

## A Brief Biography Of John Francis Sullivan

By: Michael Paul Sullivan

John Francis Sullivan was born in New York City, July 5, 1909 to a Jack and Kate Sullivan. Jack Sullivan was nominally Catholic and Kate was a lapsed German Lutheran. As one can see from Jack and Kate's religious affiliation, religion was not a major topic at the Sullivan home. John Sullivan grew up in a rough neighborhood bordering between the Queens and Brooklyn. His father was a truck driver and also had a problem with alcohol.

Mary Sullivan, John's grandmother, was a sound Catholic. When John's younger brother was born, she was the one who baptized him before he died. John's grandmother on his mother's side was a lapsed Lutheran. She taught John German from an early age. John started asking his Lutheran grandmother about religion and what church she used to attend when she went to church. She told him about a Missouri Lutheran Synod church that was about half an hour walk from where John lived. At age ten John went to church on his own. What happened next can only be described as a miracle of God. John, from the message he heard at church, from attending Sunday school, and from personal Bible study, grew in faith and love towards God and his word. He became a very active member of his home congregation. He joined the Walther league, an organization for the youth in the Missouri synod, that focused on Bible study and witnessing. While a member of the Walther league, John took opportunities to teach instruction classes, both at his home church, and even did mission outreach in Chinatown. His interest in God's word grew more and more. As he matured, he toyed with the idea of attending a seminary, but his family lacked the funds to do so.

In 1927 he started studying German at New York's City College. He attended this college because his tuition was free. His professors realized his ability in the German language and offered him a position at the University while he was still a student. But John's love for languages did not only stop with English and German. He loved all languages, and studied various languages on his own, well into his retirement. A sampling of the languages he study would include French, Latin, Russian, and Gaelic. His love for languages and his love for the Bible also led John to study Greek and Hebrew on his own, even before he knew he was going to

become a pastor. In 1936 John went over to Europe and there he met Madeleine Urban, whom he married in 1938.

John Sullivan loved God's Word dearly, and his pastor encouraged him to study for the public ministry, but both he and his parents were not happy with the seminary at a Bronxville New York. A relative of John's attended that seminary and left because of the drinking that was going on there. John asked his pastor if there was another way he could study for the ministry; he wondered if he couldn't study on his own. The pastor of his congregation raised some funds and bought John a set of Pieper's Dogmatics. The president of the seminary in Bronxville told John to study Pieper, and then, when he felt that he was ready to be colloquized, that he should give him a call. While of teaching at New York City College, John studied for the ministry until 1943, when he called the president of the seminary at Bronxville and told him that he was ready to become a pastor. The colloquy only lasted one day. His examination was oral and he preached a sample sermon.

After the colloquy John received a divine call to Delhi New York. There he served until 1945. He was called to Delhi New York because it was still a German congregation. He introduced English services at that congregation, since the youth did not know High German, and thus had trouble understanding his sermons.

After serving in Delhi New York, John got a call to Concordia Milwaukee. There he served until 1960. Other than a small run in with the president of that college, John loved teaching there. Overtime John started hearing about the liberalism that was being introduced at Concordia St. Louis. He tried talking to his fellow faculty members at Concordia Milwaukee about the issues at Concordia St. Louis but no one would listen to him. The coming liberalism in the Missouri synod disturbed John Sullivan; so much so that he would advise his students to attend the Wisconsin synod seminary in Mequon. When students took his advice to do so, he was very happy.

Although John did not intend to leave the Missouri synod at this point, the Lord had other plans for him. In 1960, John got a call to serve congregations Alsace, France. Although John

never admitted taking the call to Alsace because of the problems facing the Missouri synod, his children believe that this was a major reason why we went to France. The reason why they think this was the case, was because John seemed to love teaching more than the parish ministry. In any case, John did not arrive in France at a particularly good time for the French Free church. The French Free church was caught in a triangular arrangement with Wisconsin and Missouri. John tried to advise the French Free church to break ties with Missouri, but they didn't listen. The French Free church was afraid that they would lose funding from the Missouri synod, which they relied upon heavily.

Again the Lord of history called John out of a troubling ministry. In 1965 John started teaching at Northwestern College. He taught there until 1985. John enjoyed teaching at Northwestern College very much. He remembers almost all the faculty from their and most of the students he taught. After retiring in 1985, John moved to Milwaukee. In the early 1990's he started teaching again. He taught German through the UWM system to older people, who wanted to learn the language. While in Milwaukee, he also translated Manna, which sold close to 5000 copies. His children consider this to be ones his most influential accomplishments, because of the letters they receive telling them how the book has strengthened their faith. He later moved to Ontario Wisconsin, where he now currently resides. There He also completed translating "The Psalms" by Zorn, which hopefully Northwestern Publishing House will publish at soon date.

A special note concerning the video:

The viewer of the video of the interview with Professor John Sullivan should note the circumstances surrounding the taping of this video. Professor John Sullivan was never one to talk much about himself. He was 91 years old when this was taped. Also a month before the taping of this video his wife of 62 years passed away at age 89. This influenced his memory, since he was still in mourning when the taping was done. Most of what Professor John Sullivan says is a factual, though some events are confused. The interviewer tried to correct these confused events during the interview on tape, and also in this introduction.