

Justus Heinrich Naumann
Pastor, Missionary, President

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Justus H. Naumann: Pastor, Missionary, President

On February 5th, 1917, Pastor Justus Heinrich Naumann, president of the Minnesota Synod, died suddenly after suffering a heart attack. In his death our hospital has lost a true friend and our Lutheran church one of her hardest workers.

The funeral service was held in St. Paul on the 8th of February, for which a large group of administrative colleagues from the synods of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Missouri, and also from the Norwegian Synod turned out, in spite of the traveling hindrances brought about by the many snowstorms. The service at his home was officiated by pastors J. Plocher and J. R. Baumann. At Immanuel Director Schaller and Pastor Gausewitz preached; President Koehler of the Missouri Synod spoke words of sympathy. Pastor Richard Siegler appeared as a representative for the Wisconsin Synod Praesidium. Director Ackermann read the biography of the one now fallen asleep. The bodily remains were brought from St. Paul to Wood Lake, Minn. under escort of relatives and several pastors. A funeral service was arranged there on Friday, the 9th of February, 1917, in which the new president of the synod, Rev. J. R. Baumann, preached the German sermon, and Pastor A. C. Haase the English. The residing pastor, J. H. Hinck, spoke words of earnest admonition and tender comfort. The crowd of those who revered the deceased, which gathered from near and far, was so great that the church and its school addition could not accommodate everyone. The interment followed at the community cemetery in Wood Lake. Numerous letters of condolence from sister synods and churches had been received.¹

The foregoing is a translation of the obituary of President Justus Heinrich Naumann which appeared in the St. John's Hospital Bulletin in March, 1917. Upon reading this obituary of Pastor Naumann, one cannot help but be intrigued by the life and career of this Lutheran pastor who faithfully served the Lord and his church. It is the goal of this writer to satisfy this intrigue by offering a biographical sketch of Pastor Naumann. The reader will find in the following pages a translation of the brief biography of Pastor Naumann² alluded to in the obituary above

(printed throughout in the shaded text boxes), interspersed with supplementary information from various other sources.

The Biography of Pastor Naumann, drawn up by Professor Ackermann from Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, reads as follows:

The deceased, whose mortal remains rest here in the coffin, is Justus Naumann. He was a son of Heinrich Naumann, who was well-known in and beneficial to the Lutheran Church. He was born on 14 March, 1865 in Dresden, Saxony, Germany. He took his primary education at the Bohemian Institute in Dresden and later at the Latin School in Planitz. This was under the care of Rev. G. Stoeckhardt, who would later become a professor of Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

Much can be learned about a person's character by knowing the atmosphere which surrounded that person in his formative childhood years. Justus H. Naumann was born into a family that displayed strong Christian convictions. His father, Heinrich I. Naumann, was the manager of the family bookshop in Dresden. Although it did not make him a wealthy man, his publication and promotion of sound Lutheran literature has had a tremendous impact on the Lutheran church in the United States, as well as in Germany.³ Although he was not a pastor, Heinrich I. Naumann was a dedicated Lutheran layman. In spite of public scorn, for reasons of conscience he could not remain a member of the German Lutheran State Church, and accordingly became a founding member of the Saxon Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.⁴ In addition, H. I. Naumann organized the Lutheran Society (*Lutheranerverein*) in his place of business on March 31, 1868, and was the first elder of the Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church in Dresden, U.A.C.⁵

Of the nine children of Heinrich Naumann, eight either became pastors or married pastors of the Saxon Free Church and the Missouri Synod. Some of these pastors attained high administrative positions; others served as professors or missionaries.⁶

In the thirteenth year of his life he came to America and enrolled at Concordia College - Fort Wayne, Ind., from which he graduated, and dedicated himself in the year 1883 to the study of Theology at Concordia Seminary - St. Louis, Mo.

When Justus Naumann was enrolled as a student at Concordia Seminary, he was treated like a member of the family in the home of Prof. G. Stoeckhardt, who had accepted a call to teach at the seminary. We get an idea of Naumann's sense of humor from an incident that occurred at the Stoeckhardt home:

At one occasion...when many guests were present [Justus] was asked to fill their glasses with beer. The pitcher which had been given him for this service was much too small and Professor Stoeckhardt asked him to get a larger container. Faithful to instructions [he] secured the sprinkling can and filled all the glasses using the sprinkling can to the great amusement of everyone present.⁷

After he had completed his three-year course he set out on a journey in the same year (1886) to Germany. Soon after his return voyage to our country he set out for his first field of labor as a travelling missionary (*Reiseprediger*) and was ordained on the 26th of January, 1887 in Harold, S.D. Thus he belonged to the group of pioneers who preached the gospel among the German Lutherans of this territory, and who had tasted an age of great want. Five years after his ordination he came to Wolsey, S.D., where the external conditions also were not glorious, for the newly formed state of South Dakota was still considered to be in the developmental stage.

Pastor Naumann had his work cut out for him, mostly in the gathering of Lutherans who were scattered throughout the territo-

ry. He finally founded fifteen preaching stations.⁸ This was difficult work as there were no roads in South Dakota at this time; he had to rely on his compass, buckboard (a topless, lightweight, four-wheeled wagon), and six reliable horses to get from place to place.⁹

Although life and travel was difficult for Pastor Naumann in this untamed land, it did make for some interesting experiences, which Oscar J. Naumann describes:

One day father prepared to ride to Pierre, South Dakota, the present capitol, in the company of one of his neighbors. Suddenly it became very dark and the men sought shelter and a place to rest at the shanty of a sheepherder, whose shanty, however, was much too small to accommodate guests. The two men slept in a wagon box and used their fur coats for bedding and cover. While they were sound asleep a pack of prairie wolves, or coyotes as they are commonly known, gathered around the wagon and snooped all around the place. The men awoke and after a while, despite every effort, burst into loud laughter. The coyotes ran for their lives.¹⁰

The next trip father made to Pierre on his faithful pony, traveling alone and in a great hurry. Suddenly he saw an Indian waving at him with both arms and motioning him to turn around. Our Father stopped and jumped from his horse and suddenly realized that he was at the edge of a 60 foot drop-off which would have cost him and his horse their lives, if the Lord had not graciously warned him through this Indian.¹¹

Living in South Dakota at this time made for a strenuous life--not only because of the difficulties involved with travel, but also with respect to the climate. On July 7th, 1894 a scorching wind arose in Wolsey, where Pastor Naumann had lived at the time. We are told that the temperature in his house was 107 degrees at seven o'clock in the evening. In contrast, a snow-storm lasting for seven days trapped Pastor Naumann in a house in Iroquis the next January. Although food supplies lasted, the

supply of tobacco did not. The three smokers in the house resorted to smoking wild sunflower seed. When the storm finally subsided one of the three men hopped on a pony and rode to town to get some of the real stuff.¹²

In addition to the difficulties posed by travel and the weather, Pastor Naumann experienced a degree of poverty. The travelling missionaries in those days were called with an annual salary of \$400. Because there were never sufficient funds in the mission treasury for such a salary, the missionaries were asked to get by on only \$350. Even this sum was never paid in full. The average salary that Pastor Naumann received while serving in South Dakota was only \$235.¹³ Pastor Naumann was not interested in his income as much as he was with the preaching of the gospel to people who thirsted for it. This point is illustrated by two stories that Pastor Naumann was fond of telling:

[Pastor Naumann] and a neighbor pastor once travelled by buckboard and broncos from eastern South Dakota to the Black Hills of which Teddy Roosevelt said, "There's gold in them thar hills!" The only place the two pastors could find to hold a service on Sunday was the saloon. It was otherwise not used on Sunday morning. A good delegation of people attended. After the service one of the men remarked, "Boys, these two men gave us a right good talk. I am going to pass the hat!" This he did and the partner of [Pastor Naumann] wrote in his memoirs that the offering consisted of \$96.00, all in gold!¹⁴

When Pastor Meyer of Canistota, South Dakota accepted a call to Minnesota, father became the vacancy pastor. At that time he already lived in Wolsey. Here is one incident that Pastor Naumann often told, one of his experiences in Canistota. After the service there, one of the members came to him and said, "Pastor your sermon was very good, but there was one thing wrong with it." Pastor Naumann inquired what this one thing could be. "It was too short" and when Pastor Naumann pulled out his faithful pocket watch, he found that he had preached two hours and fifteen minutes.¹⁵

Some of the places that Pastor Naumann served during this time included Huron, Cavour, Iroquois, Yale, Miller, and Harold (where the work was done in Danish).¹⁶

On April 12th, 1894 he married Miss Maria Scherf, who was a faithful companion and helpmeet to him until the end of his life.

While Pastor Naumann was still single a fellow pastor advised him to travel to Scotland, South Dakota where he would find "exactly what he was looking for" in the parsonage. There he met Maria Elizabeth Scherf, a native of Saxony, born on September 23rd, 1872. After she had been orphaned at the age of seventeen she travelled to America with her brother, who enrolled at the seminary in Springfield. Maria eventually came to live in the house of pastor Dick Ehlen who needed her assistance for his wife and little girls. Three days after his arrival in Scotland Justus Naumann and Maria Scherf were engaged. They were married six weeks later by Pastor Ehlen. When Pastor Naumann returned to Wolsey with his new bride the next day, they were welcomed with music, gifts and a table laden with food for the occasion.¹⁷ While they were still living in Wolsey, the Lord blessed the couple with the birth of a daughter, Emily Marie.¹⁸

In the following year (1895) the deceased received a call from the congregation in Gibbon, Minn., which he accepted, and thereupon he entered the Minnesota Synod.

This call, which he received shortly before Christmas 1894, was not at all an easy decision for Pastor Naumann to make. He turned for advice to an intimate friend of his, President Pfothauer, who had been a travelling companion of his when he first travelled to America. The advice he received was, "Accept the call; those people need you." After confirming his first confirmation class in the kitchen of the parsonage and after the birth of his daughter, the family headed for Gibbon. When they arrived they had only seventeen cents in their pockets. So as not to embarrass the family, the Wolsey congregation agreed to pay the bill of \$32 which Pastor Naumann owed in Wolsey for kerosene and groceries.¹⁹

Pastor Naumann served Immanuel in Gibbon for ten years as both pastor and teacher, during which time he also shepherded the younger and smaller St. John's congregation in Fairfax. Services were held at each church on alternating Sundays until the Gibbon congregation grew larger, at which time Pastor Naumann conducted a morning service at Gibbon and a service in Fairfax in the afternoon. By 1900 the Fairfax congregation had grown to the point where it could support its own pastor. Eased of the responsibilities of a second congregation, Pastor Naumann was then able to organize a new congregation--Zion in Winthrop, which he served from 1897 to 1899.²⁰

During these years three more children were born to Justus and Maria: Paul George, Hedwig Martha, and Charlotte Magdalene.²¹

After a little over nine years the congregation at Wood Lake, Minn. called him. While he was at this congregation he was allowed to observe the anniversary of his 25 years in the ministry.

In the year 1910 the Minnesota Synod published a history in commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary. At this time Justus Naumann was the superintendent of the synod's home missions (*Reisepredigt*). The final report in this book, written by Pastor Naumann, gives us an idea of the mission-mindedness of this man. In this report Pastor Naumann makes the statement:

A synod which operates no mission whatsoever has failed, in part, in its purpose, although it goes without saying now also, that every small synod must carry on its own mission to the heathen.²²

Pastor Naumann then goes on to point out that the Minnesota Synod was fulfilling its mission purpose in its support of the Synodical Conference's Negro Mission in the southern states, as well as the mission efforts of the Federation among the Indians in Arizona.

There is one mission, however, that we have always considered to be our chief business and have operated independently all along. This is the mission to our brothers in faith scattered throughout our land, and to our fellow countrymen practically alienated from the church, who often isolated, often in small groups--especially in newly settled areas--find themselves without spiritual care.²³

The term *home missions* today refers mainly to evangelistic efforts; a century ago the primary task of home missions was to reach out to dispersed, isolated Lutherans. Since Justus Naumann served as a *Reiseprediger* and later became the superintendent of the *Reisepredigung* in the Minnesota Synod, overseeing the work

being done in twelve regions²⁴, we are justified in calling him a missionary.

Here it may be mentioned that in addition to being a man of stature in the Minnesota Synod, Pastor Naumann was also a man of great physical stature. Oscar Naumann explains:

One day in Wood Lake, Minn., when your great-grandfather was waiting for the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad train to arrive and bring the mail [As students at New Ulm we used to call it the Misery and Short Life RR., or the Midnight and Still Late (M. & St. L. RR.)], the livery stable owner also came to the station. His name was Ed Wahl. Both were big, heavy men. Someone asked who was the heavier. --I don't know whether anyone laid any bets, but your great-grandfather won. He weighed 324, Mr. Wahl only 323! No wonder he was a good swimmer. He would take his oldest son, Paul, out to Wood Lake, and they would swim out into deep water. When Paul grew tired, he would just crawl onto his dad's back and his dad would bring him to shore!²⁵

Pastor Naumann served this congregation from 1905 until the end of 1913. During these years the Lord blessed the Naumann family with three more children: Theresa Henrietta, Justus Carl, and the youngest son, baptized Oskar Johannes (the name *Oscar John Naumann* would become familiar in the WELS during the mid 1900's). In the year 1912 the congregation permitted their pastor to accept the office of president of the Minnesota Synod.²⁶ In 1913 Naumann accepted a call to Goodhue where he served the tri-parish of Grace, St. John's and St. Peter's until 1915.²⁷

World War I broke out in Europe while Naumann served in Goodhue. This must have concerned Pastor Naumann greatly. Germany was his fatherland, and many of his friends and relatives still resided in there. Being the president of a German Lutheran

church body must have added other concerns as well. From his presidential address to the Minnesota Synod in 1915 we can accurately assess his feelings on the matter:

Since we gathered in Gibbon, Minn. last year the great world war has broken out in Europe. Not only has this war been waged relentlessly for over ten months already by the powers and their allies with never before witnessed means of combat and military forces, but it also affects the other nations of the earth, both civilized and uncivilized. Indeed our nation stands more than a little danger of being drawn into this conflict.

We have friends, relatives and close fellow-believers there in the actual war zone, as well as in the other lands indirectly affected by the war. As also in our own circles we become affected more or less by the agitation, the dangers, and the ethical and economic influences of the world war, thus within all the battle cry we hear above all the solemn, punitive, admonitory voice of our God. In just such difficult times of war are we to remain steadfast in faith and in the Word of the Lord, and by all means not to let oneself drift, but to work as long as it is day, for soon will come the night when no one can work.

The Savior himself had said about such a time:

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

(Mark 13:7-13)

We draw from these words of the Savior for us at the present time mainly this, that we in this time of war should firmly and fearlessly persist with the spread of the gospel—with the clear witness of the name of our Savior, until a blessed end comes to us and to those who hear us.²⁸

Shortly after President Naumann had reported this his youngest child, Marie Elisabeth was born in Goodhue.²⁹

In the year 1913 he followed the call to the parishes in and around Goodhue, and in 1915 he came to St. Paul, since the Minnesota Synod had resolved that he should devote his entire time to the business of his office of president.

One noteworthy aspect of the Justus Naumann presidency is that of efforts to unite with other church bodies. The unification attitude can be attributed perhaps in part to the upcoming Reformation anniversary. While fellowship efforts with the Ohio Synod failed, the steps from federation to merger with Wisconsin, Michigan and Nebraska progressed steadily from 1912 to 1917. Pastor Naumann expressed his attitude toward unification in his presidential report to the 1916 Minnesota Synod convention:

We live in an age of unification efforts, for the splintering of the Lutheran church is a pity--not merely in so many autonomous synodical bodies, but also in fiercely self-attacking, self-opposing factions guilty of false teachings--which attracts our attention and saddens us more and more with the approach of the Reformation's anniversary. A unified Lutheran church lies before our eyes as a magnificent goal worth striving for. Since the Lutheran church claims to be the church of the pure Word, and while all outward union without unanimity in teaching and belief on the basis of Scripture is to be rejected, the inter-synodical conferences and doctrinal discussions of years gone by are to be greeted as strides in the proper direction. The Word of God, that shall be studied there, and which shall be acknowledged as the truth, upon which all teaching must be grounded, and according to which all teaching must be judged, this Word of God shall prove itself as a power of God to lead the heart to the truth and to unite in the truth, if only we men do not obscure or pervert it through our own thoughts and self-invented language.³⁰

A significant change in the Minnesota Synod took place during the presidency of Justus Naumann--the office of the synod

president was made a full-time position. This change was needed for a number of reasons. The 1913 Minnesota Synod convention called for a congregational referendum on the matter of the proposed merger of the federated body.³¹ The time that this matter and other presidential duties required cost Pastor Naumann 84 days away from his congregation in 1914.³² The shortage of synod funds also required added attention.³³ In his 1915 report at the synod's convention Pastor Naumann summarizes the necessity for a full-time president:

There should be someone whose business it would be to go from congregation to congregation--in special cases also from house to house--to stimulate and elucidate concern for synodical matters, and to promote the joint Christian work at the institutions and in the mission fields.³⁴

The convention in a ballot vote favored the proposal 88-54.³⁵

As a result President Naumann gave up his ministry in Goodhue and moved to St. Paul. Naumann was the first and only full-time president of the Minnesota Synod. Shortly after his death the Minnesota Synod became the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod.

As a sidelight it is interesting to note that Oscar J. Naumann, son of Justus H. Naumann, followed in his father's footsteps in more ways than one. Justus was the tenth president of the Minnesota Synod; Oscar was to become the fourteenth president of the Minnesota District in 1948. Justus became the first full-time president of the Minnesota Synod in 1915; Oscar became the first full-time president of the Wisconsin Synod in 1959.³⁶

On Monday morning, the 5th of February, he departed this life after having suffered a heart attack.

President Naumann remained active in his office until the day of his death. Heart disease is an unfortunate genetic trait of the Naumann line. After having walked through deep snow and in a driving snowstorm to Emanuel Church for Sunday services, Pastor Justus H. Naumann died of a heart attack on Monday morning, February 5th, 1917. Pastor Naumann had reached the age of 51 years, 10 months, and 22 days.³⁷

The deceased was equipped by the dear Lord with excellent gifts of the Spirit. He possessed a sharp, penetrating understanding and an excellent knowledge of the Word of God. Accordingly, his counsel was also greatly sought after and gladly followed. He always displayed a keen interest in the affairs of God's kingdom, and therefore served the church in various offices: as a member of the board of trustees, as vice-president, as superintendent of home missions, and finally as president.

The deceased left behind, besides the deeply afflicted widow, eight children, three brothers and four sisters, as well as a large circle of relatives and friends, who sincerely mourn his death.

We thank our faithful heavenly Father for all of the blessings of body and soul which he has demonstrated in the deceased. He comforts the mourning survivors. And when the time comes may he bestow upon us all a blessed end. Amen!

The Lord has blessed his church through this man, short as his life was. May he continue to supply his church with such dedicated workers.

Soli Deo Gloria!

1. From the *St. John's Hospital Bulletin*, March, 1917, p. 2. Translated by Daniel L. Borgwardt. The bulletin was published quarterly in the interest of St. John's Hospital, St. Paul, Minn. by the Northwestern Lutheran Hospital Association.
2. Ackermann, Prof. A. "Biography (*Lebenslauf*) of Pastor Naumann." Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt. *St. John's Hospital Bulletin*, March, 1917, pp. 2-3.
3. Huebner, Rev. W. *Heinrich Immanuel Naumann*, translated by Gottfried Heinrich Naumann, reprinted in *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Vol. 63, no. 1, Spring, 1990, pp. 13-14.
4. Reported by Oscar J. Naumann in a letter to Michael J. Borgwardt, March 2, 1976, p. 1.
5. Op. cit., Huebner, p. 15.
6. Vogel, Leroy E. "From the Editor." *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* vol. 63, no.1 (spring, 1990), pp.2-3.
7. Maria E. and Oscar J. Naumann. *From the life of Pastor Justus H. Naumann*, June 12, 1960, p. 1.
8. Loc. cit.
9. Ibid., pp 1, 3.
10. Ibid., p. 1.
11. Loc. cit.
12. Ibid., p. 2.
13. Ibid, p. 3.
14. Op. cit., Oscar J. Naumann, p. 3.
15. Op. cit., Maria E. and Oscar J. Naumann, p. 2.
16. Loc. cit.
17. Loc. cit.
18. From *The Naumann-Scherf Family Book*, prepared by Martin O. Naumann for the Naumann family reunion, 4 July, 1971, at Deer Lake, MN.
19. Op. cit., Maria and Oscar Naumann, p.3.

20. From *Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District*, 1969, pp. 113, 349.
21. Op. cit., Martin Naumann, p. 5.
22. *Geschichte der Minnesota-Synode*, p. 299. Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt.
23. Ibid. p.300.
24. Ibid., p. 302.
25. Op. cit., Oscar J. Naumann, pp. 3-4.
26. *Golden Jubilee History*, pp. 351-52.
27. Ibid., pp. 142-48.
28. *Synodal-Bericht* (Synodical Report), 1915, pp. 6-7. Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt.
29. Op. Cit., Martin Naumann, p. 5.
30. *Synodal-Bericht* (Synodical Report), 1916, p. 8. Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt.
31. Fredrich, Edward C. *The Minnesota District's First Fifty Years*, p. 15.
32. *Synodal-Bericht*, 1915, p. 11. Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt.
33. Ibid., p. 10.
34. Loc. cit. Trans. Daniel L. Borgwardt.
35. Fredrich, Edward C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p. 123.
36. Loc. cit.
37. Op. cit., Maria & Oscar Naumann, p. 3.

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