as its leader. Pastor Schmugge kept his pastoral skills fresh by helping out at church and teaching a Bible Class. Upon the death of the old, conservative pastor, a young, liberal pastor was assigned to St. Peter's. Now the liberal teachings of the Missourians came to the forefront. The first thing that really upset Pastor Schmugge was the Concordia Publishing House publication of "Daniel" by Professor Hoyer. Professor Hoyer suggested that the book of Daniel was probably just a fictional story and served its purpose only for the people of the time of Daniel. Of course, the fellowship idea started to rear its ugly head also. The young pastor of St. Peter's started to have joint Young People meetings with local ALC churches, and he <sup>spread</sup> (permeated) this ecumenical idea of fellowship among St. Peter's members. Pastor Schmugge became somewhat disturbed at what was taking place, and tried to lead the Pastor in the right direction. Frederick even wrote a letter to the church council, trying to point out to them the unscriptural teachings that the church was allowing to be



taught. Finally, Frederick saw that there was no hope, and he pulled his family out of St. Peter's in 1969 and joined the Wisconsin Synod church in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin. The Rev. Donald Buch was the pastor at that small country church. It was here that Betty was confirmed, and where the Word of God was taught in its truth and purity. Now the Schmutz's belonged to a new synod, a synod which Pastor Schmutz grew up in, a synod which was faithful to God's Word. I asked Pastor Schmutz if it was the fellowship principle then, which was the key to him leaving the Missouri Synod. He replied, "Fellowship was just a symptom. The important thing was sticking to the Bible as inspired by God, and not that it was just a group of writings which didn't hold credence to pull doctrines, such as fellowship, from. That was the main problem." With the Missouri Synod behind him, and with a strong feeling toward its problems, Pastor Schmutz wanted to do something more to spread the truths of God's Word. Now another chapter would begin in Frederick Schmutz's life.

When Pastor Schmutz left the Missouri Synod, he felt the urge to get back into the full-time ministry, and to teach God's Word faithfully as he had been taught throughout his life. His first step was to contact the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor was given the opportunity to meet with synod officials for a colloquy. However, their recommendation was that Pastor Schmutz return to their Seminary and enroll in the Senior Class. Because he had just bought a new house in Afton, Minnesota and felt that he couldn't afford financially to take off a year for schooling, Pastor had to turn down the opportunity. It would be a couple years yet until the Lord

decided to let Pastor return to the ministry.

Around 1973, a good friend from the past, Bill Overn, whom Fred went to school with at Concordia College, asked Frederick if he would like to return to the ministry. There was an ELS church in Minneapolis of which Overn was a member, and which now had a vacancy. Bill asked Fred if he would be interested in filling the vacancy. Of course, things would have to be cleared with ELS Synod officials first. So once again, Pastor Schmugge took a colloquy--this time with the ELS. After several meetings, the ELS found Pastor Schmugge to be in agreement with their doctrinal teachings. There was concern about Pastor's homiletical skills. The ELS wanted to be sure he was still capable of writing sound sermons. Pastor was asked, therefore, to write a series of sermons for the homiletical department of the ELS. While Pastor was in the midst of writing these sermons, most surprisingly he was given a call to serve an ELS congregation in Petoskey, Michigan. The year was 1974. The writer will never forget those days. I was thirteen years old and ready for anything exciting in life. I remember my dad asking my sister and me how we would feel if he went back into the ministry. We, needless to say, were quite excited. At the age we were at, just the thought of moving to a new place was an exciting adventure that we couldn't let slip by. So once again, another chapter was to unfold in the Schmugge residence. Twenty three years later, Frederick Schmugge was back in the ministry, and this time he joined his third Lutheran church body--the ELS.

I asked Pastor if there were any major differences

between the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod that he saw as he re-entered the preaching ministry. He replied that he didn't see any major differences because, of course, the two synods were in fellowship with each other. There was a problem among some of the ELS pastors, however, concerning the doctrine of church and ministry. Some of the ELS pastors were siding with the Missouri Synod stand on the issue, which was unscriptural. Pastor Schmugge was one of the key people involved with getting these pastors to see that the Wisconsin Synod's stand on the issue was the correct one. This was done through several important pastoral conferences.

Pastor Schmugge was called to serve a rural church, Faith Ev. Lutheran, which was actually located in East Jordan, Michigan, and not Petoskey. The parsonage, however, was located in the larger city of Petoskey--a 45 minute drive from East Jordan! Later, a mission would be started in the public library in downtown Petoskey, but the church never seemed to grow from its original nucleus of people. The church continued in East Jordan when the Petoskey venture failed, yet there were some doctrinal problems among some of the members which Pastor Schmugge had to face up to. The family that supported the congregation the most financially had some children who were involved with the Campus Crusade movement, and who happened to be very vocal concerning the Reformed theology of this group. They wanted to sway the congregation to their view-point. Many discussions were held between Pastor and this family, and it got to the point where this debate took up much of Pastor Schmugge's valuable

time--time that was needed to help the congregation grow. After 3 1/2 years at East Jordan, and after turning down one other call, Pastor Schmugge received a call to serve at Christ Ev. Lutheran Church in Bowling Green, Ohio. It was a difficult decision to leave, but as Pastor put it, "I felt that the time had come to move on, and perhaps a new person would have better success in dealing with the Campus Crusade problem in Petoskey and East Jordan." So another chapter had ended in Pastor Schmugge's life, and another chapter was about to unfold.

The church that Pastor Schmugge took a call to was an independent church which was being served in the past by ELS pastors. The year was 1978, and now Pastor Schmugge was associated with a fourth Lutheran church body! This was a mission church which was being supported by a group called Independant Lutheran Missions and by the Federation of Authentic Lutherans. With the assistance of Peace Lutheran Church in Deshler, Ohio, another independant church, the young mission church bought a large church building in downtown Bowling Green. Evangelism work was carried out, but the numbers weren't adding up. It became somewhat depressing for the small group to meet in such a large church. The maintenance bills and unkeep of the church were difficult to bear, yet the efforts to grow continued. Most of the people that did form a nucleus there in Bowling Green were past Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod members.

As this church struggled to grow, problems were looming on the horizon. The Federation of Authentic Lutherans disbanded during Pastor Schmugge's stay in Bowling Green, and

this spelled trouble for the group supporting this mission. The Independent Lutheran Mission group soon ran out of funds and was no longer able to support the church in Bowling Green. The church had no choice but to fold and disband. Pastor Schmugge was now without a church and was hoping to receive another call from the ELS. An immediate call was not to be found, however. Neither the ELS or the WELS had vacancies to fill during this economically depressed period. Since he had returned to the ministry, Pastor Schmugge was receiving below mission status salary, so a decision had to be made what to do for the welfare of his family. He decided that this was a sign from God that he should re-enter the computer business world. The year was 1980, and it would be the last year that Pastor Schmugge served a church as its pastor.

After sending applications to various companies, Pastor ended up landing a job with Lockheed Electronics in New Jersey. The Schmugge's would now join a Wisconsin Synod church in East Brunswick, New Jersey. It was a young congregation that had just gone self-supporting and which was made up of many transfers from Wisconsin and Missouri Synod churches. Once again, not one to stay long in one place, Pastor Schmugge found a job with his old company in St. Paul, Minnesota--Univac--and in 1981 the Schmugge family would move back to Minnesota, buying a house less than a mile from the one Betty and Karl grew up in. You could say that Pastor Schmugge's life had gone "full-circle," starting in Minnesota, and ending up back in Minnesota.

Pastor Schmugge continues to be active in the church

today. He established membership once again at Mt. Olive Ev. Lutheran Church in St. Paul--the very church which he grew up in as his family lived across the street from the church. He was given the opportunity by Pastor Donald Meier to preach on occasion, and also to conduct a weekly Tuesday night Bible Class. He has also done substitute preaching for both ELS and WELS pastors in the Twin Cities area. He has become actively involved with Creation Science and has considerable insight in that field since his career has spanned both the science and religious fields. And now that he has retired from his job at Univac, the Lord has given him the opportunity to spend time at his favorite hobby--writing. His first Bible study book on the end times was published this year and is entitled, "When These Things Begin." God-willing, Pastor Schmugge plans to write many more books in the future years.

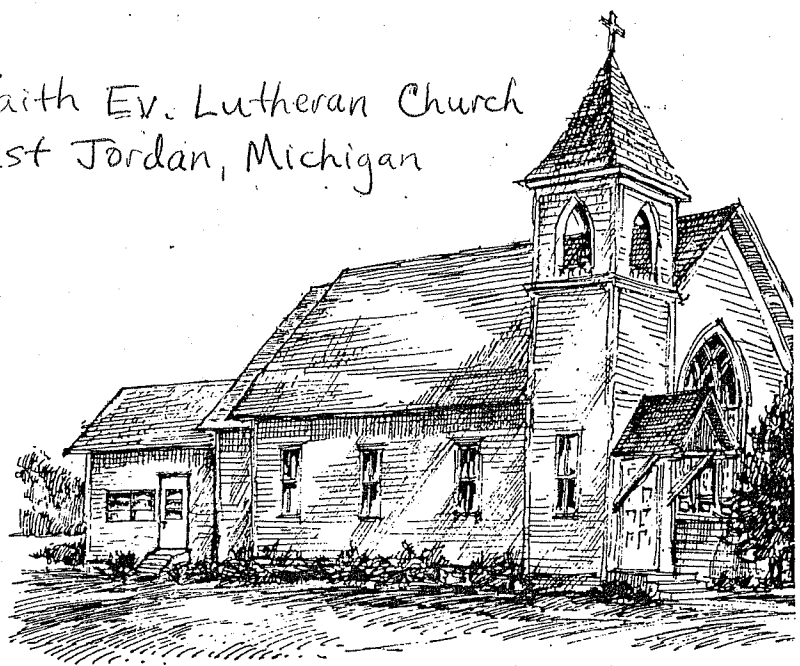
Here is a man that has been involved in four Lutheran church bodies. It has been an opportunity and adventure that not too many people could come close to comparing to. What are Pastor Schmugge's overall feelings of having the opportunity to serve in these four different Lutheran bodies?

He replies, "I think God was trying to prepare me in a very unique way in writing, and at the same time giving me a good theological training. I think that prepared me quite well to write things on Creation Science, on the creation and the flood, and I thank God for giving me the chance to do the things I did."

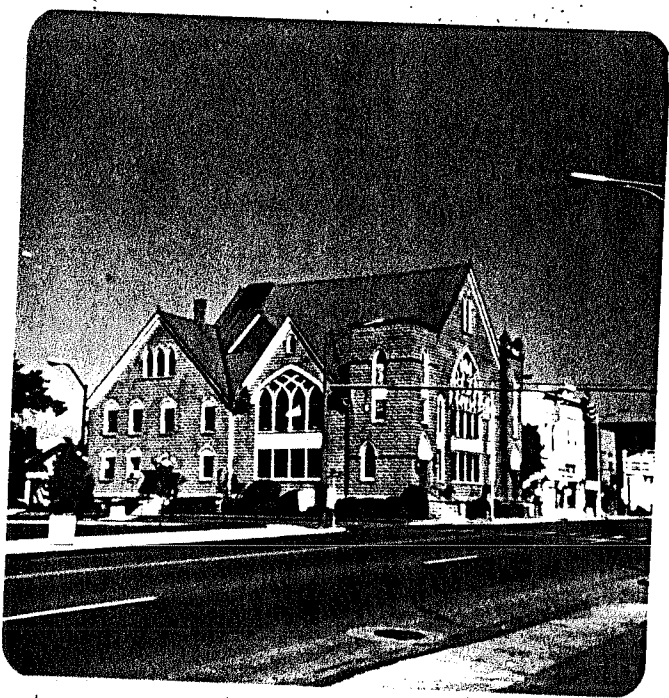
Yes, Pastor Schmugge had the opportunity to experience what probably no one else will ever have the chance to

experience--serving four Lutheran church bodies. Certainly, God has been gracious to him, his wife and children. The writer of this paper thanks God for giving me the opportunity to be brought up in his household, where I was taught Christian truths, and encouraged to walk proud as a believer in the one true God. I am thankful for the encouragement and support that I was given to pursue the full-time ministry. God-willing, Pastor Schmugge will have many more years to devote himself to his writings, and I'm sure that he will never forget the blessings God gave to him as he looks back and reflects on his life--a life in four Lutheran church bodies.

Faith Ev. Lutheran Church  
East Jordan, Michigan



Trinity Lutheran Church  
Albany, Texas



Christ Ev. Lutheran Church  
Bowling Green, Ohio