

The Ministry of Rev. Daniel Deutschlander

The Challenges and Blessings

Andrew Schroeder
Professor Brenner
Church History
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To many who have encountered him over the years, he is known as Professor Deutschlander or Professor D. He happily responds to these titles. However, before conducting this interview, I asked Professor Deutschlander if he preferred to be called Professor or Pastor. He said, "Pastor." During this interview, it was easy to understand why. He said, "I love being a pastor. I can't think of myself apart from being a pastor." He carried out pastoral ministry in every call he held. Whether in the parish or teaching at a school, he always considered himself as a pastor, because of the relationship he had with his congregation and with his students.

Pastor Deutschlander graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1968 and was assigned to a dual parish in South Dakota, Zion in Akaska and St. James in Tolstoy. This assignment was far different from any expectation he may have had. Pastor Deutschlander grew up in the Twin Cities. The rural setting of South Dakota was unlike what he had experienced in his youth. As a willing servant of Christ, he joyfully went to serve these congregations.

Because of the rural setting and the age in which he served, there were unique challenges to these churches. Pastor Deutschlander mentioned one of the main difficulties was that everyone knew and was interested in everyone else's business. In the small town setting, news travelled fast. One factor that led to this was the town was on a party line phone system. Each house had its own ring, but everyone in town could still listen in on any conversation. This caused people to avoid talking to the pastor on the phone about problems, for fear of everyone else knowing their issues.

People also were hesitant to go visit Pastor Deutschlander at home, because if you went to see the pastor, obviously you had some problems. He recalled one instance when a woman went to see him because her son had run away from home. Rather than just going to his house, she made a pie and deliberately stood on his doorstep with this pie and poured her heart out to him. This action prevented anyone from becoming suspicious of her situation.

Though there were these challenges, there were also many blessings and joys. He had a great love for the people, and they loved him in return. Immediately when Pastor Deutschlander went there he had the respect of the people. They had the respect for his office as a pastor. It was his to lose. They also showed patience for their new pastor, and as he put it, "They put up with him." They were a very easy congregation to serve because they had no pretenses.

Pastor Deutschlander was able to overcome part of the suspicion of the congregation members when members met with him by the way he dealt with communion registration. The congregations had the practice of announcing for communion the day before church. When someone would stop by to register, he gave them the opportunity to talk about anything that was on their mind. If there was nothing particular to discuss, he would have a brief devotion tying the Lord's Supper with the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday. This opened the doors for people to talk to him, without any questions from the rest of the congregation. This helped him to know his members better and to become closer to them. They were wonderful people and it was hard for him to leave.

In 1970, Pastor Deutschlander took the call to St. Peter's in St. Albert, Alberta, Canada. This was an entirely different situation than in South Dakota. He did not have the support of the people anymore. The congregation had voted to close the church. The Mission Board had wanted to close the church. The District wanted this church to remain open, and he was sent there to hold the church together. He had been completely unaware of these factors when he accepted the call.

The situation in Canada was less than ideal. The previous pastor had made a mess out of things. He hadn't kept records, not even a membership role. He had told these German Canadians that the WELS was very similar to the German State church. The congregation was not doctrinally sound. Pastor Deutschlander's goal was to turn St. Peter's into a Lutheran congregation and hold it together.

Another challenge was the Canadian culture and the high turnover rate in the area. Pastor Deutschlander said, "The Canadians are in no hurry to get to heaven." On average it took four years

from the time a prospect showed interest, not first contact, to get them into instruction. On average the residents of St. Albert turned over every four years. This made it difficult to get a solid core group of members.

Because of the lack of support from the congregation, and those who were in it were not Lutheran to begin with, it was almost all raw mission work. This challenge was also a great blessing and joy for Deutschlander. He had the joy of seeing people see the light of the gospel for the first time. He saw the work of the Holy Spirit in a dramatic way. He took joy in the joy people experienced as they saw God's love. During the interview, Pastor Deutschlander recounted several examples of these blessings. Through these experiences, he knew God was looking out for him. He knew God gave him the little joys when he needed them.

While in Canada, Deutschlander also helped serve the vacancy at St. Matthew's in Edmonton. As he recalled, this congregation (a German speaking congregation) had become WELS more to preserve their German heritage and language than for the Gospel truth. This church struggled with fellowship issues which they kept hidden from their pastors. These problems came to a very dramatic climax, and ultimately fellowship ties were cut and St. Matthew's left the WELS. This also broke ties with the German speaking preaching station St. Matthew's had in Barhead. This was the saddest day of Pastor Deutschlander's life. He loved those people in Barhead, and to break ties was very difficult.

In 1975, Pastor Deutschlander took the call to serve St. James in Evanston, Illinois. This church did not have a worship facility of its own. Instead it used a chapel on the campus of Northwestern University which was owned by a fraternity. As in Canada, there was a high turnover rate in the congregation. People did not stay in the area very long. These factors prevented St. James from ever becoming a neighborhood church, and so growth in the church was hindered.

Along with serving St. James, Deutschlander also served as the campus pastor at Northwestern University. In his meetings with the Lutheran Collegians, he became acquainted with several students.

He told them all about *The Northwestern College*, and even took some men up to Watertown to see it. He happily recalls how three of these men eventually went on to Northwestern College and are currently serving as Pastors in the Wisconsin Synod.

Pastor Deutschlander served in Evanston until 1980, when he took the call to be the campus pastor and assistant principle at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School. Here he taught German and doctrine classes. He joyfully recalled the interaction he had with students at Kettle. Even though he was no longer in the parish, he still acted as the students' pastor. And the students welcomed this. They came to him with their problems, and he was always there to help.

Though he was the warden and enforcer as assistant principle, he was also the pastor on campus. There was the distinction in his roles, but the students seemed to understand the different hats he wore. He always told them, "You should never be afraid to come in to talk to me. You should be afraid of a summons." He found the students of high school age easy to work with because they did not yet have their walls up, and they were rather transparent with their problems. This made it easy to know the students. Though they all had problems, their problems were very similar to one another.

I asked Pastor Deutschlander what the difference was between serving in a parish and serving in a school. He said that in a parish you never go home. There is always more you can do. You have to program times to think. When serving at Kettle, there was no time to think, only to do. His time was always filled with things he had to do while at school. But when the day was done, it was done. He could "go home." He was able to leave things at school and actually find time to relax. It was a different type of ministry and it was a different kind of trade off.

In his four years at Kettle Moraine, Pastor Deutschlander grew very close to the students. He loved them dearly. This made his decision to take the call to Northwestern College very difficult. It was difficult to do and difficult to announce to these students. But in 1984, Pastor Deutschlander moved to

Watertown and became Professor Deutschlander. His call was originally to teach German, but later expanded to teaching philosophy, history and “Dummy Doctrine.”

The challenges at Northwestern were different from what he had experienced before. When he came as a German professor, he was frustrated and appalled by how much German the students did not know. The curriculum as it had been designed was not achieving its purpose. As time went on, he adapted the curriculum. He no longer had false notions on what the students would know. He started further back with more remedial education. His new curriculum began to focus on Theological German. The goal of these classes was to turn these young men into Lutherans, give them a Lutheran mindset and show them the standard for good Lutheran preaching, thinking and dogmatics.

Another challenge at Northwestern was the preparation and attitude of the students. It was very easy to see early on the differences between students coming out of a prep school from those coming out of an area Lutheran high school. The prep students knew what would be expected of them; they knew how to study. But most often there was a cynical attitude. They were adversarial and wanted to do as little as possible in order to get by. On the other hand, the area Lutheran students didn't know how to study and they were shocked at what was expected of them. However, they had a good attitude, and they were ready and eager to learn. Pastor Deutschlander admits that these are generalizations, but for the most part these generalizations held true.

These difficulties seemed to wane somewhat by his second year. He had learned that he needed to change the curriculum. Word had also funneled down to the prep students that this battle of wills between student and teacher was going to be a losing battle for them. Attitudes seemed to change but the cynicism of the student body always seemed to remain.

In 1993, the Synod in convention voted to close Northwestern College after the 1995 school year. Although Deutschlander was opposed to this decision he does have an interesting perspective on

it. "We deserved to lose Northwestern. It was a mistake, but too many people took it for granted." Too many students sought to get out of school as easily as they could, and the faculty let that pass.

When Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College amalgamated in 1995, Pastor Deutschlander moved up to New Ulm as a pastor track professor for Martin Luther College. He taught the same courses that he had at Northwestern. Initially, the resolution of the Synod Convention was to have two schools on one campus. At Northwestern the focus of the school had been clear. It was a single track school. At Martin Luther College this became increasingly difficult. Because courses were crunched, they began to include both pastor track and teacher track students. The difference in faculty was not as clear as it had been. Courses were taught more to the teacher track than to the pastor track, because that is what the majority of the students were.

A great blessing that came from the amalgamation that Pastor Deutschlander would not want to give up is the change in the attitude of the students. It no longer seemed that they tried to get out by doing as little as possible. There was just a better attitude among them. There was also a closer relationship between pastor track students and professors. There was an unspoken bond and a connection that had not necessarily been there before. The relationship was not taken for granted.

At MLC, Professor Deutschlander also gave the spiritual guidance of a pastor. "I never stopped being a pastor." Problems were narrower than in a congregation, but there were problems aplenty. He always had his door open for students to come in for a visit. Many students took advantage of this invitation. It was often noted that students would go out of their way in order to pass Deutschlander's office with the hopes of getting the chance to talk with him.

The blessings that Pastor Deutschlander saw both at Northwestern and at MLC were very similar. He had the opportunity to teach and help shape called workers. "You're there to serve and that's all that matters. When you serve students, you expect nothing in return. It is pure joy to know that it all mattered somehow." "I don't remember thinking what I was doing was that special." But when

he sees how he has touched former student's lives, he finds himself thinking, "Maybe I contributed to that. What more could anyone want out of life."

Pastor Deutschlander had a primary and a secondary goal in teaching. He taught students to love Jesus, love his Word, and love his people. That was always the goal. His secondary goal was to be there for the students. He was there for the "walking wounded," so they would not have to go through their struggles alone as he had. He wanted to encourage and be there for them.

Pastor Deutschlander served very different and very challenging calls. He served as pastor to congregations, and he served as professor at schools. Throughout his ministry, he never stopped being a pastor. Though there were great challenges, there were also great joys and great blessings. This becomes very evident in the interview. His face lights up with fond recognition of serving God's people, and sharing with them the immortal truths of our Savior.