

The Ministry of Pastor David Rutschow

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This paper will be a history of the ministry of Southeastern Wisconsin District President David Rutschow. To gather information for this paper, I wrote to a number of people who had connections with him at various times in the past—friends from high school and college, pastors who served in the same area as he, former and present members of congregations he has served, and people who were members of the boards on which he has served. I asked them a number of questions and asked them to write back. In addition, I spoke with both Pastor Rutschow and his wife, Pauline. Finally, I read any Northwestern Lutheran articles which referred to him.

Before I proceed with this paper, a few issues need to be addressed. It has well been said that every historian is biased. Because of people's nature, they rarely approach a subject impartially. Even if they are able to do so, very shortly they develop some sort of bias through which they filter and interpret any further information. Having said that, I must confess that I am probably more biased than many historians.

Pastor Rutschow is my father.

Having lived with him and watched him and his ministry for most of the first 27 years of my life, I have undoubtedly developed some opinions and ideas about him and his ministry.

As much as possible, I will try to be conscious of this, and act accordingly, impartially. But I know that I will not be entirely successful. No historian is.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is my sources of information. This is another reason that every historian is biased. Since every historian uses sources of information that involve other people and their opinions, even the historian's sources are biased.

Although I feel from reading the replies to my inquiries that people were fairly open and honest in their assessments of Pastor Rutschow—both positive and negative—they undoubtedly were not as candid as they might have been—especially since they knew that his son would be reading their replies.

Therefore I will freely admit that this paper does not tell the complete story, and it does not tell it as every individual would see it. No church history paper will, and this is no exception.

Finally, despite these limitations and shortcomings, I do not apologize for my choice of topic. It has been interesting to me to learn about my father's ministry, for there were many things I had never known about it. And not only has it been interesting to me, but it has also been instructive. I feel that there have been many things I have learned that I can use in my ministry. Lastly, it has been—and I don't think there's anything wrong with combining this with schoolwork—fun. I've enjoyed getting into contact with people from his—and, in some ways, my—past. I've enjoyed hearing stories and anecdotes from his ministry. And I've been proud to hear of how God has blessed him with gifts and then used him to carry out the work of his Church.

Another thing I want to address before I begin the paper is that since people who are still in contact with Pastor Rutschow responded to this letter, I made a decision not to document who said what about him—either positive or negative. It seemed to be in the best interests of everyone. Documentation is available upon request.

*A research paper
must be documented*

I also made a decision not to show this paper to Pastor Rutschow before I handed it in. I felt it could put both of us into an uncomfortable position.

You will notice that there are a number of anecdotes in this paper. This could have the effect of making the paper seem like a rambling, incoherent series of disconnected anecdotes. But I hope that it accomplishes its intended purpose. I hope that the anecdotes give concrete, living examples of the general qualities of Pastor Rutschow.

Finally, I made the decision in this paper to refer to Pastor Rutschow as "David" until the time he was ordained, and as "Pastor Rutschow" thereafter. In some of the letters people wrote to me, they referred to him as "your father" or "your dad." I have changed those statements to either "David" or "Pastor Rutschow."

David Rutschow was born on October 29, 1944. His parents, Norman and Gertrude, were farmers. He and his younger brother and sister (Steve and Margaret, both of whom are currently teaching in Lutheran elementary schools) were raised on a farm near Cream, Wisconsin. From all the stories I have heard and from everything I have seen, it was a happy childhood in a home with fun, loving, but at the same time strict parents. A couple different people commented on his obvious appreciation for and remembrance of the blessings of his youth.

On July 13, 1958 David Rutschow was confirmed at Zion Lutheran Church in Cream, Wisconsin by Pastor Frederic Nitz. In September he left home to attend Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin. He said that his reasons for attending there were that Wayne Borgwardt, a member of the Cream congregation who was attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, had encouraged him to attend, and because Pastor Nitz had told him that if he wanted to become a pastor, he needed to begin fulfilling the language requirements now. Otherwise five years of college would be required.

Although a former classmate and good friend describes David as “quite a resilient individual who was able to ingratiate himself with many people and get along with both his own classmates and the upperclassmen,” going to high school was an adjustment for David. Pastor Nitz had anticipated one of the problems that might face him ahead, and had forewarned him accordingly. He warned David that he should not expect that he was entering the Holy of Holies. Instead he warned him that “he would very likely be shocked at what he might hear and observe at NWP.” He reminded him “that the students still carried with them the old Adam and that sadly the sinful flesh would still exhibit itself too.” These wise words were undoubtedly helpful in easing the culture shock that took place in high school.

Not only did high school require a social adjustment, but it also required an adjustment in his relationship with his family. After 14 years of living at home, Cream, Wisconsin was now nearly 300 miles away. While admitting that Pastor Nitz’s words above played a role in keeping him in school, he says that there were some other words that were even more instrumental in keeping him at NPS.

Fairly early on in his Sexta (freshman) year, David was homesick and about to call home. When one of his Tertia (senior) roommates, Duke Sonntag, heard about this, he said, “Well, Sextaner (freshman), it’s been nice knowing you.” When pressed for an explanation, Sonntag replied, “That’s not going to help you at all to call home. You’ll only get more homesick. Soon you’ll quit and be on your way home.” Whether or not this was what Sonntag intended, I don’t know, but the effect his words had were to challenge David. A little bit of stubbornness flared up. David decided not to call home, and he decided to show Sonntag that he could tough it out.

During his years at Northwestern Prep, David participated in band, glee club, and choruses. He also worked in the canteen. He was a diligent student who got excellent grades, and yet he wasn't particularly outstanding.

While home for Thanksgiving vacation during his Tertia year at Northwestern, David began dating Pauline Bade, a girl from his church who lived about 10 miles from him.

After graduation from Northwestern Prep in 1962, David spent the next 4 years attending Northwestern College in Watertown. During this time, he made a number of weekend trips to Madison to visit Pauline, who was attending the University of Wisconsin.

In the fall of 1966, David began attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

On August 5, 1967, between his junior and middler years at the Seminary, David married Pauline. She was to be a tremendous blessing for him, both as a wife and also as support for his ministry. In fact, as I read through letters and cards of congratulations on the occasion of Pastor Rutschow's 25th anniversary in the ministry, I was surprised to see how many people made a special effort to refer to her contributions to his ministry. Included in one of the replies I received was this quote: "I suppose we could say that (Pastor Rutschow) was smart enough to marry someone who shares his love for people and for the ministry."

In addition, one person closed his reply to one of my letters in this way:

Does all this come close to making him (Pastor Rutschow) a saint? By no means. Saints do not gulp down so much lemon pie in one evening (Note: The Rutschows and this couple shared many lemon pies during their years together.), and all the while tap a finger on the table—or was it a pencil that he tapped, I do not recall, but Pauline would always suggest that it could stop. So who's the saint?

They lived in a mobile home about a mile from Our Savior in Grafton during David's middler year. During that year, he worked the same place he did all 3 years at the Sem—Paulus's Supermarket in Cedarburg. (The supermarket has since been torn down and replaced by a bank.)

For their vicar year, David and Pauline packed up their mobile home and moved it to Neenah, where they served the Trinity congregation. They lived in a trailer home and thoroughly enjoyed the year, serving under a bishop named Pastor Schaefer who frequently invited the young couple to his house for dinner.

I only found one person to write to concerning Pastor Rutschow's vicar year of 30 years ago, but I learned a couple interesting things. One was that his musical abilities (he has an excellent tenor singing voice) were put to use many times.

Many times I had to call on him to sing at funerals and a few weddings with little or no practice time. I am not a very good musician and it doesn't take much to make me very nervous. His calmness and skill helped me many times. I was so thankful to have him available.

Another thing I found interesting concerning his vicar year is that it was mentioned that he never had to use notes or his manuscript when he preached. Since I know that he always has a manuscript in the pulpit with him now, I asked about this. He said he didn't recall, but that it was quite possible that he preached without a manuscript in those days. He said that he has one with him now in the interest of saving a little time in his sermon preparation.

When David and Pauline returned for senior year at the Seminary, they decided to abandon the mobile home in favor of an apartment above a floor covering shop in Cedarburg.

During January of senior year, they had their first child, Paul.

Call Day finally arrived, and Pastor Rutschow was assigned to Beautiful Savior's congregation in Creve Coeur, Illinois, just outside of Peoria.

On July 12, 1970 Pastor Rutschow was installed as pastor of Beautiful Savior's. The service was held in the back room of Bob's State Farm Office in Creve Couer. Pastor Nitz (the same pastor who had confirmed him) preached for the installation—almost exactly 12 years to the day after Pastor Rutschow's confirmation. The text for the sermon was 2 Timothy 4:1-5. The theme was:

The Gospel Ministry Is God's Institution

1. He picks the man
2. He provides the message
3. He prescribes the method

Things were at times a struggle for the young congregation. Caterpillar (a manufacturer of earth-moving equipment) was the biggest industry in the area. Sometimes people who were really motivated and gifted moved into the area and joined the church. But just as it seemed that they might be a catalyst or at least a stable presence for the future of the church, Caterpillar would transfer them somewhere else. It's hard to overstate the discouragement that losing one good family can cause in a church that's only made up of 5 or 6 families—especially when such a scenario is repeated a number of times.

Financially things were not always easy, either. One of the treasurers in the early years of the congregation said that the records were in complete disarray when he took the job. Even after he got things straightened out, things were tight. There were a number of times when Pastor Rutschow and his wife did not receive a full paycheck. The rest of the money always came before the next pay period, so it was not a major hardship. But it was probably something a pastor fresh out of the Seminary did not expect.

In the fall of 1970, the congregation moved out of the back room of the insurance office and began renting a building in Marquette Heights that had served another church body.

The 13-year old structure, designed as an education, fellowship, and all-purpose building, was part of a first-phase plant that at the time included a portable chapel. The chapel had been dismantled a few years before. Nevertheless, the members of Beautiful Savior's were happy to rent this building until such time as they would be able to purchase land and erect their own worship facility. Early in 1972 it became known that the building might be available for purchase. Negotiations began in June and were concluded on November 30 of that year. The building, with five adjoining classrooms and three acres of land, was purchased for \$63,500. The purchase price included chancel furniture, a piano, tables, nursery-class furniture, and blackboards. The building also included a pastor's office and a kitchen. (The Northwestern Lutheran, March 24, 1974)

While in Marquette Heights Pastor Rutschow had the privilege of instructing a young couple who had just recently been married. They had come to the church as the result of a canvassing effort. The couple became close friends with Pastor Rutschow and his wife, and they remain so to this day. They told me a story which I think gives the picture of a pastor who knows how to relate to his members not just as a pastor, but also as a person.

I remember one winter evening—8 or 9 PM—when it had been snowing for hours and Ed decided that he wanted to go play in the snow (My note: Undoubtedly the snow removal crews in Marquette Heights hadn't done a thing with the roads), so he went up to church and asked (Pastor Rutschow) if he wanted to come out and play. He of course did, and they drove around the streets of Marquette Heights in this little car that we had. Ed still mentions that time.

I hope that the effect of that last story is not to portray Pastor Rutschow as an immature pastor who eagerly, almost pathetically, does whatever he can to come down to the level of his people. I have observed him for 27 years, and I know that this is not true. I hope that the effect of this story is to portray him as a pastor who does not completely hide his individuality and his personality in an effort to remain aloof from and above his people—a pastor whose company people enjoy and yet whose words and authority they also respect.

Although it's a little hard for me to imagine this now, 1970 was a time in which the WELS had very little presence in Illinois—especially in central Illinois. In fact, in the 100 miles between Moline and Peoria there were no other WELS pastors. One of the things for which God used Pastor Rutschow and the Western Wisconsin District Mission Board was to establish mission congregations in the area.

The first one was in Jacksonville, 90 miles to the south. Before Pastor Rutschow even left the Seminary, he knew he would be serving a small group of Christians there, and helping to get them up and running as a congregation. Pastor Roger Zehms had formerly been serving them out of Saint Louis, but Peoria was closer to Jacksonville than St. Louis was. The congregation, which was holding worship services in a beauty salon, was made up of former Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) people, some of whom later became part of the effort to get a congregation going in Champaign-Urbana.

Pastor Rutschow went to Jacksonville every other week. At first he went on Sunday nights. After the congregation received mission status, his schedule became a little busier. He drove to Jacksonville on Saturday afternoon for class, stayed overnight, conducted worship early Sunday morning, and then hurried 90 miles back to Marquette Heights for 10:30 worship.

On August 22, 1971 the 16 members of Mt. Zion Congregation in Jacksonville and about 150 guests gathered to rededicate their church building. (It was rededicated because they were moving into a building that had formerly been occupied by a Methodist group for nearly a century. When the group dissolved, its members offered the building to the WELS group for ten dollars a month on a 20-year lease.)

Soon the congregation in Jacksonville requested their own full-time pastor. In 1972 they were assigned a graduate from the Seminary named Al Zahn.

When Pastor Rutschow left the Seminary in 1970, he was also aware that he might be serving a group of Christians in Champaign-Urbana. A family from a church in northern Wisconsin had relocated to nearby Danville, and a family from New Ulm had been assigned to the Kraft plant in Champaign. Champaign-Urbana was also the home of the University of Illinois, which was attended by a number of WELS students. In addition, Chanute Air Force Base was in nearby Rantoul. In February 1972 Pastor Rutschow began holding Sunday afternoon services every other week in a chapel at Chanute Air Force Base. Eventually they moved to a classroom of a large nursing home in Urbana.

Attendance was helped by the presence of a number of students from the University of Illinois. Many of these students were from former District President George Boldt's church in Morton Grove, Illinois, and he encouraged them to continue attending church while they were away at school.

In addition to this encouragement, one of the students in particular took the lead and made herself responsible for getting everybody headed in the right direction each weekend. (Later she would move to the Chicago area. While attending the installation of the new pastor at her church in Downers Grove, she would elbow her husband and say, "I think I know him!" The new pastor, of course, was Pastor Rutschow.)

Eventually the church at Champaign requested its own full-time pastor. In 1973 they were assigned a graduate from the Seminary named Rick Raabe.

The third church the Lord used Pastor Rutschow to help start was a church in Bloomington-Normal. As was the case with Jacksonville and Champaign, there were already a few WELS members in the area. One family had been attending services in Marquette Heights, a 45-mile drive from Bloomington-Normal. In addition, a couple of widows—one of whom had been married to a WELS pastor—had moved into the area. The District Mission Board saw these people as a nucleus for a congregation and decided to begin work there.

Like Champaign-Urbana, Bloomington-Normal was also a university town, home of both Illinois State University and Illinois Wesleyan. Pastor Rutschow held services there every other week. Eventually he held services there every week at 8:00 and then drove back to Marquette Heights for a 10:30 service. Services were at a small catering shop. In less than a year the congregation requested its own full-time pastor. In 1974 they were assigned a graduate from the Seminary named Steve Staude.

At the installation for Pastor Staude, an incident occurred which may give some indication that people felt comfortable joking around with Pastor Rutschow and that they knew he was comfortable laughing at himself. A layperson who had attended the installation services of Al Zahn in Jacksonville in 1972 and Rick Raabe in Champaign-Urbana in 1973 came up to Pastor Rutschow and said to him, "Boy, Pastor, I don't know about you. This is the third summer in a row I've been to one of these. You just don't seem to be able to hold a job."

He didn't do any better at holding a job in Burlington, Iowa, either. This mission originally started when some members from the church at Marquette Heights moved to Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Since there was no WELS church anywhere nearby, Pastor Rutschow attempted to serve them. (As it turned out, this family wasn't really that interested, and they ended up joining an LC-MS church.)

In addition, another member from Marquette Heights moved back to the Burlington area and lived with his mother. They were interested in worshipping. By writing to Soul Conservation, a WELS agency that kept track of WELS people who had moved out of the area of a WELS church, Pastor Rutschow learned of 2 other families who might be interested in having services. Finally, there was a family from Jefferson who was going to an LC-MS church because there was no WELS church in the area.

Once a month Pastor Rutschow packed up the car—sometimes taking along an elder of the church in Peoria, sometimes taking his wife and 2 kids (a daughter, Kristin, had been born in November 1973)—and made the 115-mile trip to Burlington. (The other weeks the congregation listened to services on tape.) He conducted services in people's houses for a while until, as he says, they looked around one night and realized they had 30 people jammed into someone's living room.

From there they decided that it might be best to rent a building and establish a presence in the community. They rented a room in the Burlington Civic Center and began advertising their services. From this time on, Pastor Rutschow came every other week.

One night there was a public information meeting about the congregation for anyone from the community who wanted to attend. A number of LC-MS people who were dissatisfied with some of the positions their church was taking attended the meeting. They were interested in the new congregation, but they had some questions. After Pastor Rutschow's initial presentation of the basic teachings of the WELS and a few other general things, he opened the floor to questions.

The first two questions were about the WELS position on scouting and the WELS position on military chaplains. Pastor Rutschow says that he won't ever forget that. First of all, he was a young pastor who was conducting this meeting by himself without any other representatives of the synod in attendance. Secondly, he had just been put in the unenviable position of talking about what the WELS was against rather than all the things it was for.

Although Pastor Rutschow didn't entirely satisfy them with his answers to their questions immediately, he was willing to confront the issue in an evangelical but firm way. Some former members recall the situation:

Some concerns arose about scouting from that group from the Missouri Synod as some of them had children who were involved and could not see the problem with it. (Pastor Rutschow) wrote an excellent paper (Note: Pastor Rutschow remembers addressing the issue more in the form of a Bible class.) and presented it to the congregation which pointed out the problems and dangers of scouting and their doctrine. Even with this potential problem area tempers were kept in check, anger was kept to a minimum, peace was maintained, and scouting was out.

Soon the congregation requested its own full-time pastor. In 1975 Pastor Richard Maurice received and accepted the call.

Despite the fact that there was not a high WELS concentration in central Illinois, Pastor Rutschow also found time to study and socialize with other WELS pastors. Pastors Gene Ahlswede in Moline, Ralph Scharf in Davenport, Iowa, Wayne Schneider in Savanna, Al Zahn in Jacksonville, Fred Bartling in Freeport and Elizabeth, and Leroy Martin in Platteville, Wisconsin would get together once a month on a Sunday afternoon for study group, spending the evening hours in fellowship, staying overnight, and heading back to their homes the next morning. Although these places were quite a long drive for most of the pastors involved, Pastor Rutschow recalls that they rarely canceled or skipped one. In fact, he says, for a young pastor somewhat isolated geographically from others, these gatherings were real life-savers. They provided much-needed fellowship and encouragement.

In January of 1977 Pastor Rutschow received 2 calls at roughly the same time. One was to Omaha, Nebraska, and the other was to be the first full-time pastor of Good Shepherd in Downers Grove, Illinois. He accepted the call to Downers Grove. Of the 25 calls he has received since being assigned (including two to South America, one to Germany, and one to be president of Northwestern Prep), the call to Downers Grove is the only one he has accepted.

The man who was then the chairman of the congregation tells his recollection of how Pastor Rutschow ended up coming to Downers Grove:

Pastor had been sent a call from our congregation and had seemed to have been holding it an inordinately long time. I was delegated to call him to see if we could encourage him to answer our call very soon. Pastor was called and told me of his unanswered questions of doubt. He had been very active and successful in the Peoria area in starting and developing new explorations and new congregations. He didn't want to abandon the small groups of Christians he had ministered to since he was ordained, and possibly lose some newly converted Christians. In our conversation I found our church had more members than all the souls in the Peoria area. When I explained that saving Christian souls in need of ministerial nurturing is as important as bringing souls to Christ, Pastor did agree and eventually came to Good Shepherd.

When Pastor Rutschow came to Downers Grove, he came to a congregation that had been formed by a group that had left the LC-MS because of its laxity in doctrine. These people had been served by the same pastor for the entire 48-year history of the congregation. Although this pastor had left the LC-MS with them, he did not wish to head the new congregation. Instead, since he was 74 years old, he retired.

But he remained as a presence. He remained a literal presence, as he attended services and became a member of Good Shepherd. He remained a figurative presence in that the people had gotten very comfortable with him as their pastor.

Therefore it was quite a switch for the people to have a young pastor (Pastor Rutschow was 32 at the time, but he probably looked even younger) come in and become their shepherd. (In fact, the congregation had really wanted to call their vacancy pastor, because he was older than anyone else on their call list.) The people were fairly conservative and tended somewhat to view change as bad—which is understandable in light of the effects they had seen change have on the LC-MS.

So Pastor Rutschow had to learn how to “make haste slowly.” When the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible was introduced, the congregation at Downers Grove did not want it used in the church service. Pastor Rutschow certainly must have been frustrated by this, but he realized that this was not a matter of doctrine, but a matter of personal preference. And the congregation had stated their preference.

However, the congregation did allow the children in the grade school to use the NIV in the classroom and for memory work. Gradually it became accepted, and by the time the congregation voted to use the NIV in the worship services, there really wasn't too much debate.

Sometimes it must have seemed to Pastor Rutschow as though the people were ridiculously old-fashioned. A pastor who served in the area recalls:

When (Pastor Rutschow) got there (to Downers Grove), many were skeptical of this “young” pastor. There were even insinuations by some that he wear conservative shoes, and suits, not sport coats. You'll note that to this day he still wears very “sincere” suits.

Connected with this, in the very early days of his time in Downers Grove it was suggested to him that he not wear tasseled shoes while serving communion. Although it might have seemed as though people were infringing on his Christian freedom and starting a fight over something that was foolish, Pastor Rutschow stopped wearing tasseled shoes for communion.

One is reminded of the apostle Paul when he spoke of giving up his Christian freedom and becoming a Jew to the Jews and weak to the weak so that by all possible means he might save some. Pastor Rutschow knew that a pastor's role is to preach pure doctrine, and that a pastor who petulantly and even defiantly has to always have his way will probably not be respected when he finally does make a demand that is firmly grounded in the Bible.

Pastor Rutschow's time in Downers Grove has certainly not been free of controversy even in more recent years, and he would probably be the first to say that he has not handled everything exactly the way he would have liked. And there are certainly others who would say that he has not always handled things the way they would have liked. But I believe that most—although probably not all—of those people would quarrel only with his opinions, and not his attitude. Again, the former chairman of the congregation speaks—this time concerning an issue on which the two disagreed:

(Pastor Rutschow) and I differed by a wide margin concerning women attending our voters' meetings as observers and to keep informed. One evening, one on one, I strongly disagreed with his feelings that ladies would gain much and damage nothing to sit in the voters' meetings. Thus, we now have Sunday forums. I know our opinions are still a world apart on the subject, but we have been able now to walk past each other tolerating the other's stand.

When Pastor Rutschow was installed at Downers Grove in March of 1977 the worship services were being held in one of the conference rooms of a Holiday Inn in nearby Willowbrook, and Pastor Rutschow and his family (which gained another member in January of 1978, daughter Annette) lived in an apartment in Westmont. By August 19, 1979, Pastor Rutschow and his family had moved into a newly built parsonage, and the congregation had dedicated their new worship facility and school.

The school opened in September 1979 with one teacher (Ron Zahn) for grades 3-8 and a teacher's aide (Julie Skeels) for grades K-2. Eighteen children were enrolled.

In May of 1981 Margaret Ungemach, a graduate from DLMC was assigned to teach the lower grades at Good Shepherd School. Pastor Rutschow and his wife helped her get comfortably settled in. (I recall her spending many nights at our dinner table.) The following story and conclusion will show that. It will also show that Pastor Rutschow has the ability to joke around with people and make them feel comfortable around him—even if, as in this case, they are momentarily taken aback. I'll let Miss Ungemach tell the story as she related it in a letter of congratulations to Pastor Rutschow on the occasion of his 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry.

Do you recall helping me deposit my first salary check and opening a checking account? We went to the bank that you and Pauline were currently banking at. First off, I couldn't cash the check there so we went to the bank where the church had its account and got cash. Then we headed back to your bank and were seated with a banker to continue the process. Her first question was, 'Will this be a joint account?' and you answered 'I don't mind if she doesn't!' Not knowing you very well at the time, I found myself wondering what to say in answer to that!...I'm very thankful to you and Pauline and all the congregation members who graciously took a young greenhorn under their wing and gave me such a wonderful beginning to my teaching ministry. You will always have a very special place in my heart!

Something in which Pastor Rutschow was blessed—especially during the early years of the school, which can tend to be difficult ones—is that he was privileged to work with an extremely capable and organized principal in Ron Zahn. It gave Pastor Rutschow peace of mind to know that the running of the school was in good hands and that he did not constantly have to be keeping one eye on the school. There can be a fine line between disinterest and too much interest, but according to Mr. Zahn, Pastor Rutschow was able to maintain the balance.

Probably the chief relationship issue was his abiding belief that we each had a Call and that was enough to keep us both quite busy without trying to second-guess the work of the other, or to micro-manage it. He was always there to respond when I asked for advice, but never did he put his nose into my work.

It is also worth noting that in the first 6 years of the school's existence, there were thirteen graduates. Nine of them attended Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown. Six of them attended either NWC or DMLC. Four of them eventually entered the ministry as pastors and teachers. This is a trend that has continued at Good Shepherd to this day.

It would be irresponsible to claim too much credit for the role of Pastor Rutschow in this. To a large extent, the phenomenon is merely a reflection of the priority that the members of the congregation as a whole place on Christian education. But there is no doubt that Pastor Rutschow does whatever he can to encourage that sort of an attitude. He does this by the way in which he speaks of the worker training schools, the attitude he himself projects about the joys of public ministry, and by his continuing interest in students once they make the choice to attend one of these schools.

At the same time, I have been unable to discern any difference in the interest he shows in the students who attend a public high school. He often attends their sporting events, their plays, and band concerts. This continues the rapport he has been able to build with them during their catechism years.

Good Shepherd has always been blessed with steady growth. In October 1975 Good Shepherd Congregation did not even exist. Less than four years later—and 2 years after Pastor Rutschow came to Downers Grove—it was a congregation of just over 200 souls and 160 communicants, with 18 students enrolled in its Christian day school. By 1985 it had grown to 365 souls and 249 communicants, with 32 students enrolled in its Christian day school. Today it is a congregation of 448 souls and 336 communicants, with 56 students enrolled in its Christian day school. In addition to the obvious (and main) reason—that God’s Word accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it—Pastor Rutschow lists at least 4 outward reasons for the growth:

1. There were no WELS churches within 25 minutes of Good Shepherd—in fact, there still are not—and so when the congregation was formed, a number of members from other churches transferred to Good Shepherd, which was much nearer their homes.

2. Downers Grove and the surrounding areas have experienced strong population growth, with new homes constantly being built.

3. There has been very little turnover. The founding families have stayed and contributed their time, talents, and treasures from the start. (You may recall that a lack of this is what hindered the congregation in Peoria initially.)

4. The church has had good facilities from very early on. This has allowed them to establish a very visible—and viable—presence in the community.

In 1977 the Synodical Convention passed a resolution “that the General Board for Home Missions make a feasibility study of radio as a mass communication medium, including the possible establishment of a nation-wide Synod broadcast” (The Northwestern Lutheran, October 19, 1978). Pastor Rutschow was appointed one of the members of the eleven-man committee. He thinks he was probably appointed because a year before he had been on the program committee for the Western Wisconsin District Missionary Conference, and some of his work had involved gathering information and samples of radio ministry work that was being done by various people in the synod.

The committee eventually decided that although it would be desirable to have a nationwide radio broadcast along the lines of the LC-MS’s “The Lutheran Hour,” the difficulty and the cost of buying good time slots on good radio stations was prohibitive.

However, one thing which came out of the committee’s work is familiar to anyone who watches the WELS Connection. The committee commissioned a songwriter from Nashville to write a song for possible radio use. He wrote the song commonly referred to as “the Come to the WELS song”—a snippet of which is featured at the beginning of each month’s WELS Connection video.

Pastor Rutschow has also been on a few other committees of the synod. He spent 6 years on the Synod Evangelism Board. When the Board for Parish Services came into existence, he was elected vice-chairman.

In 1981 Good Shepherd granted Pastor Rutschow permission to become a circuit pastor. This gave him a chance to work with other congregations and with other pastors.

In 1984 Pastor Rutschow was appointed 2nd Vice-President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District.

In 1989 he was elected 1st Vice-President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District.

In 1991 Carl Mischke, who was then the synod president, appointed Pastor Rutschow to the 7-member Feasibility Study Committee. This would prove to be one of the more trying things Pastor Rutschow had done.

To explain the purpose of the committee, some history is necessary. The 1985 Synod Convention suggested that the Board for Ministerial Education do a special study on the ongoing need for three prep schools. The Prep School Study Commission made its report in 1989. The report said that the synod did not need three prep schools. After stating that this next subject was really not in the scope of the committee's assignment, the committee suggested that NWC and DMLC also be amalgamated.

The 1991 Synod Convention discussed this report, and after about 12 hours of debate, did a rather surprising thing. The motion was passed that MLPS and NPS be amalgamated, and that the same be done with NWC and DMLC, pending the findings of a Feasibility Study Committee.

So the purpose of the Feasibility Study Committee was to answer the question, "Is it realistically possible for the synod to combine the schools?"

The committee, headed by Pastor Herb Prah, visited all the schools, met with the faculty of all the schools, and then filed its report. In one word, their answer was, "Yes." Yes, it was possible for the synod to combine the schools. The committee had done the job they had been asked to do.

In the interest of fairness, it should be stated that the report of the committee came out quite strongly in recommending that the schools be amalgamated. There are undoubtedly those who wish the committee would have simply answered "yes" and left it at that. But they did not. And I don't think that really goes beyond the scope of their assignment. They were asked to give their input on the situation. After reading the report, I would say that the report was fair in listing the advantages and the disadvantages, and the personal opinions of the committee were presented in such a way as to avoid being pushy.

The report was presented to the Synod Convention in 1993, a vote was taken, and it was decided that the schools would be amalgamated.

That is the short, sanitized version of the story.

In truth, the matter was quite a bit more sticky than that. And here I ought to admit that I am more strongly biased on this issue than on most others in this paper.

The amalgamation question stirred much discussion, and some things were said that should not have been said. While it is true that some ill-advised, even unkind things were said by both sides, it is my impression that those who were against amalgamation were quite a bit more vocal and vehement.

A synod official from that time, and someone fairly close to the situation at the time, said that what he thinks happened is that people were sometimes unable to distinguish between wholesome tradition and spiritual necessity. Some people felt that our doctrinal heritage was caused by the way in which our school system was structured.

While there probably weren't too many people who would have phrased it quite so strongly, I think a number of them felt that doctrinal laxity and poorly trained pastors would be the inevitable result of combining the prep schools—almost to the point where God himself would not be able to guide the WELS in maintaining purity and unity of doctrine.

The members of the committee received many letters and fielded numerous phone calls during the time they were doing their work. After the report was made, there were more letters and more phone calls—many of them unfavorable and some of them slanderous.

I found the talk about the issue, and especially some of the things that were said about the Feasibility Study Committee (FSC), to be quite disturbing. It seemed to me that the members of the FSC were not only being accused of having poor judgment, but also of having dishonest intentions.

Of all the things that I heard concerning this issue, one thing really stuck with me. During my senior year in college, I was serving as a resident assistant in the prep dorm. A pastor was standing in the hallway talking with his son and some other students. He didn't know who I was, and he maybe didn't even know I was listening. After complaining about the possibility of amalgamation for a while, he made a statement to this effect: "Well, maybe what we ought to do is form the WELS Mafia. If some of these guys like (here he named a synod official) start showing up floating in the Milwaukee River, maybe then they'll get the message."

By that time, there wasn't too much that could be said about the issue that could have surprised me or offended me. But that statement did. I only knew one of the members of the committee, but I knew that he was an honest, fair-thinking man, who would do whatever he felt was best for the Synod.

One of the pastors told me, "One opponent of the Feasibility Study Committee's recommendation said that (Pastor Rutschow) was an 'unreliable, irresponsible, decrepit, disgusting human waste.'" He went on to say:

The grief that (Pastor Rutschow) took was totally undeserved. I hope that he never heard much of what was said because it was among the most vicious of attacks that I've ever heard. And I can't imagine anything more disheartening than to have done your job and done it well, according to the guidelines given you, and have the personal attacks launched against you that were in this case...No one should have to put up with what he and that committee had to put up with at that time and have the slanderous things said about them (that were said).

I didn't really know how to handle this subject, and I hesitated to even include it. But it is a part of the history of Pastor Rutschow, and I felt that to exclude it for fear of being charged with personal bias or being charged with digging up dirty laundry from our synod's past would be less than honest.

One thing I would like to make clear is that I didn't intend for this to be a defense of the Feasibility Study Committee's recommendation. Only time will tell whether or not it was a wise one. But it was intended to be a defense of the committee's motives and its integrity. Unless someone can read the hearts of those seven men, one must be forced to believe that these men were serving their synod and their God faithfully and to the best of their abilities. To say or to even suggest otherwise would be unchristian.

Following Pastor Win Nommensen's retirement in 1992, Pastor Rutschow was elected Southeastern Wisconsin District President. (I might add that someone mentioned that Pastor Rutschow has never sought out any of these offices. I don't mention this because it surprised me to read that, but because I feel that it says something about him and his "servant" attitude towards ministry.)

Through all these changes and increasing responsibilities, Pastor Rutschow has been blessed with a congregation that, while realizing that these changes call for sacrifices on the part of the congregation, also realizes the importance for the synod as a whole of having capable, dedicated leaders. There are undoubtedly people who wish that he would spend more time on congregational work. (Someone writes, "Pastor is a wonderful, caring, and loving shepherd. If I had to say one thing it would be that we don't get to experience it enough anymore because of his district president duties. I genuinely miss him just as a person.") In addition, there are probably even a few who have a hard time understanding why he needs to be away from Downers Grove so often, but—and perhaps this is bias and naivete speaking—I don't think there is anybody who would suggest that he has ever used "district work" as an excuse for shirking "congregation work."

The district presidency has brought about a fair amount of additional work for Pastor Rutschow. Because the Southeastern Wisconsin District is so large and because it has such a large number of Christian day schools, there are always a number of pastoral and teaching vacancies that need to be filled. This has required making up many call lists and driving to many call meetings.

I asked him once why he didn't just have one of his vice-presidents run the call meetings of congregations that were close to them. He said there were really two reasons. The first was that Pastor Nommensen had not done that to him when he was second and first vice-president of the district, and the second was that he didn't feel comfortable taking those men out of their parish. He felt that the synod had provided Good Shepherd congregation with a second pastor (Pastor Dan Witte, who was assigned in 1992) so that he would be free to attend call meetings and the like.

In addition to filling vacancies, the district president is responsible for the supervision of doctrine in the district which he serves. This has caused Pastor Rutschow to be involved in a number of doctrinal discussions. Some of these have resulted in pastors and, at times, even much of their congregation leaving the synod. There are two reasons I do not plan to write on this subject at any great length. The first is that I have fairly limited access to such information, and some of the access I have been given to it was simply a result of being around the house, so it would fall into the realm of "confidential." The second reason is because these things happened so recently and are so vivid in the memory of some people that it would be impossible to write about them without making it obvious to whom I was referring. Therefore it seems inappropriate to write about them.

Probably the best I can do on the subject is to quote the replies given me by some pastors concerning Pastor Rutschow's dealings with such matters.

I probably can't go into specifics, but I know he (Pastor Rutschow) showed a real pastoral heart, when he would agonize over pastors or congregations that chose to follow a path that led them away from Scripture. It was always with a genuine sadness over someone who became convinced they were going to go it alone.

The second quote combines the sympathetic side with the honest side: “(Pastor Rutschow) is not a hard man, but he is a strong man.” The person went on to say that it is very difficult for a person to act independently of the people who are pulling him on the one hand to proceed faster and those people on the other hand who are pulling him to proceed slower.

Concerning the struggle to decide how fast to act in any situation, another pastor writes:

As I know David Rutschow he is evangelical in the good sense of the word. I’m sure he has been accused by some of not dealing promptly enough and firmly enough in some situations, but if he is going to sin I believe he prefers to sin on the side of being too charitable. I say that to his credit.

The final quote portrays a leader who knows that steadiness and calm is called for in leadership. A member of the COP writes, “(Pastor Rutschow) can deal with such issues with an unruffled looking exterior even though you know they have to be eating him up inside.”

In connection with the quote about the “unruffled exterior”, it appears that the district presidency has brought a bit of caution to Pastor Rutschow. One reply said that he has changed in that he “has shown the tensions and strains of his office” and that he “has become more wise and careful in his communication with people.” The person then hastens to add, “These traits only make him more valuable to the church.”

A classmate and good friend said much the same thing when he mentioned that their relationship had changed in the past few years. He said that there had been a time when they shared everything, but since Pastor Rutschow had become a district president, that had changed. There are now things that Pastor Rutschow had no business telling him, and there were things about which the friend had no business asking. Yet another pastor commented on how he missed socializing with Pastor and Mrs. Rutschow as often as they were once able to. I suppose that those sorts of changes are simply accepted as part of the job, but I would imagine there are times when they're not real enjoyable.

Pastor Rutschow has enjoyed his work with the Conference of Presidents (COP) and has commented to me on more than one occasion that he has been pleased to see the spirit of cooperation and the servant attitude shown by those men. Being surrounded by men like that has undoubtedly made it easier for him to maintain that same spirit and attitude. A former member of the COP writes:

On the COP I always considered him a team player. There are people who feel they have a call from the Lord to try to find something wrong with everything that is presented. There are others who understand clearly the amazing freedom we have under grace. David Rutschow belonged in that latter group. Unless he could show from Scripture that there was something wrong with what was being presented, he could be counted on for support.

Beginning with his being appointed a circuit pastor and continuing to his present position as a district president, Pastor's Rutschow's work has brought him into much more contact with other pastors than before. Although I had never really considered it much before, after reading a few replies from people, I believe the Holy Spirit has used this to benefit his church. A pastor writes:

Perhaps the one thing that I most strongly attribute to (Pastor Rutschow) is the importance of pastor to pastor encouragement. Called workers often don't want to take off their masks even among their peers. We need to reach out to each other and encourage each other. We also need to open up to each other, and find the support we so often desperately need in the called workers God has placed around us.

I believe that this quote from another pastor emphasizes the same quality:

In my brief and few encounters with him informally since he has become District President it has been pleasing to me to see that he has retained his simple open friendliness and there is no suggestion of seeking to project an image of official importance, while at the same time he is sincerely concerned with his responsibilities as a servant in God's Kingdom.

In connection with this, a former high school classmate commented that he didn't think Pastor Rutschow has changed much since high school and college. As he got along well with both his own classmates and upperclassmen then, today he gets along well with both pastors and laypeople. Another person echoed this thought by writing, "Gifts we admire most in (Pastor Rutschow) are his ability to relate to anyone, young or old, rich or poor, strong Christian or weak Christian, men or women." (To that, one might add, "Christian or non-Christian." A member who was bringing her unchurched boyfriend to the youth group activities in the 1970's writes, "[Pastor Rutschow] welcomed [my boyfriend] to our events as though he were a member of the church. That was very pleasing to me.")

Neither of these last few quotes was intended to paint a picture of a wonderful man, tirelessly making an effort to do his job and to present an amiable face to everyone he meets. I don't see it as some great deed of goodness on his part. What I see is that God has blessed him with an ability to feel comfortable among his peers and also with others, and I also see that God has blessed him with a personality that enjoys interacting with them. It's something that comes fairly naturally to him. (As someone who has been a member of the last family left at a WELS function more times than I care to recall, I can attest to the fact that he genuinely enjoys meeting people. Perhaps these WELS functions are where he "cultivated the special gift of being able to simultaneously participate in three completely different conversations.") And what I see is that God has used that attitude to benefit his Church.

Finally, there are a few aspects of Pastor Rutschow's personality and work which did not fit naturally into the historical part of the paper, so I'm going to address them here.

I asked people to comment on Pastor Rutschow's preaching. As I expected, the opinions varied quite a bit. (While I would say that I felt the answers to this question were fairly candid, it's certainly true that a person probably wouldn't reply by saying, "I always fall asleep because the sermons are so irrelevant"—even if they really felt that way.)

Some people ranked him among the best preachers they had ever heard, while others mentioned that his sermons tended to get a bit long. (One person wrote, "Perhaps you could use your paper to advise him on some control over his enthusiasm for his Sunday topics.") Apparently a number of people have heard or made the comment about his long-windedness, because one person felt compelled to say, "If people say that Pastor has a long-windedness...I don't see it that way. I see his love for God's Word. His joy in bringing it to us. He is a gentle preacher. Softspoken, to the point."

One thing a couple people mentioned which I found to be interesting is that Pastor Rutschow's preaching seemed to have been revitalized after the addition of Pastor Witte to the congregation. I don't really know what the reason for this might be. Perhaps seeing a different preaching style opened his eyes to some slightly different ways of doing things.

I mention that possibility because I think that it is easy to get into a rut in anything one does in the ministry. I would imagine that this could be especially true when one is dealing with making call lists and holding call meetings to fill 15 pastoral vacancies in one's district. The familiar way is going to be the quickest way to prepare when pressed for time.

For example: Although the Sunday morning Bible class at Good Shepherd has always been very successful (currently the average attendance is 60, while the average church attendance is 250) and tends to involve a fair amount of participation and discussion by the students, one person, after speaking highly of the Bible class, wrote:

Recently I have noticed the class running in a “groove” that usually has (Pastor Rutschow) asking a discussion question, one or two of the “regulars” responding in a fairly predictable fashion and then (Pastor Rutschow) affirming the response with a somewhat lengthy discourse. The class is very comfortable to the regulars (myself included) but I sometimes wonder what would be learned by a variation of the format or by the introduction of some occasional wrong answers.

This is a subject I should have asked about more specifically in my letters to people, because only person mentioned it, but I’d like to address the subject of his catechism instruction. Although initially his teaching was the only teaching I really knew, as I’ve gotten older and as I’ve been able to see more pastors teach, I’ve developed enough of a frame of reference that I think I am able to say that teaching is one of his strengths. A parent writes:

Bible teaching is all-too-often concentrated on the facts of the case, and in the WELS, on the correct facts. Pastor Rutschow carried it further, to where it needs to be, to leading kids and adults to think things through, to rehearse them, to apply them to daily life as we really live it. We treasure the instruction that (our child) received and lament that the others did not have the same instruction.

I’ve attended the examination of catechumens at a number of churches over the years, and I’ve never seen an examination as in-depth and as full of doctrine and application (as opposed to a mere retelling of the facts of Bible stories, with perhaps a bit of memory work thrown in) as the ones I’ve seen at Good Shepherd in Downers Grove.

The quality that was mentioned the most in the replies to my letters was that Pastor Rutschow always seems to have time for people and is always there for them when they need him. No matter how busy he is, he seems to genuinely enjoy talking to people (“without being an overbearing glad-hander” one person added) about nothing more pressing than a simple “How are you?” Yet at the same time, he also is genuinely concerned and compassionate about the more pressing things, such as spiritual trials. One person wrote, “I will never forget his understanding and his counsel as the Lord worked through him to lead us through those difficult times.”

Somewhat connected with this subject is the following quote, in which the former chairman of the congregation recounts an example of Pastor Rutschow’s patience with weak souls:

In the early years of (Pastor Rutschow’s) work in our church, we had a member who among many frailties liked to get a little drunk. Over time this resulted in his wrecking one or more cars, police custody, losing his job, losing his health and basically ending up destitute. (Pastor Rutschow) on one occasion called for assistance as our friend who was drunk hadn’t eaten for a long time. When I arrived at our friend’s apartment, our friend’s world was slightly off its axis. While I talked and tried to pour coffee down our friend, (Pastor Rutschow) was at his kitchen stove heating soup to get food in his stomach. To this day, when I think back on this and many other events, it brings to my mind Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. By the way, I gave up on the friend—fortunately, (Pastor Rutschow) and another member did not. I believe he died with salvation.

I also would like to attest to the fact that Pastor Rutschow always seems to have time for people. Any time I have needed to talk with him about something, he has stopped whatever I was doing, knowing that if I considered it important enough to interrupt him, then it was important enough to him. I realize more as I get older how difficult this must be for someone so busy. He's even received a few 4AM phone calls from me (once with a meeting scheduled for 7:00 that morning), and he has always listened and helped without seeming to be impatient.

Even more importantly, he has time for people when they need him the most. One person wrote, "When others in the congregation grieved, I was always amazed and comforted by his desire to be there and weep with them." Another person mentioned the time a classmate's wife died. Pastor Rutschow and another classmate got into a car and drove 1000 miles to be at the funeral.

Pastor Rutschow's sense of humor was a subject which received somewhat varied reviews in the replies I received. Some people said they thoroughly enjoyed his sense of humor. Others seemed mildly amused by it. One said, "Most of the jokes or jokes he tells are only somewhat funny." And one or two even seemed to be slightly puzzled by my question. This did not surprise me. I myself have given his jokes varied reviews in the years I have been listening to them. It also did not surprise me because different people have different senses of humor. Finally, it did not surprise me because Pastor Rutschow has undoubtedly brought out or muted his sense of humor according to the situation or the person.

There are a couple quotes which I think sum up his sense of humor quite well. I think they indicate that he feels no compulsion to be the court jester—especially since such an attitude could erode respect for a man who is supposed to be a leader—but that he understands that humor can be used both to indicate that he does not see himself as essentially any different or any better than anyone else, and also that he understands that laughter can at times indeed be the best medicine.

Although the WELS called worker humor canon seems to mandate a laser-sharp, bone-dry, three-ups-man-ship style, (Pastor Rutschow) (who can hold his own when required) has a naturally “open” style, more often than not self-deprecating (My note: A number of people referred to this aspect of his humor and his ability not to take himself too seriously), that I believe is viewed warmly by others and is one of the most endearing characteristics of his personality... Whether the joke is funny or not, I always enjoy him telling it, because it makes me feel that he cares enough to want to give me a little joy.

Although I had never really thought of it that way before, I think the last sentence in that quote is especially revealing.

The second quote says that he has “the ability to take a difficult or uncomfortable situation and interject some light-hearted humor that didn’t take away from the situation but relieved some of the tension.”

Something Pastor Rutschow told me once might have some connection with that last statement. When some classmates mentioned to me that it seemed that I didn’t get upset enough about things, as though I let a lot of things roll off my back, I asked him about this. He said, “Well, there aren’t that many things in life worth getting upset about.” I’ve never forgotten it, because it was such a simple way of making such a wonderful point. If God is for us, who can be against us? And what does it really matter?

This shouldn't be construed to mean that he has an apathetic attitude towards things—just that for the most part (but, as a son who has spent time sitting in traffic with him can attest, certainly not always) God has given him the strength to attempt to change those things that need changing, but also the serenity to accept the things that he cannot change.

Another thing to which a number of people referred was his attitude towards money and material things. It was mentioned that he still wears the same watch he received upon graduation from high school—35 years ago! And to him it makes complete sense that if the watch is still working, still tells time, and still fits around his wrist, then there's no sense in getting another one. In fact, he seems to have that attitude towards life. I finally gave up asking him what he wanted for Christmas because he would answer, "Nothing. I already have everything I want." (Then he would often look over at my mother, say, "I have your mother", and then give her a goofy smile. My mother usually responded to this by rolling her eyes. I usually just left the room.)

But I guess he does have everything he wants. This doesn't mean that he lives a spartan lifestyle—we were one of the first people I knew to get a VCR way back in 1981. It just means that he generally takes pleasure in the simple things in life.

One pastor commented that in his church work he tends to save money where he can. For instance, they said that his church bulletins tend to be fairly simple. (Whether this can be attributed to frugality or simply to computer illiteracy, I don't know.) I would say that this is the sort of thing that has never bothered me, but I can see why someone might think that it would be nice to have a church bulletin that looked a little more like it was from the 1990's.

Another example of his saving money—in this case for the synod—is that he rents cars to go to call meetings in Wisconsin. It is actually cheaper for the synod to reimburse him for the rental and gas than for the synod to pay him 26 cents a mile to drive his own car. This especially is a trait that I would not suggest is really a good work. It's not as though he has had to suffer hardship as a result. As someone who has often been dragged out of his nice warm room at the Seminary by a 52-year old kid to look at the "cool car" resulting from a free upgrade at Enterprise, I can attest to the fact that he enjoys this aspect of the district presidency a little more than what I would consider normal.

Financially, he really doesn't take a lot of interest in things if he can avoid it. He has left the family financial matters to his wife, and—especially in recent years, as Good Shepherd has been blessed with very capable treasurers and generous givers—he has concerned himself very little with the financial books at Good Shepherd. This isn't to say that he remains willfully, intentionally, head-in-the-sand ignorant, and this is not to say that he would not be capable of learning about such things if it were necessary (On one occasion he spent a couple consecutive nights staying up until 2 or 3 AM helping a treasurer sort out financial records that had become complete chaos). A treasurer at Good Shepherd makes this point by saying, "I'm not sure how (Pastor Rutschow) could have such little interest and concern for his personal financial matters and then be able to deal with some important and complex financial concerns of the congregation." But the fact remains that finance is certainly not one of his strong points.

In fact, a former congregational treasurer speaks of Pastor Rutschow's occasional impatience with such things:

After I had become congregational treasurer, (Pastor Rutschow) and I sat down and tried to make some sense of the books... In the ensuing conversation he revealed his tendency towards some stubbornness on his part. I just could not get him to understand that the balance on the bank statements as well as the monthly reports should match to the penny. In other words, every penny deposited had to be accounted for in the checkbook as well as in our reports. We hassled that point through for some time until finally he agreed with me.

As I look to the future, I know that the growing process described by an older member at Downers Grove will continue as Pastor Rutschow continues learning and striving to be an even better pastor in his service to God and to God's people. The member writes, "Over the 20 years that I have known Pastor, he has grown from that eager, sometimes immature acting preacher, to the well-seasoned, (experienced) people-sensitive, leader of leaders. Always focused on his dedicated life mission to nurture God's Word in the congregation and bring that same Word to unbelievers."

I close by making an obvious point. Reading through responses to my letter, I noticed that people constantly referred to the "gifts" Pastor Rutschow had been given.

And finally that's what it comes down to. God gave him the ability to do this work. The glory for any good that has been achieved during Pastor Rutschow's ministry solely belongs to God. Pastor Rutschow would be the first to say that he has merely been an "unworthy servant" who has done his duty. But, like all of us unworthy servants who work in God's kingdom, he will one day hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!... Come and share your master's happiness!... Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:21, 34). That's all Pastor Rutschow would ask. That's all any of us can ask. Let the glory be God's. For the kingdom is ours.

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