

Oscar J. Naumann: Steadfast Leader in Turbulent Times

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“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” (Heb. 13:7)

This paper is the third of a series on synodical presidents, each representing a 50-year era of the Wisconsin Synod. Professor John Brenner last winter presented a paper on Johannes Bading and the years 1850-1900, and in May Professor Pete Kiecker delivered his paper on John Brenner and the years 1900-1950. To cover the last half of the 20th century, I have been asked to write this paper on Oscar J. Naumann, who was president for a record 13 consecutive two-year terms from 1953 to 1979. As we go “Forward in Christ” into the 21st century, it is good for us to take a backward glance and remember this leader, a steadfast pastor for a synod going through turbulent times.

“The times, they are a’ changing” was a song sung in those years. The times were changing indeed. The United States of 1953 looked much different than the United States of 1979. The tranquil period of the Eisenhower administration soon gave way to the social upheaval of the 1960s. Vietnam, Nixon, Watergate and Carter all contributed to a loss of faith in our nation’s leaders. In 1953, TV was the new technology; by 1979, the personal computer and the VCR were making their debut.

Many of you remember those years, I’m sure, as well as the turbulence that faced the Wisconsin Synod. The years 1953 through 1979 saw great changes for the WELS: The breaking of fellowship with our sister synod, Missouri; the expansion of our synod throughout the United States; and mission outreach that extended all across the world. Those were turbulent years but also very blessed years. Through it all, God was guiding this little flock to remain faithful to him and His Word. He chose a steadfast leader to guide the synod during those years: Oscar Naumann.

This paper will focus on Naumann’s presidency and synodical history from the 1950s to the 1970s. Our topics will include the Wisconsin Synod’s break with the Missouri Synod; home and world mission expansion; and a glimpse of ministerial education and administrative changes. It is my prayer that during this hour or so that you will learn from President Naumann’s legacy on our synod, and that during the discussion some of you who knew Oscar Naumann well can share some stories and information with us.

Oscar Naumann, 1909-1953

“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” (2 Tim. 1:5)

On June 24, 1909, Oscar John Naumann was born to Rev. Justus and Maria (nee Scherf) Naumann. Justus Naumann, an immigrant from Germany, graduated from Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis in 1886, was called to be a missionary in South Dakota the next year, and then accepted a call into the Minnesota Synod in 1895. He was serving in Wood Lake, Minnesota, at the time Oscar was born, one of eight children that Justus and Maria were blessed to have. Justus served as president of the Minnesota Synod (before it merged with Wisconsin in

1917) from 1912 until his death on February 5, 1917, at the age of 51, when Oscar was not yet 10 years old.

Bereft of their father, the Naumann children were raised by their mother in a Christian household. The family stayed in St. Paul, Minnesota, where Justus was last serving. Oscar was confirmed by Pastor John Plocher in St. John's Lutheran Church at St. Paul. He enrolled at Doctor Martin Luther College in New Ulm for his preparatory school years (back then, college and prep were considered one school). Desiring to follow his father's footsteps into the ministry, he entered Northwestern College in Watertown and graduated in 1931, then he studied at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where he graduated in 1934. Naumann graduated in the middle of the depression, a time that affected the synod severely. Calls were hard to come by; salaries of synod professors were reduced; President John Brenner was calling on members to "forego personal pleasures to help reduce the [synod] deficit."ⁱ The gifted Oscar, however, did receive a call right out of the seminary: tutor and assistant to the dean of men at Northwestern College. In 1936 he was ordained and installed as pastor of Arlington Avenue Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio. His teaching abilities led him to be called at Doctor Martin Luther College as a professor, where he taught Latin and mathematics from 1940 to 1946. In 1946 his former congregation, St. John's in St. Paul, Minnesota, called him to serve with the pastor who confirmed him, John Plocher. Pastor Naumann accepted the call and served there until 1959. Not only was Naumann the pastor at St. John's, but he also served as administrator of the large parochial school.

In the meantime, Oscar also found time to raise a family. On September 5, 1936, he married Dorothy Schwarz of Lacrosse. The Lord blessed Oscar and Dorothy with seven children: One daughter, Myrna, and six sons, three of whom followed their father into the ministry: Peter, James and Paul.

Becoming Synod President: 1953

"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity." (1 Tim. 4:2)

How was it that a relatively young pastor, just 44 with less than 20 years in the ministry, could become synod president? Oscar Naumann displayed a steadfast quality as both pastor and professor. At New Ulm he was known as a "strict" professor.ⁱⁱ Well respected in his district as both pastor and professor, he was elected as president of the Minnesota District in 1948, replacing incumbent Adolph Ackermann who had "liberal unionistic tendencies." Ross Henzi relates what happened at the Minnesota District convention:

"Adolph Ackermann arrived at DMLC, fully expecting to be re-elected for another term as president. There was no reason to suggest otherwise...When the vote was announced and Oscar Naumann declared the new president, Ackermann was visibly shaken. He admonished the delegates for not re-electing him. He then left the chair and the convention.

Oscar Naumann was not elected president of the Minnesota District purely on a whim. He was well known. When I say that he was well known [I do] not mean to imply that the election was purely a popularity contest. His integrity and confessional stance was never in question...Naumann was also well known for having served DMLC from 1940-1946 as a professor. He was well respected by those outside of the college as well as by his colleagues."ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1951, Naumann was elected as second vice-president of the Wisconsin Synod. When the next synod convention came in 1953, President John Brenner announced that he was stepping

down after serving as president for 20 years. Many assumed that the popular and more experienced first vice-president, Irwin Habeck of Milwaukee, would be elected. But on the fourth ballot, to the surprise of some (including himself),^{iv} Oscar Naumann was announced as the next synod president.

It was reported that after the election, John Brenner congratulated his successor and mentioned to him that he had heard some talk about a “change in Bible thought” with the election of a new president. “God forbid it,” said the new president.^v Naumann may have been young, but he would not be intimidated by those demanding that the synod change its stand on Scripture to accommodate a changing world. He remained steadfast and faithful to the Word.

Naumann’s steadfast faith, patience, and endurance would help the synod in his years as president, particularly in the painful break up with Missouri.

The Naumann Years: Inter-church Relations, 1953-1979

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (2 Tim. 1:13,14)

1. The Break with Missouri

The new president did not have the luxury of breaking in to his position slowly. In 1953 the synod had come to the heart of an agonizing dilemma: What was the Wisconsin Synod to do with a sister synod that was suddenly going adrift from pure confessionalism? The crisis with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was in full swing.

A little review is in place. What had gone wrong with the Missouri Synod? In the 19th century, the church that Walther built was the epitome of confessional Lutheranism in America. Missouri was the largest body of the Synodical Conference, organized in 1872, that represented confessional Lutherans in America for nearly 90 years. Wisconsin stood by Missouri in the election controversy of the 1880s, opposing *in tuitu fidei*. True, in the early 1900s, Missouri and Wisconsin did not see eye-to-eye in the doctrines of church and ministry, when Koehler, Pieper and Schaller hammered out their “Wauwatosa Theology.” But in 1932, a truce was called even in this area when both sides were able to agree on the *Thiensville Theses* regarding church and ministry (while leaving some questions unsettled), and in the same year the Missouri Synod accepted the *Brief Statement* on Scripture inerrancy and the Biblical doctrine of fellowship.

In the 1930s, though, a perceptible change was creeping into the larger, more diverse Missouri Synod. A new Lutheran church body had organized, the American Lutheran Church (made up of former Midwest Lutheran synods Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo, synods that differed with the Synodical Conference on *in tuitu fidei* and “open questions”). The ALC (not to be confused with the later ALC of 1960) declared at its 1938 convention, “We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.”^{vi} But the Missouri Synod in convention that year determined that it would still discuss a possibility of joining in some sort of fellowship with the ALC, on the basis of their agreement with the *Brief Statement*. The Wisconsin Synod protested this move in its convention in 1939.^{vii}

But the LCMS continued on in its unionistic track. In the 1941 convention, the synod debated whether or not to hold negotiations with the ALC.^{viii} More boldly, Missouri at its 1944 Saginaw convention approved a resolution that distinguished prayer fellowship from “prayer that does not express fellowship.”^{ix} The convention also gave consideration to joining the national Lutheran council (which was tabled), and gave approval for congregations to host Boy Scout

troops.^x During World War II, the Missouri Synod also agreed to allow their pastors to serve in the government's military chaplaincy along with other Lutherans and Protestants. (The Wisconsin Synod developed its own chaplaincy program to avoid fellowship problems.) The Missouri Synod justified their action by calling it "cooperation in externals," rather than fellowship in religious activities. Finally, by the end of the decade, a "Common Confession" was drawn up between the ALC and Missouri in which both sides felt settled "past doctrinal agreements."^{xi} However, Wisconsin and the ELS felt that such a declaration that papered over differences was inadequate.

The Synodical Conference soon became divided between two sides—the Norwegians and Wisconsin remaining on the right, the Missouri Synod drifting to the left. Synodical Conference meetings, and the committees chosen to help patch things together, failed to heal the breach and demonstrated even further the growing divide.^{xii}

So it was in 1953 that the Wisconsin Synod came face to face with an enormous decision: Should we part ways with Missouri? Or was there more patient, brotherly admonition to be given still within the bounds of fellowship?

The 1953 Wisconsin convention recessed from August to October to discuss a recommendation to rescind fellowship with Missouri. The recessed convention recommended to continue its protest against Missouri and that the next synodical conference in 1954 devote all its sessions to discuss the issues in the controversy. The 1954 synodical conference recessed from its August meeting to November to accommodate the Wisconsin Synod's request. Missouri, Wisconsin, and the ELS all debated the topics at hand: the "Common Confession," scouting, military chaplaincy, and miscellaneous issues. Professor Edward Fredrich reported, "Wisconsin's newly elected president, Oscar Naumann, appointed two young and obscure Michigan District pastors as Wisconsin essayists, no doubt in an effort to disprove the common notion that the Michigan District and younger pastors did not really share their synod's position. Along with them Naumann appointed President Kowalke of Northwestern College."^{xiii}

Much effort was spent. No resolution came. Soon the critical 1955 Wisconsin Synod Convention arrived. It was held August 10-17 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw. The new, young president began his report with a devotion on 2 Timothy 4:1-5. He applied the words of the apostle, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (KJV translation) to the convention before him:

"Even so it was with fear and trembling that I accepted the election to the office of president of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other states two years ago. We all know that the days in which we live are critical days. We are in the days when many men 'will not endure sound doctrine,' but wishing to hear what pleases them, 'they heap to themselves teachers.'

"Fully aware of my own weaknesses, my fears, my shortcomings, I earnestly implored and do still implore the Lord to forgive what has been done amiss, and to give unto His servant an understanding heart to lead his people aright, as Solomon prayed in Gibeon, 'that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this so great a people?' (1 Kings 3:9)

"We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply his definite command 'Avoid them!', or whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years."^{xiv}

Naumann would not make the decision for the convention; the convention would do that. He instead directed the convention to be guided by God's Word, in love for the Lord and his truth and for fellow brothers in the faith.

The 1955 convention was a hotly debated one. After much wrestling in the Word and prayer, the convention resolved to rebuke Missouri's unionism for causing the rift. The committee in charge drew up the resolution: "Whereas the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." But the resolution was declared to be held "in abeyance" until the Missouri Synod had a chance to meet at its regular convention in 1956.^{xv}

Seventeen of the twenty members of the Standing Committee on Church Union, chaired by President Naumann, attended the Missouri Synod Convention in 1956. There, the Missouri Synod declined to join the Lutheran World Federation, and resolved that the "Common Confession" no longer be "regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowships with other church bodies."^{xvi} After making their observations and drawing conclusions, this committee reported to the recessed Wisconsin convention held at Northwestern College, August 21-23, 1956, to discuss the resolution to terminate fellowship with the LCMS. Also read were protests which stated that the synod could not delay in the "avoiding them" of Romans 16:17. But the committee, observing that the Missouri synod had declined membership in the Lutheran World Federation, and noting that the Common Confession was as good as dead since the old ALC was preparing to merge into a "new ALC", made this evaluation:

"The sister synod [Missouri] expresses an earnest desire of reestablishing the former unity of spirit. In light of all that has been presented in this evaluation, we are of the conviction that our Synod ought not to close the door to further discussions at this time...As our Synod makes this review, it dare not lose sight of the constant offense which the continuance of the difference in practice is creating."^{xvii}

The recessed convention resolved, "that we concur in the suggestion of our, Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance." It also resolved "that our fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced, where necessary, in the light of II Thess. 3:14,15."^{xviii}

The stage was set for the next Wisconsin Synod convention, held at D.M.L.C. in New Ulm, Minnesota from Aug. 7-14, 1957. In his president's report, Oscar Naumann addressed the matter of relations with the LCMS:

"Many individuals, several conferences, and one entire District are convinced that we as a synod are guilty of disobedience to God's Holy Word, because we have not as yet applied the injunctive of Romans 16:17,18 to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod...They assure us that continued fellowship relations and even continued discussions on the present terms are taking place in violation of their conscientious objections.

"Others in Synod are of the conviction that doctrinal discussions as now carried on are the one means by which we can testify of our convictions. They trust in the power of the Word...They believe that the discussions should continue until we have also dealt

with those doctrines that are involved in the charges we have brought up against our sister synod.”^{xix}

Naumann’s words accurately portrayed a divided convention. After doctrinal reports and memorials relating to the issues at hand were read, the floor committee on church union presented its report. A resolution was made to suspend church fellowship with the LCMS, but to continue discussions with its representatives. A minority of the floor committee, however, disagreed and indicated its feeling that the time for suspension was not at hand. Debate on the resolution ensued. President Naumann let delegates have their say but also cut back the speech-making. Finally, the question was called and the vote taken: Was now the time to break with Missouri? Sixty-one delegates said “Yes”; seventy-seven voted “No”; eight abstained. The convention resolved “that we continue vigorously protesting fellowship over against the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod”^{xx}, and urged efforts to restore unity with Missouri while keeping its doctrinal stand. What was the cause for such a sharp division? As Professor Toppe pointed out in *The Northwestern Lutheran*, it was not a debate on whether or not Missouri’s unionism should be condemned:

“There was no speaker who defended any of these [unionistic] practices of the Missouri Synod [such as joint prayer, Scouting, chaplaincy, cooperation with unorthodox church bodies]. Unionism is wrong in the sight of God, no matter what external advantages might accrue to a church body that closed an eye to it.

“The debate centered about the word ‘When.’ Should a break be declared at this time, or should the Synod wait before declaring it?...

The majority resolved that the time to break had not yet come. The assembly decided to continue further negotiations...

Our Wisconsin Synod has voted with prayer. Now we leave the results of this decision to God and look to Him for direction in the difficult days yet to come.”^{xxi}

So the Wisconsin Synod looked to God for guidance in the following years. In Synodical Conference meetings after 1957, theologians of the WELS (the synod changed its name in 1959) and the LCMS worked out doctrinal statements on various subjects, but they could not come to an agreement on the doctrine of fellowship. Regarding prayer fellowship, Missouri insisted on “levels of fellowship” while Wisconsin held to the Biblical “unit concept” of fellowship.^{xxii} Soon discussions ground to a halt, and the synod’s “Commission on Doctrinal Matters” (formerly the Standing Committee on Church Union) reported, “We sincerely regret that the earnest wrestling with the problem on the part of the Thiensville [now Mequon] Conference of Theologians has not resolved the impasse. Therefore we plead with our brethren at the Synodical Conference convention to give this matter their prayerful consideration by evaluating this sad situation in the light of God’s Word.”^{xxiii}

The Commission reported the same to the 1961 WELS Synod Convention held at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, held August 8-17. President Naumann spoke on their behalf:

“Our Commission [on Doctrinal Matters] members have taken part in these discussions in all humility, preaching the Word, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine. Yet we found that the Joint Doctrinal Unity Committees [of the Synodical Conference] were no longer perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

“When this became evident, our Commission declared that it was convinced that we had arrived at an impasse.”^{xxiv}

The Convention also heard the Study Committee report from Naumann, Oscar Siegler and chairman Carl Lawrenz that had met with all areas of the synod to discuss the situation with Missouri. Following their report, the convention was ready to vote. By a vote of 124 to 49, the Wisconsin Synod resolved to suspend fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, their long-time partner in the Synodical Conference.^{xxv}

The Wisconsin Synod continued to observe the situation and keep in contact with the Missouri Synod, but to this day, fellowship was never restored. In 1969, a story is told of Oscar Naumann, who observed the “schizophrenic” Missouri Synod convention of that year which elected conservative Jack Preus as its president, but also approved fellowship with the (new) American Lutheran Church. Later, when Preus and Naumann met informally in Oconomowoc, Preus mentioned to Naumann that if he addressed the ‘69 convention of Missouri, he would have swayed enough votes to prevent the LCMS’ decision to fellowship with the ALC. Naumann noted that he couldn’t address them as one outside of their fellowship: “It’s not my business... That was your convention”—in effect telling the new, politically-minded Missouri president: “You blew it.”^{xxvi}

2. The Church of the Lutheran Confession

The break with Missouri was not the only separation that occurred. As noted above, many within the Wisconsin Synod throughout the 1950s felt that the time to separate from Missouri was “now,” not “later.” Convinced that Wisconsin was joining Missouri in error by continuing in fellowship with them during that period, pastors, teachers, members and congregations withdrew their membership from the Wisconsin Synod. This exodus “increased sharply in 1957” when the synod in convention did not vote to break fellowship at that point.^{xxvii} Among the most notable of those who left for conscience’ sake was Professor Edmund Reim, then president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Some who remained pleaded with synod officials to urge the 1959 convention to break fellowship with Missouri on account of the loss of pastors, teachers and congregations. While sympathetic to their concerns, Naumann addressed the convention to be more concerned about God’s Word: “As much as we regret this termination of fellowship and the losses in membership that accompany it, I sincerely believe that we must find our compelling reasons for termination in God’s Word rather than in the losses we have sustained or may still sustain.”^{xxviii}

In 1960, those members who had resigned from the Wisconsin Synod established a new church fellowship called the Church of the Lutheran Confession. In 1962 they numbered 62 pastors, 60 congregations, and 8,992 souls.

When the WELS did separate from Missouri, it was thought that those former Wisconsin Synod members would return. Sadly, such was not the case. One observer noted how Naumann made many overtures toward the CLC’s leadership, and ongoing attempts were made to “heal the breach,” always outside the area of fellowship.^{xxix} But the issue on admonishing an erring church body remained unresolved. The CLC contended that once an error is marked the avoiding must take place, and any admonition must be done outside the realm of fellowship. The WELS felt that it has the duty to admonish an erring brother as long as possible, until such a church body becomes persistent in its error. To this day, the WELS and CLC have been unable to overcome this difference and reconcile with one another.

3. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Before we conclude that all relations with other Lutheran church bodies went sour during the Naumann years, we should look at the WELS' closeness with the confessional Norwegian-American Lutheran body known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Here we find something positive that happened in the area of inter-church relations.

The ELS, as a member of the Synodical Conference, also noted with dismay Missouri's drift toward unionism and weakening stance toward confessionalism. Already before the 1955 Wisconsin Synod convention, the ELS in convention declared its fellowship ties with Missouri broken. When the WELS followed suit in 1961, the two asked the Synodical Conference to disband at the 1962 conference. In 1963, the WELS and ELS formally withdrew from the conference. One confessional alliance of Lutherans was broken...but another had begun.

In the years after the break with Missouri, the Wisconsin Synod developed closer ties with the ELS. The larger Wisconsin Synod played the role of "big brother" to the smaller Norwegian body. During and after the Naumann years, joint conferences among pastors helped to establish and maintain a good working relationship between the two. First vice-president Carl Mischke observed that Oscar Naumann had a "cordial relationship" with the ELS and attended all of the ELS conventions. An Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum was established in which the leaders of the two synods could give mutual encouragement to each other and get to know each other as "real human beings." Mischke also recalled how, in the days after Naumann's death, ELS president George Orvick and Bethany Lutheran Seminary president Wilhelm Peterson met with him personally to encourage him as the new WELS president.^{xxx}

The fellowship that the WELS and ELS still enjoys has yielded great blessings. A number of pastors from the WELS were called or assigned to help ELS congregations when they had pastor shortages, and both have played a vital role in organizing the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, which organized in Germany in 1993.

The Naumann Years: Missions

"May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you." (Psalm 67:3,4)

1. Home Missions

There were many who thought that the break from Missouri would be the WELS' death knell. Actually, the opposite was true. Up to that point the Wisconsin Synod had mostly relied on Missouri to establish confessional Lutheran missions coast to coast in the United States. For instance, Missouri got a jump on California, legend has it, by a "gentleman's agreement" in which a WELS missionary and a Missouri mission official met on a train. The two agreed that Missouri would do work in California and Wisconsin would do mission work in Arizona.^{xxxii} But, when Missouri drifted from clear Lutheran confessionalism, Wisconsin Synod leaders realized that they needed to step up efforts in home missions as the major confessional Lutheran body in America.

Growth in home missions was preceded by a shift in attitude toward home missions. During the first eighty or ninety years, Wisconsin's approach toward home missions was mostly following German immigrants that migrated across the Midwest, from Michigan and Wisconsin to Nebraska and South Dakota. When German immigration slowed to a trickle, and especially after the depression hit, our mission fields in America became fewer and fewer. But zeal to do mission work would not be abated. In 1939, the synod in convention authorized calling general missionaries to Arizona and Colorado—the start of a new wave of home missions that would

expand the previously land-locked Lutheran body across the states.^{xxxii} In 1941, Chairman W. Roepke of the synodical General mission board signaled a new approach to home missions: “Let us free ourselves from the thought that our Home Mission work is done with the same kind of people that were available a generation ago. Then this type of mission work was done almost exclusively around those of the household of faith. Today it is different.”^{xxxiii} Reaching out would be done to all Americans, not just the German-speaking, and throughout the United States, not just the Midwest.

Mission fields in the United States grew, though not steadily. From 1941 to 1945, 88 new trial fields were opened. A looming manpower shortage, however, curtailed the opening of mission fields in the years that followed. As late as 1961, the WELS was represented in just 16 states, but that, too, would soon change.

Following World War II, the American people were becoming much more mobile. Businesses and retirement would move families to far away states like California and Florida. In the early 1950s, the Wisconsin Synod established congregations in those rapidly growing states. Gethsemane in Mar Vista, a community in northwest Los Angeles, was established in 1950. (A note from my personal history: When my grandfather’s business took him to Los Angeles in 1954, he intentionally moved his family near the Wisconsin Synod church in Mar Vista.) Missions in Florida were a special leap for Wisconsin, since previously the closest churches to Florida were in Ohio, nearly a thousand miles away. The 1953 synod convention passed a “no leapfrogging” resolution to limit home missions to states adjacent to where we have congregations, but the Michigan District Board finally managed to get the green light to do some exploring in Florida. Pastor William Steih was called, exploratory work was made, and a church was organized in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1955.^{xxxiv}

In 1955, the General Mission Board divided into the General Board for Home Missions and the Board for World Missions, so that two boards, not just one, could concentrate on the growing mission effort at home and abroad. The home mission board became more aggressive in advocating the growth of missions in the United States. Illustrating this were mottoes adopted in 1963 by the board: “Mission-a-Month” and “Every State by ‘78.” Norman Berg, the second executive secretary of the Board for Home Missions (following Raymond Wiechmann), relates the thought behind the mottoes:

“These catchy phrases were not motivational gimmicks but expressions of the realistic hopes the Spirit had raised in the hearts of the home mission leaders of the day. The mode of operation indicated was to establish regional outposts in metropolitan areas with good potential for winning the unchurched in these densely populated areas not served by us before. The next step would be to ‘ring’ such metropolitan areas with several missions to more effectively serve the area.”^{xxxv}

Although the synod did not quite reach “every state by ‘78,” it did come close to its goal. By the end of the 1970s there were congregations and missions in every state except four. The last remaining states, West Virginia, Vermont, Maine, and Mississippi were all added to the WELS roster in the early 1980s. (Since that time, the mission in Rhode Island crossed the border into Massachusetts, but it still serves the Rhode Island area.) The WELS’ metamorphosis from a mainly Midwest, land-locked Lutheran body to a nationwide church was complete.^{xxxvi}

President Naumann noted the growth of home missions in his tenure. He observed it already in 1965, following the aftermath of the break with Missouri: “We do certainly stand before unprecedented opportunities. The Lord has brought us through bitter intersynodical and intrasynodical struggles. These struggles took their toll also in the form of numerical losses. Yet

despite these losses, God is granting us a steady increase...Let us grasp these opportunities in the confidence that the Lord is purposely placing them before us.”^{xxxvii}

Ten years later Naumann looked back and marveled at the Lord’s blessings on home missions in the WELS:

“One can hardly believe that it has actually come about. Since August of 1961, when we had organized congregations in sixteen states of the Union, the Lord has granted an expansion which today lists organized congregation in 44 states including Alaska and Hawaii. Whereas our congregations formerly transferred...to sister synods in areas and states where we’re not represented, we were compelled for confessional reasons to change our program. We learned to follow our people into new areas and to minister to them ourselves.”^{xxxviii}

Such quotes tell us that Naumann had a large heart for missions. While it cannot be said that Naumann caused the growth of home missions from the ‘50s to the ‘70s, he did play a major role in encouraging growth and giving the green light to expansion. Carl Mischke noted that the president was “very influential” in fostering and encouraging growth in both home missions and world missions. According to Mischke, Naumann had a “real soft spot” in his heart for “lonely Lutherans” who were searching for confessional Lutheranism and weren’t finding it in the bigger American Lutheran bodies.^{xxxix} The break with Missouri found the Wisconsin Synod as the largest truly orthodox Lutheran body in America, and it took its role seriously with home mission expansion.

2. World Missions

Naumann’s heart for “lonely Lutherans” led him to be a “strong friend for world missions” as well. He was interested in any group around the world that would send the WELS a letter expressing interest in establishing a confessional Lutheran church there. Naumann would send a letter in reply, contact the Committee on Inter-Church Relations, and get the World Mission Board involved. A case in point was the mission started in Hong Kong. In 1960 Peter Chang, an ordained ex-businessman, asked for help from synod for his three congregations. “Friendly counselors” were sent, starting in 1964; financial assistance was provided; and finally the WELS adopted the mission field in 1972.^{xl}

Again, Naumann was not the cause of the world mission expansion. The impetus for mission expansion came before his term as president. The 1945 synod convention directed the Mission Board to explore new mission fields overseas. In 1949, Pastors Edgar Hoenecke and Arthur Wacker took a safari through southern Africa and found an ideal site to start mission work when they visited Lusaka, Zambia. The “WELS ‘49ers” gave their report, and soon calls were issued for missionaries to Africa. At the 1953 convention, it was happily reported that the first African missionary, Pastor A.B. Habben, had arrived in Lusaka with an assistant, Paul Ziegler, to help erect buildings.

Africa was not the only continent the Wisconsin Synod entered in the early ‘50s. The 1951 synod convention, faced with the choice of Africa or Japan, answered, “Both.” Rev. Fred Tiefel accepted the call to be the first missionary in Japan and started the mission field there.

Naumann may not have been the cause of world mission expansion, but he wholeheartedly gave the missions his support. Mission growth during his administration came in two forms: Expansion into many countries, and growth of individual fields. Regarding expansion, consider all the countries the WELS entered from the ‘50s into the ‘70s: From Zambia into Malawi and Cameroon in Africa; Hong Kong, Taiwan, India and Indonesia in southeast Asia;

Puerto Rico, Mexico and Colombia in Latin America; and assistance toward confessional Lutheran churches in Sweden and Germany. Regarding growth, consider especially the explosive growth in the Zambia and Malawi missions, which organized in 1965 as the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. The church in densely populated Malawi grew to over 3,000 communicants by 1982, doubling the older church in Zambia.^{xli}

The call to “go into all world” was being met by the synod. Breath-taking mission expansion was God’s repay to a synod troubled with its break with Missouri. The synod truly experienced that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him”(Ro. 8:28).

The Naumann Years Ministerial Education and Administration

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction... [K]eep your head in all situations, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:2,5)

1. Ministerial Education

At first glance, it might seem as if the area of worker training was the one thing that changed very little during the Naumann years. The same synodical schools that were there in 1953 were still there at the time he died in 1979: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon; Northwestern College (and Prep) in Watertown; Doctor Martin Luther College and Academy in New Ulm; Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan; and Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota. Only at the tail end of his administration was this line-up about to change, when a special convention in 1978 resolved to buy a campus in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. There, Martin Luther Preparatory School, made up of the former prep schools in New Ulm and Mobridge, opened its doors in the fall of 1979.

But looking again, one sees that great changes also occurred between 1953-1979. Great growth in mission expansion as well as growing congregations and schools demanded a larger number of both pastor and teacher candidates. To supply those needs, all campuses went through building programs, constructing classrooms and dormitories and refurbishing their facilities. The first recruitment efforts were begun in 1957 with what was called a “manpower committee.”^{xliii} In the 1960s, Wisconsin Lutheran College was established in Milwaukee to provide a teacher-training school in Wisconsin to help cope with the teacher shortage, until it merged with D.M.L.C. on the New Ulm campus in 1970. Also during this time, the campuses at Watertown and New Ulm reorganized their administration, so that the colleges and prep schools at both became separate entities with their own administrative staffs. We could go into more detail, but time will not permit us. With inter-church relations preoccupying his time, and with such a great heart for missions, Naumann might have been expected to give ministerial education as little attention as I’m giving it here—but he didn’t. Permit three quotes to counter that, one in 1960, the others toward the end of his presidency:

“When our Savior directed His disciples to pray for laborers in the harvest, He was not speaking only of the fainting and scattered multitudes of His day. He spoke a word of divine compassion and exhortation to His disciples of all ages.

“The shortage of trained workers in the Lord’s harvest is a need which we are experiencing in common with nearly all Christian denominations. Their periodicals and their efforts to recruit students to train for the preaching and teaching ministry bear witness of this fact. This same shortage of trained workers is one of our chief concerns in the Wisconsin Synod today...

“What does our compassionate Savior bid us do in the face of this shortage of workers? He bids us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into His harvest...He also asks us to become workers...[Naumann expounds on Matthew 9:35--10:4, and also Acts 6, and mentions the vacancy problem of the synod at the time.]

“When congregations are convinced that their pastor or teacher is needed more urgently where he is than in the calling congregation, the least that they can do is to add their gifts to their prayers for laborers in the harvest. Our schools, especially Dr. Martin Luther College and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, are compelled to deny admittance to prospective students, because the buildings and facilities are already filled beyond capacity. To remedy this situation our gifts for the Synod and for our missions ought to meet at least the minimum share which we have agreed to give...And these are the years when the Lord has given us golden opportunities to expand our labors in his harvest. Let us not be found wanting!”^{xliii}

In his president’s report at synodical convention in 1977 that faced difficult decisions:

“Are we not living today in the joy of our Lord? We have been training messengers of salvation and sending out missionaries, pastors and teachers to shepherd the souls entrusted to us. The Lord has found us faithful over a few things and is now making us rulers over many things. Shall we panic in the face of greater opportunities of service to our Lord, or should we recognize that we are experiencing to a greater degree the joy our Lord gives us in his service?”^{xliv}

And, in an interview in 1978:

“As a former professor at Dr. Martin Luther College (New Ulm, Minn.), where we educate our parish school teachers, I am also pleased that we have given six of our seven teacher and preacher training schools new campuses since 1961. Just this summer [1978] we strengthened our academy system by the purchase of Champion High School in Prairie du Chien, Wis., where in the fall of 1979 we will open Martin Luther Preparatory School, a feeder school for our higher educational institutions. The facilities are magnificent, and we were able to purchase the school from the Wisconsin Province of the Jesuit Order for just \$2.8 million.”^{xlv}

Naumann knew as much as anyone the need for a strong ministerial education system for a confessionally-minded and mission-minded synod.

2. Administration

For the first six years of his presidency, Pastor Naumann continued to serve his flock at St. John’s Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. It soon became obvious that the amount of work placed on the synod president was too heavy for one serving his Lord as a full time pastor. So the synod in convention resolved to make the synod presidency a full time position. Naumann accepted the change, albeit reluctantly. Fredrich reported, “As late as 1959 it took a massive effort to persuade the synod and the incumbent in the presidency to make the latter’s office a full-time position.”^{xlvi} Tears were shed when he preached his farewell sermon at St. John’s on November 29, 1959, and moved his family to Milwaukee.

Naumann later observed how wise a decision this was. He said, “As the weight of synod matters increased, I felt unable to do justice to both synod and congregation. Also, my sons were asking questions like “When is dad going to visit us?” and “How come dad is home with us tonight?”^{xlvii}

But at heart, Naumann would always remain a pastor. He didn't view becoming a full time president as a "step up." He never tired of saying that he would like to get back into the parish (after becoming synod president), and would still answer the phone, "Pastor Naumann." Indeed, the President did not cease being "Seelsorge"; his pastoral ministry was just being applied in a different arena, toward a synod and not toward a congregation.^{xlvi}

Yet Naumann had gifts and talents as an administrator. He was gifted with the gavel at conventions.^{xlvi} He encouraged good stewardship and giving of missions. During his tenure, two synod-wide special offerings were conducted: *Missio Dei*, started in 1965 to help supply building needs at worker-training schools and expand mission outreach; and the 125th anniversary offering in 1975. He was an impartial leader of the synod "divisions" (later termed "areas of ministry"). Robert Voss recalled how he was "fiercely loyal" to the worker training programs and synod schools, but also displayed his fairness toward all other boards and never played favorites between the areas of ministry. When the administrators got flak for their roles, Naumann went to bat for them and stood behind their decisions.¹

Oscar Naumann's Death and Legacy

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim. 4:6,7)

In October, 1975, Dorothy Naumann preceded her husband in departing to the church triumphant. Oscar continued to serve his Lord and synod until 1979. It was known only to a few that Oscar had a heart problem; he managed it well, but he soon decided that he would retire at the 1979 convention. In the June 1979 "The President's Newsletter," Naumann informed called workers,

"It is only right and proper to inform you—and all our members through you—that a new day will be dawning for our beloved synod this summer. I feel that I should inform you that I am asking the convention to elect someone else as their president this summer. My health is such that I could be stopped from functioning properly at any time, and I wouldn't want the Synod in any way...to be hindered or delayed in carrying out its God-given work by an unexpected inability of its executive officer to function."^{li}

The Lord decided to take Oscar home before the synod convened. On Saturday, June 16, 1979, Oscar suffered a stroke, and he died early Tuesday morning on June 19. His funeral was held at Mt. Lebanon Lutheran in Milwaukee on Thursday, June 21. Pastor George Boldt served as liturgist; Pastor Marvin Otterstatter preached on Psalm 73:25,26 (KJV): "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." The preacher addressed both family and synod: "It was his love for God and his Word that made Oscar J. Naumann the esteemed head of your family and the esteemed leader of our church body."

Those left behind mourned, but also thanked God for blessing them with a faithful, steadfast leader. Memorials spoke of his legacy in various ways. Carl Mischke, acting synod president before being elected in 1979, wrote of Naumann's humility and selflessness in *The Northwestern Lutheran*: "In my acquaintance with him, one that goes back 30 years when he was my district president in Minnesota, I don't remember ever hearing him speak about kingdom work in the first person singular."^{lii}

In the next issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Edward Fredrich summarized the history of his presidency, noting his steadfastness in that turbulent period:

“In that turbulent situation, amid thunder from the left and from the right, O.J. Naumann began his presidency pleading for a continuance on old confessional pathways and for the relevancy of old biblical passages. The efforts to conserve were not easy and not entirely successful. The Synodical Conference ceased to exist. The Wisconsin Synod suffered losses. But the church body and the leader hewed to the line, the line for doctrine and practice the Scriptures lay out for us. Flawed and faulty leadership could have been disastrous. The leader did not falter.”^{liii}

A steadfast leader in turbulent times. The Lord gave the Wisconsin Synod exactly the leader we needed from the ‘50s to the end of the ‘70s. By all accounts, Naumann had the right tools and personality to serve as synod president for 26 years of change: A man who was persistent, faithful, loyal, and humble. President Mischke would call him “an Israelite in whom there was no guile.”^{liv} But most of all, this leader was one who was steadfast in the Word. Oscar Naumann was a man who trusted the Word of God’s power in all aspects of his presidency. May his presidency be a role model for our ministries: Keeping the truth of God’s Word as our dearest possession, and sharing that truth as our most valuable gift.

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ⁱ Braun, Mark E. "Hard Times," *Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran*, August 2000, pp. 16-17.

ⁱⁱ Interview with Rev. Robert J. Voss, September 11, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henzi, Ross A. "Oscar J. Naumann: The Making of a President", p. 9. 5/18/89.

^{iv} Robert Voss, a visitor at the convention, reported that Naumann, light-complexioned to begin with, turned "as white as a ghost" when the balloting was announced.

^v *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Saturday, October 7, 1978, part I, p. 11.

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- ^{vi} Fredrich, E. C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 199, quoting *American Lutheran Proceedings, 1938*, p. 255.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- ^{viii} See *Proceedings of the 38th Regular Convention of the Missouri Synod*, pp. 277-287 and ff.
- ^{ix} See *Proceedings of the 38th Regular Convention of the Missouri Synod*, pp. 245-6.
- ^x *Ibid.*, pp. 247-252, 258.
- ^{xi} Fredrich, pp. 200-201.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 202. For more detail, read *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, ch. 18, and *WELS and Other Lutherans*, part one.
- ^{xiii} Fredrich, p. 203. The professor was one of those “young and obscure Michigan District pastors.”
- ^{xiv} Proceedings of the Thirty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, MI, Aug. 10-17, 1955, pp. 9-10.
- ^{xv} *Ibid.*, pp. 85-88.
- ^{xvi} Quoted in J. Borgwardt’s Church History Paper, “Oscar J. Naumann: A Legacy of Leadership”, p.23.
- ^{xvii} Proceedings of the Recessed Convention of the Wisconsin Synod, Aug. 21-23, 1956 (page numbers not available)
- ^{xviii} *Ibid.* See also E.C. Fredrich, “Fellowship to Continue: Report of Recessed Convention,” *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Sep. 16, 1956 (43:19), pp. 294-295.
- ^{xix} Proceedings of the 34th Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, p. 15.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.
- ^{xxi} Carleton Toppe, “Union Matters,” *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Sep. 1, 1957, pp. 284-285.
- ^{xxii} James Borgwardt, “Oscar J. Naumann: A Legacy of Leadership”, pp.27-28.
- ^{xxiii} Fredrich, E.C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 205, quoting 1960 “Synodical Conference Proceedings” p. 46.
- ^{xxiv} Proceedings of the 36th Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Convention, p. 14.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid.*, pp. 197-9.
- ^{xxvi} Interview with Carl Mischke, Feb. 4, 2000.
- ^{xxvii} Fredrich, E.C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 207.
- ^{xxviii} Proceedings of the 35th Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Convention, p. 17.
- ^{xxix} Interview with Carl Mischke, Feb. 4, 2000.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxxi} Nicole Moline, “Helping People Where They’re At”, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, September, 2000, p. 11.
- ^{xxxii} Norman Berg, “Home Mission Moods and Modes—125 Years in WELS” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, October 1976, p. 261.
- ^{xxxiii} E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 210.
- ^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.
- ^{xxxv} Berg, p. 264.
- ^{xxxvi} For more information, read E.C. Fredrich’s *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, chapter 19, page 209-218.
- ^{xxxvii} Proceedings of the 38th Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Convention, August 4-11, 1965, pp. 14,16.

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- ^{xxxviii} Proceedings of the 43rd Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Convention, August 6-13, 1975, p. 19.
- ^{xxxix} Interview with Rev. Carl Mischke, Feb. 4, 2000.
- ^{xl} Interview with Carl Mischke, Feb. 4, 2000; E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, pp. 230-231.
- ^{xli} *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People*, T. Sauer, project director; H. Johne and E. Wendland, editors, pp. 213-16. Naumann is mentioned quite frequently throughout this book as a great supporter of missions.
- ^{xlii} Interview with Robert Voss. Voss was on that manpower committee.
- ^{xliii} Oscar Naumann, "Pray for Laborers in the Harvest," *The Northwestern Lutheran*, April 10, 1960, pp. 120-121.
- ^{xliv} *Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod 1977 Convention proceedings*, Aug. 3-10, 1977, DMLC, pp. 22-23.
- ^{xliv} Oscar J. Naumann in an interview with James P. Schaefer, director of public relations (released Oct. 4, 1978)
- ^{xlvi} E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 250. See also the 1959 *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, pp. 24-28, 36-39.
- ^{xlvi} James Johnston, "Rev. Naumann: Voice of Conservatism" *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, Oct. 19, 1968, p. 20.
- ^{xlviii} J. Borgwardt, "Oscar J. Naumann: A Legacy of Leadership", pp. 14,15.
- ^{xliv} Carl Mischke, in an interview, recalled when he knew just when to cut discussion on a topic when it was dragging on—such as when a man went to the podium three times to argue the closing of the Milwaukee Teachers' College.
- ^l Interview with Robert Voss, Sept. 11, 2000.
- ^{li} Oscar Naumann, "The President's Newsletter" June 1979.
- ^{lii} Carl Mischke, "In Memoriam" *The Northwestern Lutheran*, July 22, 1979, p. 232? (unsure of page number)
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