

**The Life and Ministry of  
Walter A. Diehl**  
1912-1987

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## PREFACE

This paper marks my first attempt at recording the life of another child of God. Not sure exactly how to go about organizing the material, I have chosen the following format.

The first major part of the paper is a brief history of the life and ministry of Pastor Walter Diehl. Within this part, one will find divisions based on milestones in his life; his early years, his college and seminary days and divisions marked by changes in his parish ministries.

The second major part is topical. Under each subheading I have tried to capsulize the unique characteristics and strengths that make the memories of Pastor Diehl so dear to those he touched.

It is with the deepest gratitude that I acknowledge the help of those without whom this work could not be possible; Mrs. Louise Diehl for her volumes of information, patience with my questioning and courage to review the tender moments with me; Jim and Judy Diehl for candidly sharing the memories they have cherished for so long; Margaret nee Diehl Gustafson for giving me a window through which to see the young Walter, and the many others who filled out questionnaires and submitted to interviews, some of which are listed below:

Ted and Lois Burgdorf  
Pastor Vilas R. Glaeske  
Pastor Otto Engel  
Alfred G. Hildebrandt  
Leon Breeden

Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht  
Pastor Norman Berg  
Buddy and Gretchen Hovda  
Pastor John Gaertner  
Edward A. Deforge

May all who read the account of this humble servant of God be encouraged to serve with the same faithfulness and zeal he exemplified until they meet him around that heavenly throne!

Donald Patterson

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## INTRODUCTION

Some people leave such a large wake behind them that one can't help but take notice even years after they are gone. Rev. Walter A. Diehl was like that. I never met him. But, by God's grace I have been given the opportunity to cross over the wake of memories he left in the hearts of those he loved and served.

I was born and reared in Garland, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. Our family held membership at a Missouri Synod Lutheran church in Garland until I was a junior in High School. During those years Walter Diehl was serving at a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran church only five or six miles away, Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church. When our family later joined Calvary Pastor Diehl had already taken a call to Weslaco, Texas. Another pastor had come to Calvary and left. Pastor John Gaertner had just been installed. Even though he was two pastors removed from Calvary people still referred to Pastor Diehl with great fondness.

That was the first time I heard about Walter Diehl and the blessing he was to those he served. Ten years passed and I was assigned to a vicarship in Houston, Texas. My bishop, Vilas R. Glaeske, first met Walter when he (Glaeske) was assigned out of the seminary as missionary to Edna, and the greater San Antonio and Houston area. As chairman of the board for the "Mission District" of the Arizona-California District Walter was Pastor Glaeske's mission counselor, friend, and overseer. From that time on they served together in southern mission endeavors until Walter's death in May of 1987.

During my year with Pastor Glaeske a feel for the impact of Walter Diehl began to materialize. In many of those tender moments when a Bishop discipled his vicar (And there were many of them in Houston.) Pastor Glaeske would quote Walter Diehl because it seemed that Walter had spoken the appropriate word for the occasion. Often the quote would be introduced by, "As Pastor Diehl, the patriarch of our district, once said,". Pastor Glaeske, currently the District President of the South Central District, admits that Walter Diehl is among the four most influential men in his life. The other three include his father and his bishop, Jon Mahnke.

Throughout my vicar year, Pastor Diehl's name was mentioned by pastors at conferences, by members he had served, and by many other people who had the opportunity to meet this humble saint. Even during my senior year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, a seminary professor quoted Pastor Diehl in the classroom when he wanted to press us to faithfulness in our evangelism ministries.

If I have been the beneficiary of this man, a gift from God, even though I never met him, one can imagine how blessed those who knew him personally must feel. Other than fulfilling the assignment of completing a history project I've written this brief history of the life and ministry of Walter Diehl to offer to all who knew him a comprehensive memory of the man they carry in their hearts and look forward to seeing in glory.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF WALTER DIEHL HIS BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

Walter August Julius Diehl was born on June 27, 1912 in Peshtigo, Wisconsin. His Father was Rev. Henry John William Diehl who had graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in May of 1910.<sup>1</sup> He was assigned from the seminary to serve Zion Lutheran Church at Peshtigo. He was installed there on July 10, 1910 and succeeded Rev. Adolf Haase as Zion's pastor. One year and two months after he was installed he married Caroline Haase, the sister of his predecessor. She was the parochial school teacher at Zion at the time.<sup>2</sup> Two years later Walter was born. Shortly thereafter Walter and his parents went to visit his maternal grandparents who were visiting their son in Randolph. While they were there his younger sister, Margaret, was born. She was baptized at two days of age by her father before they journeyed back to Peshtigo.

The Diehls lived in Peshtigo until May, 1915, when they moved to Milwaukee so that Walter's father could serve three mission churches; Divine Charity, Zabaoth, and Messiah.

During these years, at his young age, Walter began to learn German from his parents and the housekeeper that lived with their family. She only understood German and when people came to the door during the day, Walter would be her translator.

Only three years after they moved the Lord called Caroline and her unborn baby home when complications developed in childbirth. She died on March 11, 1918. Sometime during the next year and a half Henry Diehl married Lillie M. Roepke, a member of one of the congregations he was serving. In September of 1919 he took a call to First Ev. Lutheran Church at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. He served there until his death on December 5, 1958. Walter was seven years old when they moved.

The young Walter was full of energy. His sister remarks, "I distinctly remember walking to school with Walter. He always walked ahead of me and would soon be an entire block in front of me. But, he would always look back to make sure I was alright." The concern he showed for his sister was the same that he would exhibit as a shepherd of God's flock in the years that followed. Also, his energy in the early years was not only that of youth but showed itself to be an integral part of his make-up. One of his former members said that what he remembered most about Pastor Diehl was that he walked fast.

His sister, Margaret, also remembers Walter locking her in the chicken coup during one of their more "active" times together. It's odd that Walter never remembered doing such a thing.

Although he and his sister were held to firm house rules as the "Pastors children", Walter and his sister lived a normal, happy childhood. Once when Mom and Dad were away they were enjoying a nice jumping match on their parents' bed. Suddenly, the boards holding the mattress gave way with Walter and Margaret falling in a heap. They quickly

located some very small nails and tried to reverse the damage. They succeeded in getting the bed back together but later that night his parents were awakened when they and their mattress collapsed to the floor. As if he didn't suspect foul play his father simply said, "Look! No wonder it fell. These nails are too small to hold in the boards."

Walter's mother loved to bake. Among her specialties were angel food and daffodil cake. Since she lived in an era before cake mixes and electric mixers, baking was a little more strenuous than today. She often had Walter help beat the egg whites. Those times proved to be helpful later when Walter was on his own and needed to cook for himself. One incident Walter often spoke of happened when his mother asked him to get the dust pan and broom and to sweep the floor. He replied by saying, "I don't want to but I will." He got the lecture of his life.

Walter was an excellent student. He was at the head of the class academically and even skipped one grade of elementary school so that he graduated from Lake Geneva High School in 1928 at the age of sixteen. Yet, even then he was the valedictorian. He enjoyed reading and could often be found discussing ideas and concepts with his parents.

### HIS COLLEGE AND SEMINARY YEARS

During High School Walter was interested in three different careers choices; law, medicine and the ministry. He finally settled on the ministry. His father was delighted.

After high school he looked into going to school at Northwestern College in Watertown. But they were going to set him back a year to "teach" him Latin and German. Walter felt that was unnecessary since his father had taught him the languages at home. So, he attended Concordia College in Milwaukee. In those years one could finish the Greek and Hebrew language studies at Concordia in three years and then immediately begin seminary. Walter did just that. Since he was already younger than his classmates and there were no mandatory vicar experiences Walter was one of the youngest (if not the youngest) graduates Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has ever had. He graduated in 1934 at the age of 21. His classmate, Rev. Otto Engel, commented that Walter's young appearance and youthful voice were striking when he entered the pulpit.

During his college and seminary years Walter's relationship with his father continued to deepen. He would often come home from college to see his parents and spend time discussing theology with his father. Many times he brought with him a classmate who undoubtedly would enjoy these theological "caucuses". Those early years solidified a life long friendship between father and son. In his own pastoral ministry Walter quoted his father more than any other man.

His father was a very creative and humorous man. He told jokes well and enjoyed good company. Walter learned the art of telling jokes from his father but somehow he was most successful with the punch line only when he told his father's jokes. Usually, Walter would

get so tickled in telling his own jokes that he would burst out laughing in the middle of them.

The seminary graduating class of 1934 had only twenty five candidates. Walter was not among the three men to get a call right away. So, in September he returned to the seminary as a student. For those who had not gone through Northwestern College allowance was made for them to return to round out their education.

During the summer that followed graduation a terrible thing happened at the seminary. Two of his classmates, Arnold Gatz and Chester Bender, drowned in the Milwaukee river in Thiensville, only a quarter mile from the seminary grounds. In his paper on *The History of the Seminary Chorus*, Paul Prange writes:

On Tuesday afternoon, June 6, (1933) the choir arrived back at the seminary from the longest weekend of their schedule. Since it was a warm day, many of the members of the chorus decided to go swimming in the Milwaukee river. Arnold Gatz, a touring member, and Chester Bender, a member of the chorus who did not tour, were the first to arrive at the river, and immediately dove in. Although each was an accomplished swimmer, the river pulled them under, and they were drowning in the sight of the other members of the chorus just arriving at the bank of the river. Rescue efforts failed. Several members of the choir had to be restrained from going in themselves by the trained lifeguards of the group.

The death of his classmates understandably stunned Walter. Family members remember hearing him and his cousin, Frederick Zarling talking about the incident.

### THE YEARS AT ELKHORN, WISCONSIN

In the fall of 1934 Walter followed a call from the Lord to serve at Friedens Lutheran Church (now called First Lutheran Church) at Elkhorn, Wisconsin, only a few miles from where his father was serving in Lake Geneva. He was installed on November 18, 1934. His father, who accompanied Walter in the processional at the service had to have been bursting with parental pride and joy.

Being so close to his father geographically only served to deepen their friendship. They would often spend free time together. In September of 1935 Henry wrote to his life long friend, George Luetke, about one of his father-son excursions.

My ministerial sprout at Elkhorn (Walter) and I journeyed to Chicago last Monday to see what the Cubs could do to the king of beasts of the National League. They did plenty. For a time I feared that the umpire was going to get a hit and score. And that game two days later! 15-3 - --- what a rout. And then Hubbell (Carl Hubbell) on Friday. Seems that Detroit will most probably battle the Cubs. (See the full letter attached to this paper.)

Henry's passion for sports was passed on to his son. Sometimes, on special occasions, when more than one important game was being played, Walter would line up two televisions



and a radio in one room so that he could keep tabs on all the games simultaneously.

During those first two years at Elkhorn Walter was a bachelor. He earned less than \$100.00 dollars a month and lived comfortably in his eight room parsonage. However, there was little money to eat out. So, the cooking lessons given to him by his mother were most helpful. Since he was so energetic he rarely took very long in eating. In later years he recalled how he used to eat his breakfast cereal while walking around the house and looking out the windows.

In the summer of 1935 Henry Diehl celebrated his twenty-fifth year in the ministry. His seminary classmate, George Luetke, (mentioned above) who was a pastor at Toledo, Ohio, preached the sermon at the special service.

That weekend in June was a landmark in Walter's life. Pastor and Mary Luetke had brought their daughter, Irmgard, to the celebration. Once the Luetkes were back home in Ohio, Walter and Irmgard began corresponding with one another. Pastor and Mrs. Diehl had always hoped that their son would marry a Pastor's daughter (A letter saying as much is attached.) and it happened a year and half later when Walter and Irmgard were married on October 10, 1936. She was nineteen. He was twenty four.

Irmgard was every bit as energetic as Walter. In some of their more intense moments she was an effective counterpart in balancing the scales with her strong willed husband. She was a faithful wife who loved her husband and family with a passion. She was outgoing and enjoyed life. The two of them enjoyed serving the Lord in Elkhorn. A couple of incidentals worth mentioning are that their parsonage still had the old type water pump next to the sink in the kitchen and that Walter preached in both German and English during the sixteen years they were at Elkhorn.

On August 13, 1937 the Lord blessed Walter and Irmgard with a son, James Walter. He was born at home because the doctor said, "The hospital is too dirty for childbirth." It is interesting that the scenario has reversed since then. Now, we see the home as much less sanitary than the birth rooms of our hospitals. Seven years later, on November 29, 1944, they were blessed with a daughter, Mary Ann. In a letter to her brother, Nathaniel Luetke, Irmgard wrote, "Walter is so thrilled, he now has his daughter!"

The ministry at Elkhorn flourished. In the words of Rev. Albert Lorenz, a former classmate of Walter's and neighboring pastor during the Elkhorn years, "Walter took a dead congregation and brought it to life."

Walter was as dedicated to his family as he was in his ministry. Once a day he would have devotions with them from *Portals of Prayer* or *Meditations*.

Jim recounts how his father tirelessly looked after the comfort and safety of the family. On one occasion a problem developed with the exhaust pipe of the furnace in their Elkhorn

parsonage. High winds caused it to disconnect. The temperature of the pipe would not allow immediate repair and the heat for the home was needed throughout the night. So, Walter stayed up with the project all night long. Jim woke up in the middle of the night and went to the basement to check on his father. There he was, standing and keeping watch over the pipe, asleep on his feet. Jim would never forget this tireless example of the shepherd of their family flock. This same kind of tenacity characterized the way Walter looked after his larger congregational flocks throughout all his years. More on that subject will be addressed later.

Being an example as a father and husband was a high priority for him as well. In those early years it was not always acceptable for a preacher to enjoy a movie at the theater, no matter how innocuous was the feature film. So, Walter would take Jim to movies at the nearby town, Delavan. This sort of sensitivity for his congregation was evident throughout his entire ministry.

The Lord often works in a way we will never understand until we see Him face to face. Such was the case in 1950. He introduced a new challenge to the Diehl family. Irmgard came down with the rare illness called scleroderma. It is a skin disease characterized by a thickening and hardening of the subcutaneous tissues. At that time there was no real treatment or cure for this agonizing ailment. The doctor recommended that the Diehls move to a warmer, dryer, climate in the hopes of making Irmgard more comfortable. Walter notified the synod authorities and received a call from the Lord to serve a mission congregation, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, on the south side of Phoenix, Arizona.

### THE YEARS IN ARIZONA

He was installed in September of 1950. The hot, arid climate of Arizona helped make Irmgard more comfortable but it did not arrest the advances of her disease. During the six years of her illness she did as much as she could for her family. She didn't talk much about her pain but always focused on accomplishing whatever the pain would allow. She also worked hard at preparing her children for her death, especially Mary. She would tell her, "When I am not here and you need anything, go tell your Dad and he'll help you." Mary learned a lot of responsibility by helping out in those times.

Irmgard was given mineral baths and frequent rub downs from her faithful husband until the day she was relieved from her affliction by her gracious Savior. Her brother and sister-in-law commented that the excellent care that Walter gave his dear wife was a comfort to them as they grieved over her terminal illness. Jim describes his mother's home going in this way.

When I was home from school I relieved my dad from watching my Mother. I was sitting in the den and she was lying on the couch. She made some odd sounds and I checked on her. It was obvious that something was wrong. So, I called the doctor. The doctor called for the ambulance. Dad came home as the ambulance arrived. She was taken to the Tempe hospital.

Shortly after that she died.

The last few days of her illness enclosed the only Sunday in which Walter ever missed church during his entire ministry. She died on February 14, 1956 and is buried at Oak Hill cemetery in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Shortly after Irmgard's home going the Diehls relocated. Since the time they had arrived in Arizona Walter involved himself in mission work in Tempe, Arizona, a few miles southeast of Phoenix. The preaching station flourished and soon the Tempe congregation established a mission church (Emmanuel) and called Walter Diehl to be their pastor. He followed the call and became their pastor. Charles Found succeeded him as pastor of Redeemer and was installed there on April 22, 1956.

The months that followed were difficult to say the least. Walter kept a steady pace as Pastor, and both father and mother to his children. In this strenuous time he even began mission work in Mesa, Arizona which is located ten miles east of Tempe. In addition to all these ventures he began taking Spanish classes at Arizona State University. He wanted to be more effective in his outreach to Hispanic Americans. He would take an early morning class so as not to interfere with his church work. When he was done he completed six semesters and could read the language. Speaking it remained difficult though. One can't help but marvel at the stamina the Lord supplied to this saint.

A mission church (Pilgrim) was established in Mesa in 1957. To get a flavor of Walter's zeal to share the gospel consider the following quote from his report to the synod from the Arizona-California District:

Prodigious growth! The influx of new residents continues in both Arizona and California. The Lord has sent the people. His kingdom will grow here. Brethren, give us the necessary men and the Church extension funds.<sup>3</sup>

About this same time, Jim, who was 18 years old when his mother died, began dating a very special girl, Judy Crook. Judy was a member of the American Lutheran Church. After taking some Bible classes with Walter she joined the Wisconsin Synod. She and Jim married on July 29, 1960. Walter felt so close to Jim and Judy that after their marriage he would stop by their home almost every evening after his pastoral rounds.

After a stint in the Armed Forces during the "Cuban Missile Crisis" Jim returned to Arizona and finished a degree in Secondary Education at Arizona State University.

Presently, Jim and Judy live in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Jim works under the Board for Parish Services of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as a stewardship advisor for congregations. The job takes him and Judy all over the United States as they help congregations with stewardship.

Mary, who was 11 years old when Irmgard died, maintained an "A" average throughout grade school and high school. She then went on to complete a degree in English from Arizona State University in 1966. She maintained a 4.0 grade average throughout college and graduated with Summa Cum Laude honors. She also received a scholarship to study in Germany and studied there for one year. Upon returning she studied at Indiana State University at Bloomington. While there she met H. David Hess and fell in love. On August 31, 1968 they were married. They moved to Berlin, Germany in 1970 where he served in the U.S. Air Force. They have one son, Eric, who was born July 12, 1971. Walter always prided in showing off the latest picture of his grandson which he brandished from his wallet.

Later, in celebration of Walter's 40th year in the ministry he and Louise received a trip to Germany as a gift from the congregation in Dallas. When Walter and Louise were visiting Mary, David and Eric in Germany, Walter was asked what province in Germany he was from, because his German was so perfect.

Presently, Mary, David and Eric live in Wiesbaden, Germany. Mary is working for the German government. David is a Chief Master Sergeant in the Air Force 969 Intelligence Group.

During the trying months that immediately followed Irmgard's death, Walter would often call his father for advice and support. His father encouraged him to consider looking for another faithful wife. It turns out that Walter had a special somebody in mind. Her name was Louise Strauss. She was a member of the church where Walter had served in Elkhorn.

One thing that stood out in his mind was her faithfulness to the Lord. When he had begun serving at Elkhorn the church only kept a record of the *specified amount* each family was to contribute. These figures were then published once a year. As odd as this custom seems today, it was a common practice in those days. It seems to have been a carry over from the similar custom of paying church taxes which their ancestors had done in Europe. In hopes of making a positive change in the giving patterns Walter asked the congregation to introduce the envelope system. They thought it would be too much work. So, he asked if they would let the youth group keep the records. Everyone agreed and the youth did such a fine job that the Church Council decided to relieve them of their duties and take over the record keeping.

To their surprise these leaders discovered that one of their members, a young single woman (Louise Strauss) with a modest income from the phone company was contributing more than many of them. Soon, their own giving increased. Walter said it revolutionized the giving patterns of the entire congregation.

Louise had shown her faithfulness to the Lord and Walter would never forget that. He began corresponding with her from Arizona. It wasn't long before they grew serious in their love and commitment to one another. As they began to make plans for marriage a unique

little wrinkle needed to be ironed out. Walter was sensitive to how a new mother was going to affect his children. Understandably, any child would have some adjusting to do. One question that was big in everyone's mind was where Walter would be buried when he died. Would he be buried by his first wife of twenty years or somewhere else, next to Louise?

He approached his Father with the question and a possible solution. He asked if there were any more grave sites near the two he had previously purchased. Irmgard was buried in one of them. They discovered that there were four grave sites adjacent to Irmgard's. So, he anxiously called his new fiancée to ask if she minded if he purchased her a grave site at Oak Hill cemetery. Imagine not even being married and being asked about a grave site! Of course Louise understood. Looking back on the circumstances they often laughed in later years. On April 19, 1958 they were married and she joined the Diehl family in Arizona.

On December 5th of that same year Walter's father went to his eternal home after 48 years of faithful service in the kingdom. Walter missed his father greatly but carried his memory close to his heart. This was made evident by the fact that he often quoted his father when counseling others.

Walter continued to serve the Tempe and Mesa congregations. In November of 1959 they became a self supporting "dual" parish. By 1968 they had both grown to the point of needing their own individual pastor.<sup>4</sup> A dilemma was developing. Both churches greatly desired to keep their Pastor Diehl. He had loved and served both faithfully. If it would have come down to choosing between the two it would have been excruciating. The Lord stepped in though. He directed the Diehls to a new field. Walter received a call to serve Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church in Dallas, Texas.

As Mission Board Chairman Walter was well aware of the "whitened fields" in Texas. He had long since reminded the synod that oil was not the only wealth the Lord would allow to be drawn from the Lone Star State. Consider this quote from his 1963 report to the synod:

The people, many unchurched and many Wisconsin Synod Lutheran transplants, continue to come. Texas, with 10,000,000 people sends requests for our services. We plan to start in Dallas.<sup>5</sup>

Consider also the following from his report in 1967:

May the Lord bless our Synod by often leading us into areas which bring such a speedy harvest. Places such as Scottsdale, Phoenix and Tucson Arizona; Houston, San Antonio, and Fort Worth, Texas; Albuquerque, New Mexico; along with others, plead for our services. May our Synod be guided by God's Holy Spirit to choose the most vital areas. Then we shall rejoice in gaining many souls!<sup>6</sup>

## THE YEARS IN DALLAS

The story surrounding the call to Dallas is worth recording. Walter had been serving on the Arizona/California District Mission Board since 1956. When a nucleus of people from Dallas contacted the Wisconsin Synod in 1962, Walter and Immanuel Frey drove to Dallas to meet with them. Shortly after that meeting they called Robert Neuman to be their pastor. He served there until 1968.

When it was time to call another pastor, Walter as Mission Board Chairman helped draw up the call documents and sent them to Dallas. He instructed the Dallas Church Council to write the name of the pastor they called in the appropriate place and to send it to their prospective shepherd. A few days later Walter received in the mail the envelope he had sent them. He was disappointed that they forgot to send the letter to the pastor they were calling. Later that day he decided to open the letter to see whom they had called. To his surprise his name was on the letter. Speechless, he walked into the den and showed the letter to Louise. He was installed at Calvary in April of 1968.

In Dallas Pastor Diehl hit the ground running. In his usual style he would visit his members almost weekly, giving each member a "generous" five to fifteen minutes of time. He also made countless evangelism calls. Some were contacts to visitors. Others were referrals from members or other pastors. Still others were simply door to door evangelism calls. One source said, "He sometimes logged an amazing 200 evangelism calls a month."

Just as he did in Arizona, Walter quickly made himself available to serve mission starts in Texas beyond his immediate area. In November of 1969 he started worship services in Fort Worth, which is 30 miles from Dallas.

The Fort Worth group became a mission congregation, Immanuel Ev. Lutheran, and called its own Pastor, Myrl Wagenknecht, in September of 1970. Shortly thereafter, Pastor Diehl and Pastor Wagenknecht alternated weekends as they traveled to Lubbock, Texas, some 300 miles to the west to hold services. The Lubbock congregation, gained mission status in 1975 and took the name, Shepherd of the Plains.

During these years Walter also helped start a mission at Tyler, Texas, 100 miles to the east of Dallas and Wichita Falls which is about 100 miles northwest of Dallas.

This entire time Walter was serving his own congregation faithfully. Calvary even became self supporting. He was also still serving the Arizona-California District as Mission Board Chairman. What's more, he and Louise took care of Walter's aging mother during these same years. She died on February 1, 1973.

## THE YEARS AT WESLACO

In the fall of 1976, he followed a call from the Lord to serve the mission congregation,

Abiding Savior, at Weslaco in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. He was installed November 7, 1976.

The situation in Weslaco was (and still is) quite unique. The population in and around Weslaco was eighty two percent Latin American. The church there had a core membership of sixty four members. But in the winter time the attendance rose to an average of about 307 members. Why? In the winter the valley is literally flooded with "Winter Texans". These visitors are generally from the northern states and find their home in the Rio Grande Valley during the months when the cold temperatures and heavy snows blanket the north.

Walter faithfully served all the people groups he found in his whitened field. "Year round" members were visited regularly, again, almost every week. The "Winter Texans" found Walter stopping by often to see how they were doing and to offer spiritual encouragement. Sometimes Walter would be at their homes when they pulled in for the first time each season. He didn't usually know when they were coming but stopped by so often that he caught many of them on their arrival. He also welcomed any opportunity to serve the Latin American population as the Lord opened the doors, even keeping Spanish Bibles on hand. The Spanish classes he had taken in Arizona proved helpful. The congregation became self supporting in January of 1987.

It is important to point out that Walter was sixty-four when he moved to Weslaco and was keeping pace with the work load he had welcomed even in the early years. He served with untiring faithfulness. One member at Weslaco commented, "We would do extra things at church for no other reason than we knew pastor would do it himself if we didn't and he was already doing too much." He and Louise irrigated the church property, gardened, and took their turn cleaning the church. When asked to slow down Walter replied, "When I can't do the Lord's work I might as well quit." As one might guess, he never had to quit.

During those years he reached a mile stone for which he had always hoped and prayed. He celebrated his fiftieth year in the ministry in 1984. Pastor Vilas Glaeske preached the sermon.

That same year (1984) God allowed Walter to experience a new struggle in his service to Him. Surgery in June revealed cancer of the digestive tract. However, he kept up his pastoral work with all the strength the Lord supplied.

The stamina he maintained even throughout his illness is mind boggling. I looked into his 1986 *Pastor's Desk Diary*. During the week of Christmas 1986 while in the later stages of his illness, I counted 41 home visits, plus eight more where people were not home. Remember, this is the week of Christmas! His love for the Savior and the sheep under his care helped him to continue on.

Walter also had another goal which kept him focused on the years ahead. That goal was even more important to him than his 50th year in the ministry. He had always wanted

to achieve 100 years in the ministry between his father's service and his own. His father had served from 1910 to 1958. Those 48 years plus the 52 years Walter had served by 1986 completed the century of service.

A surprise treat in February of 1987 took the Diehls to London and provided for them a personal visit with Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of England. Years earlier in Dallas Pastor Diehl had confirmed Diane Burgdorf. Her parents, Ted and Lois, were among the people who met with Pastor Diehl and Pastor Frey in 1962 to begin the Dallas congregation. Diane was engaged to be married in February of 1987 to Mark Thatcher, the Prime Minister's son. She insisted that her "Pastor Diehl" and his wife be present. Pastor and Louise made the trip and were among Diane's 98 guests who were allowed to come to the Queens' Chapel of the Savoy in London. After the trip Walter would carry around a picture of Louise in her wedding guest finery and his comment to people as he showed her picture was, "People would ask me, 'Which one is the bride?'" (A picture of Louise greeting the former Prime Minister is attached to this paper.)

As his illness progressed Walter relinquished his Chairmanship of the District Board for Home Missions but he remained an active member of the board until his death. On his last trip to Milwaukee to meet with the synod Board of Trustees he still held high his banner for missions. He asked for special permission to speak to the board. His basic message? "Gentlemen, please don't forget our missions!!!"

Ted Burgdorf of Dallas and father of Diane Burgdorf mentioned above, served on the District Mission Board with Walter. He recounts the last Mission Board meeting they had together:

My last earthly meeting with Pastor Diehl was at a District Mission Board meeting in Houston, Texas, a month or so before his death. Usually after the meeting, we rushed to our respective check in gates at the airport and waited *separately* for our planes. This time Pastor Diehl accompanied three of us Dallas bound members to our gate and visited with us right up to his plane's departure time. I can still see him waving to us as he left for his boarding gate to Weslaco. It seemed that he must have known this was his last District Mission Board meeting before he was called home.

In Weslaco, he continued to make all the calls he could and preached every Sunday. His last sermon was preached on Easter Sunday, April 29, 1987. That same day was his 29th Wedding Anniversary with Louise.

The last two weeks of his journey on earth were marked with increased pain. Even in the midst of this blinding pain Walter wrote letters to members who were sick and in the hospital. Sometimes the lines he wrote ran together but because of his anguish he didn't notice. The letters were sent to grateful recipients even though somewhat illegible. They knew the heart of love from which they came. His faithful wife and church members stood by him praying and trying to ease his discomfort in any way possible.



Three days before his home going he went to the doctor. While at the doctors' office the pain was increasing rapidly. He and Louise prayed Psalm 23 together. The shepherd under Christ continued to lean on his Good Shepherd as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

When they went home later that day the pain became unbearable. His last words were, "Lord, please take me or the pain!" With that prayer hardly spoken, God intervened. Walter slipped into a coma and would never again be conscious. Nor would he ever again feel the pain of his advancing disease. His son and daughter were called to his side. Three days later on May 8, 1987, the faithful servant of God was rejoicing around the heavenly throne. He waits there for the rest of us who serve the same Lord and thank God for the gift of this energetic man.

Two funerals were conducted for Pastor Diehl. The first was held at his congregation at Weslaco, where Pastor Vilas Glaeske gave the message of comfort from God's Word. The sermon text was John 11:25-27. The sermon theme was: *Comfort Which Christ Alone Can Give*. The second funeral was held at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, at the church where his father had been the shepherd for 39 years. Pastor Verlyn Dobberstein preached from Job 19:23-27 with the theme: *The Risen Redeemer Gives Living Hope In The Time Of Death*. Walter was buried next to his first wife, Irmgard, at Oak Hill Cemetery which is directly across the street from First Lutheran Church, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Louise stayed in Weslaco for about a year after Walter's death. Then she moved to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin to be near her sister. She is a member of First Evangelical Lutheran Church, and lives only a few miles from the church in Elkhorn where she and Walter met.

## WHAT MADE WALTER MEMORABLE

### His Pastoral Home Visits

To say that Walter was a home going pastor would be an understatement. In the words of his fellow pastors he was the master of "the five minute call." It was important to him that his people not only knew that Jesus loved them but that they knew he, Walter, loved them as well. His goal was to contact each family as often as possible. When his congregations were young and somewhat smaller it meant that he could see each family every week. When they became much larger he would simply see them as much as he could. He would stay at the most fifteen minutes, unless there were circumstances that called for a longer visit. He would never leave without first giving some kind of word of encouragement from the Lord.

Those families that missed church were always first on his weekly rounds. It didn't matter how far he had to drive. Dr. Dan Schmeling, a member of the Dallas congregation at the time, said that while he and his wife lived in Denton, Texas, one hour from Dallas,

Walter would drop by their house on Monday if they had missed church. Sometimes no one was home. But it was not a loss to Walter. He simply put a bulletin in the door and knew he had shown his concern for God's lambs. To give an idea of the magnitude of this house calling venture consider this: I averaged the calls he made in the month of August 1986, only nine months before he went to glory. In that month he made an average of 29 calls a week including those to people who happened not to be at home.

He called on those in the hospital daily. Again, each visit was short and filled with Scripture insight and encouragement. His devotions were usually based on the readings or sermon text from the previous Sunday. In that way the ailing parishioner not only heard God's Word but also heard the same Word his or her fellow members had heard that week. He didn't take his Bible into the hospital with him. He simply quoted the Scriptures from the heart.

### **His Evangelistic Ministry**

Often Walter would open wide his heart and life to the unchurched spouses of members. Shortly after arriving at Elkhorn one of his members was put in the hospital for an extended stay. Actually, she had slipped on the ice and had broken her hip while she was walking to the installation service for Walter. Her husband, who wasn't a member, didn't have a car. So, Walter would pick him up every day as he headed for the hospital. As a missionary he took advantage of his captive audience during those rides together. Once he asked the gentleman if he would be interested in joining the church. To Walter's surprise he agreed to join if Walter would not force him to "retake" catechism instruction. "What do you mean 'retake' catechism instruction?" Walter asked. It turned out that when this man was just a boy he had gone through the entire catechism instructions. But, at the end he got cold feet and in fear he ran away from home and joined the circus. So, he had never joined the church. Walter and he met together several times for review and he was confirmed.

No person was too far away, too grand or too low to receive a visit from Pastor Diehl. He was at their homes weekly. While there he would communicate his love and concern along with Scripture. His patience and forbearance often cleared the way for people to see Christ and His love behind the one bringing the message. At this point I will include a few personal testimonies in their entirety. They simply must be shared as they were expressed by those who were touched. As I read them I couldn't help but think of the passage, Isaiah 52:7.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

#### "The Hurricane Miracle: Edward A. Deforge"

After we arrived at the lower Rio Grande Valley on December 12, 1979, my late wife joined the W.E.L.S. congregation at Weslaco. At that time I was not a member of

the W.E.L.S.

Pastor Diehl visited us on a weekly basis, sometimes even more often. He mentioned to my wife that she should invite me to join her at worship and I did on a regular basis.

On August 8, 1980 the news station informed all the valley residents of the impending arrival of "Allen", a hurricane so large that it filled the entire Gulf of Mexico. We by law could not stay in our mobile home.

On the morning of August 9, we received a call from Mrs Diehl. She invited us to wait out the hurricane at the parsonage with her and Pastor. We accepted eagerly. For two days we spent our time discussing everything from gardening to automobiles to theology. All the time we were mopping up the wind driven rainwater.

On Sunday, August 11, Pastor Diehl conducted and preached a full worship service for Rosemary, me, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Knabb and Mrs. Diehl in attendance.

Starting that September Pastor Diehl began giving me lessons and testing me on doctrines contained in Luther's Catechism. On March 18, 1981 I was confirmed by Pastor Diehl.

Pastor often mentioned that the two days we spent sheltered from the storm were the beginning of my conversion to Lutheranism. He affectionately named the whole ordeal, "The Hurricane Miracle".

When in late November of 1982 I had injured my back the doctor ordered me to bed rest. I could only get up for about five minutes at a time in order to eat and bathe. Knowing this, Pastor would visit me from outside the bedroom window of our mobile home. He would quote Scripture, give me the news from the congregation and just chat to lift my spirits. My neighbors were amazed that a pastor would go to such lengths to visit a parishioner.

When in time I was able to get around with a cane he made sure there was a special chair for me to sit on while in church. This man was truly a Shepherd!

Edward Deforge was only one of many people for whom Pastor Diehl went to great lengths to help and comfort with the gospel. Another member writes:

I am an adult confirmand of Pastor Walter A. Diehl. He confirmed me at the age of 33. I had been a sour, tormented atheist. I got totally engrossed with Pastor Diehl's view of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world! As time wore on I, myself was totally compelled to believe it too.

This enlightenment was a complete surprise and to this day I sit in church, look at the cross behind the altar and say to myself, "I am a poor miserable sinner who is saved with a little help from Pastor Diehl. My husband was already a Lutheran and Pastor Diehl baptized and confirmed two of my children.

To try to summarize Pastor Diehl would be fruitless. He was a gift from God who touched us all in different ways. but for me his love, caring, compassion, and understanding of the human soul was truly amazing. His actions spoke as loudly as his words. He always had a kind word or a little tale to leave you with no matter how bad or how good your circumstances were.

If I die today I will fear no evil because I know I will live an eternity in heaven with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has saved my soul through his death and resurrection. This plan of salvation was all presented to me by God's humble servant, Pastor Walter A. Diehl at Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, Weslaco, Texas.

The same member writes of another special situation when Walter Diehl brought the

gospel to a family at a crucial time.

Pastor Diehl never missed an opportunity to witness of the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ. One of his greatest moments was when he reunited a family at a deathbed in the hospital.

The father had a long history of alcoholism. His son was also an alcoholic. The son had married a devout Lutheran girl whom the father disliked the entire marriage. He disliked Lutherans in general. He was a Baptist.

At the end, on this man's deathbed Pastor Diehl reunited the family. The man begged for forgiveness from his daughter in law and was saved. Shortly thereafter he died. His wife became a Lutheran as well as his son.

Walter would not let people's complex schedules interfere with their need for adult instruction. He would give them instructions any time and place that he could. Once, a couple from Denton, Texas, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Breeden, visited the Dallas congregation when their son and his family were in Dallas on a trip from California. Mr. Breeden was serving as the Head of the Music Department at North Texas State University in Denton.

After their visit Pastor and Mrs. Diehl hopped in the car the very next day and drove to Denton. (Don't forget, Denton is one hour from Dallas.) The Breedens were interested in hearing more about Christ from Pastor Diehl and they began to make arrangements to take Adult Instruction Classes. Walter offered to come to Denton once a week. But Leon Breeden prevailed and convinced him to let them drive the distance. The Breedens were confirmed a year later. Speaking of those treasured days together Leon Breeden writes:

It was obvious that every word, every thought, and every action was completely aimed at serving the Lord as TOTALLY as he could. When my late wife and I were going through our instruction (driving back and forth to Dallas for about one full year) his ability to answer EVERY question with a passage from the Bible was amazing to us! He did not tell one what HE thought but what the Bible said about that particular item! Amazing!

His manner of speech was unlike any I had heard from a pastor before! The kindness shown through like a beacon! He kept our congregation spellbound with his great knowledge of the Bible and his unique ability to present it to us in a logical, meaningful way!

I have worked with literally thousands of people in forty years of teaching at all levels in the schools; Pastor Diehl was UNIQUE unto all of the people I ever met; I would have to list him among the "Top Five!" people I've ever known! Can't wait to see him again someday!

These few examples represent the many lives touched by Walter Diehl. Walter would not want us to give him the credit for great works of service. He knew too well who it was that touched these and many others so deeply. However, we cannot overlook the earthen vessel through which God channeled his grace. These testimonies are simply the fulfillment of what Jesus teaches us in John 12:24:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Walter died to his own will every week and the result was many seeds brought into the store house for God's heaven. Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht writes:

Walter was devoted to the cause. He was never apart from his work as pastor/missionary. He worked every day--much because of the load of mission chairman, but he felt no need for recreation--no golf, etc. He was a fine host, a pleasant guest. He could relax, tell jokes, and laugh. But his Savior was always on his mind and lips.

It is also interesting to note that after his first call every other call that Walter received and accepted was to a mission opening. With each change in ministry his salary reverted back to mission code. However, by the time he left each congregation it was self supporting.

### **His Preaching Style**

Walter developed a unique style of sermon preparation shortly after he graduated. He did not write out his sermons. He studied the text for the coming Sunday on the Sunday afternoon of the previous week. Then, he would live with the text throughout the week. He often meditated on the text in the early morning and late evening gardening expeditions that he enjoyed with Louise. By Saturday he had a theme and parts for his sermon along with the supporting sub points. From this outline he would preach the sermon. He didn't take the outline into the pulpit, though. He preached from memory. The result was a free delivery that was couched in words that reflected as much the heart of the preacher as they did the heart of God's Word.

Some descriptions of his preaching are as follows: His preaching was very straight forward and was gospel and mission oriented.-- His was good, down-to-earth preaching and as a pastor he related well with the senior citizens.-- His preaching was folksy.-- The kindness shown through like a beacon.-- He was a good preacher. You could hear sincerity in his voice.

If Walter was to preach for an installation or some other special occasion on Sunday afternoon, he would always use the same text he had used in the morning sermon. As he once told Louise, "It is harder to forget sermons than it is to make new ones." Oh, the sermon would be different than the one preached in the morning but the basic ideas flowed from the same text and heart that was laid bare in the morning service.

For Lent Walter had three Lenten Series. As he put it, "My three series cover everything there is to preach about in Lent, so why create new ways of organizing it?" He would work through his preparations on these sermons every year, but his three series of texts didn't change. About Lent and Advent he used to say to Louise, "I feel like a sermon making machine," a comment to which I am sure many pastors can relate.

## His Role as Mission Board Chairman

Walter exhibited as much concern and care for missionaries who served under his board as he did for his parishioners. If he received a letter from one of them. He would write back to them the very next day, before breakfast.

Sometimes he needed to address a particular problem in a mission. However, he would always begin his letter by complimenting some aspect of the pastor or congregation that was noteworthy of praise. Then, he would go on to carefully address the sensitive issue. When he did have to be more direct he was careful not to use synod rules to tell people what to do. Even his use of Mission Board rules was easy for the mission pastors to accept.

He wrote his letters almost as fast as he walked. So, there usually wasn't time to correct errors in spelling or grammar. Sometimes he would assume several thoughts without writing them into the letter. For young missionaries it was a challenge at times to fill in the gaps. It was all well worth it though, to have someone so attentive to their needs that he would return their letters the very next day.

He often called missionary pastors around his breakfast time, 7:00 AM. One pastor comments:

As mission board chairman he loved to call at exactly 7:00 AM. His first question would always be, "Did I get you out of bed?" When I first came to the Arizona District another young missionary told me, "Get a phone next to your bed so when Diehl calls and asks, 'Did I get you out of bed?' you can truthfully answer, 'No!' You were still in bed.

He thought all should operate with the same schedule, early to bed and early to rise. It is surmised that he never suspected what was being done in this respect.

Walter was just as brief in visiting missionaries as he was his own members. Pastor John Gaertner remembers:

With his being the master of the five minute call, I recall the day he dropped by. As a young missionary in a building program I had questions. He had given me my five minutes and was walking out the door as I was asking questions.

## His Humor

I've mentioned above that Walter loved to laugh and to tell jokes. Sometimes he mastered the one liner. At other times he would embark on telling a joke with a punch line. All the while he leaned heavily on those jokes he had learned from his father. Below are some examples of his humor.

The man who invented eating was a good friend of mine!--- Isn't it marvelous how God can take a little bit of dirt and turn it into a feast like this?--- It sure is easy to get used to luxury!--- All the old prophets are dead and the new ones don't amount to anything!

On the occasion of President Naumann's 25th anniversary in the ministry Walter told this little joke: It's time to bring this happy occasion to a close. We do not want to be like the preacher who wanted to go through all the books of the Bible in one evening. After going through the entire Old Testament he noticed that he had skipped the Book of Obadiah. He said, "Oh, we missed Obadiah! Where shall we place him?" Someone in the back of the room spoke up and said, "Here, you can give him my place. I am going home."

### **His Prayers**

Anyone who ever heard Walter pray would never forget the experience. Pastor Norman Berg served as the Synod Administrator for home missions for many years. He recalls Walter's prayers.

Often when Walter was at one of the Board for Home Mission meetings and the chairman had forgotten to assign someone for the closing prayer he would say, "Brother Diehl, would you please lead us in one of your ex-corde prayers?" What followed was without parallel in the whole synod! It was full of Bible illustrations and passages, current events, hymn verses, and a tinge of humor.

The look on his face as he began these ex-corde prayers was striking: a little nod of his head to the Lord, a slight smile, and words which attested to his close relationship with the Father to whom he was praying.

### **His Use Of Scripture In Conversation**

Recently some members of Calvary of Dallas were at a seminar together where they were encouraged to put Colossians 3:16 into practice which reads:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

They immediately turned toward each other and said simultaneously, "Pastor Diehl." For them he had personified this passage. Pastor Vilas Glaeske comments:

Pastor Diehl walked the way he talked. He had an incredible ability to weave Scripture into his conversation. He had no guile. He used Scripture in such a way that even unbelievers would want to listen to what he had to say. He didn't need a bumper sticker or a lapel pin to tell you he was a Christian. From the moment he opened his mouth one would know that he was a child of God.

### **His Pipe**

Pastor Diehl enjoyed smoking a pipe. He became a master at blowing smoked rings. Because he loved children he would often fascinate them with his smoke ring "shows". He would blow a big smoke ring and then a small one that would catch up with and move through the center of the first.

As much as he loved his pipe, though, he still loved God and his people more. Late in his life someone told him that he was not effective at reaching her relative because he smoked a pipe. The relative could not understand how a minister could smoke. Walter put away his pipes and never smoked again. To him it simply was not worth risking the salvation of any soul.

### **His love for Louise**

Walter kissed his bride "good bye" every morning. Each Saturday night he would bring home something for her. If it was Easter, Mother's Day, Her Birthday or their Anniversary it would be a corsage. She dearly loves peanuts, so quite often it would be peanuts. It might even be a candy bar, a box of candy or some little trinket.

One time during his illness he came home on Saturday night without something for her. Suddenly, he remembered and said, "I'll be right back." Then he started out the door. She tried to stop him because she knew he didn't feel well. But it was no use. He went anyway and came back with his love gift just as he always had done.

On another occasion he came home with a small portable television set because he had noticed that Louise often had stopped her sewing in order to go into the living room to watch a favorite program. She was grateful not just for the surprise but for the considerate heart that had noticed. In a recent interview with Louise I asked if she had any final thoughts to share about her husband. She simply answered, "I hope everyone has a husband like I did!"

### **His Disciplined Daily Schedule**

Probably one of the things that made Walter Diehl so efficient was his adherence to a daily routine. He was up every morning at 6:00 AM. His study was always at home in the mission congregations. If he had letters to write he wrote them before breakfast. Then, he came out of his study to eat. Following breakfast he would work on sermon studies and any other office work that needed attending to. At 10:00 AM he showered and went out to make calls. He was home promptly at 12:00 noon for dinner. Then he lay down for a nap until about 2:00 PM. After checking the mail he was out the door to make more calls until 5:00 PM when he came home for supper. After supper he left again to make calls or go to meetings. He was almost always home by 9:00 PM. One can see how this sort of daily routine allowed for a steady home going ministry. We dare not underestimate the benefits God's people received from Walter's faithful wife either. She allowed Walter to concentrate fully on his work while she kept the home in synch with his routine.



## CONCLUSION

It says in Revelation 14:13:

I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

What an apt description of Walter Diehl! He lived for the Lord who purchased him with his own blood. He served faithfully in the various callings to which God directed him. He labored with all the strength God provided and he died in faith that he would awake in the glory of his eternal rest. Now he rests from his labors. But his works do follow him.

To be sure, those who knew him well will remember his unique style and approach to life as much as they will remember his service in the kingdom. But who can deny that his works do follow him. All over the United States there are people who met the Savior through Walter Diehl. Countless others remember his encouragement as their brother, husband, father, pastor, mission counselor and friend. His works do follow him. Those who knew him will be ever grateful to the One who let them bask in the light of Walter's countenance as he reflected Christ's love to them during his brief sojourning here!

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Walter's grandparents were Charles August Diehl and Margaret Schmidt.
- <sup>2</sup> Caroline nee Haase and the Rev. Adolf Haase were the children of Rev. Julius and Anna Haase.
- <sup>3</sup> This quote was found by Rev. Otto Engel in the synod proceedings.

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- <sup>4</sup> A history of the Tempe congregation can be acquired from the Wisconsin Lutheran Library, Senior Church History file. It was written by Kevin Salzwedel as his Senior Church History paper in 1984.
- <sup>5</sup> This quote was found by Rev. Otto Engel in the synod proceedings.
- <sup>6</sup> This quote was found by Rev. Otto Engel in the synod proceedings.

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin,  
July 1, 1935.

Dear George:-

Now that I have gradually awakened from the trance into which I fell some two weeks ago, I am letting pass in review before my mind's eye some of the incidents of those two glorious days. I don't remember when I have been so thrilled as at your anniversary. Everything was so nicely arranged, nothing bombastic, but just an occasion for everyone to say and do what was nearest his heart. It will remain an unforgettable event in my life.

Have you caught up on sleep? And how about the teacher? I just bet he felt that he was holding company with two well-trained and marathon-eyed owls. As I did not get any too much sleep at Detroit either, I came back to Geneva in a sort of daze and don't know just yet when I will get back to my normal stride.

Please thank Paul for that wonderful picture. It occupies a prominent place on my desk and will stay there. Especially do I wish to thank him for that beautiful frame. What a remembrance!

I hope that the festivities have not taken too great a toll from the partner of your couch. I know it was a severe strain for her.

The folks here haven't tired of hearing of our exploits. Walter was here yesterday and we had to go over all the details again. It just seems that that friendship of 35 years is something very novel.

Now, George, remember the latch-string is always out at Lake Geneva. If not before, then at least when you take Nathanael to Watertown, DON'T YOU DARE PASS US BY.

With kindest greetings from house to house and with hearty greetings to Mr. Gehm and his hospitable wife, I remain

As ever, Yours,

*Henry*

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin,  
September 20, 1935.

Dear George:-

It was on a Friday morning that the bishop of Toledo left Lake Geneva. It was on a Sunday morning that the bishop of Lake Geneva was scurrying about the house looking for a pair of Copeland Rider shoes and found them not. And it was a short time later that the Ohio bishop finds a pair of shoes not his own and returns them to his perplexed friend. Well, the trip did the shoes no harm. But, when I wore them the first time, I thought I hear them say, "Say, did I shake in myself when those two policemen spoke to my abductor. Imagine, a good pair of shoes, being humiliated by Chicago policemen. If I ever go to jail, it must be New York or nothing".

Well, George, I shiver with you when I hear of your encounter with two limbs of the law. No doubt, your two limbs did a lot of funny things standing up, as you stood on the highway pleading to be given your freedom. \$25.00 and costs for a little mistake would surely be costly tuition for post-graduate work in the school of safety. I wonder: Will Brother Luetke ever forget again to come to a dead STOP? As I know him, that stop will be dead from now on.

My ministerial sprout at Elkhorn and I journeyed to Chicago last Monday to see what the Cubs could do the king of beasts in the National League. They did plenty. For a time I feared that the umpire was going to get a hit and score. And that game two days later! 15-3 ---what a rout. And then Hubbell on Friday. Seems that Detroit will most probably battle the Cubs.

Our fall work is beginning and one feels like getting down to it. I note that you have conference in October and that you have the opportunity to again cause argument with an essay. Well, woe to the church when arguments about the correct doctrine die out. No fighting---death.

Lillie and Margaret send their heartiest greetings. Include mine to your beloved spouse and to the olive branches about your tabernacle.

And just before I close: Doesn't joy expand a man's heart and purse? It will be a long time before I forget your brother Will's evidence of expansion that evening in South Milwaukee.

Write again.

Greetings,

*H. J. Deibel*

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin,  
January 8, 1936.

Dear George and Mary:-

Just a few lines to let you know how <sup>So, one sees</sup> happy we are that Irmgard and Walter are engaged. Da sieht man, <sup>what such an anniversary can bring.</sup> was so ein Jubilaeum bringen kann. I go to Toledo, you come to Lake Geneva, and lo, and behold, two young folks become the beneficiaries of those meetings.

You can rest assured that we welcome Irmgard most heartily. Mrs. Diehl fell in love with her the first time they met. She never could forget her consideration, when she asked to help her with her work. I saw her in your home, how good to her mother, how respectful and considerate toward her mother. Surely, our son is a lucky man. God bless them both.

With kindest greetings from house to house,

Lillie Diehl  
J. J. Diehl.

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin,  
January 8, 1936.

Miss Irmgard Luetke,  
954 Belmont Avenue,  
Toledo, Ohio.

Dear Irmgard:-

We were so happy to receive Walter's letter bringing us the good news that you and he are engaged. That was our hope; that hope has now become REALIZATION.

And now we might tell you a few secrets. For years I have prayed that my son's bride might be a devout Christian, the daughter of a highly respected family, if possible the daughter of a minister. And now God in His goodness has granted us our wish, granted it in a way that I dared not hope. Not only the daughter of a minister, but the daughter of the dearest of my college chums.

Again assuring you of our great happiness and with kindest greetings,

*W. H. J. Drell*  
*W. J. Drell*

(This letter was written by Jim and Judy Diehl.  
It was read at Walter's 50th Anniversary in the ministry.)

November 18, 1984

Dear Father, Father-in-law, Pastor and Friend,

We agree there are a lot of titles in the above and you have been and are each and every one of them.

Through the years of being all these people, you have given so much, have taught us so much that we wish we could say more than a simple thank you. THANK YOU FOR BEING YOU.

One of the things we have heard and seen written from you is "The Lord will provide". How well he has provided in everything and also for the swift recovery from your operation so you could continue to finish your 50 years and continue to serve for more.

How often do we say "Give us <sup>this day</sup> our daily bread" and realize that this means God gives us everything. The Lord most certainly has well provided for us again, so that we can continue to have you around for a while longer.

In our travels around the country, we have heard both lay people and Pastors say, OH yes, Pastor Diehl has always given us the word of God when we needed it. Pastor Worgull said it like this: He guided me when I first came to Arizona to do the Lord's work in a mission congregation.

In closing we want to express our heartfelt wishes on this momentous occasion of your 50th Anniversary in the Ministry and know that God will continue to Bless you as you continue to spread the word of God for some time to come.

# Friday, November 18

*Walter ordained and installed at Elkhorn  
in the evening at 7:30 by me.  
Jedele - English - Jeremiah 3, 15  
Zarling - German - 1 Tim. 1, 3.  
Buenger - Piper - Hillmer - Baganz - Sponholz  
Kohlstedt + Fr. Zarling present.*

1934

## Son of Local Pastor Called To Pulpit of Elkhorn Congregation

The First Evangelical church of Elkhorn, in a special meeting held last Monday evening, extended a call to the Rev. Walter A. Diehl to assume the pastorate of their congregation, which has been vacant since Pastor Reinemann left to become pastor of a congregation at Hillsburg, Wis.

Walter A. Diehl is the son of the Rev. and Mrs. H. J. Diehl. He was born at Peshtigo, Wis., on June 27, 1912. From 1915 to 1919 he lived in Milwaukee, where his father was pastor of Divine Charity Lutheran church. In September, 1919 he moved to Lake Geneva, his father having accepted the call of the First Evangelical Lutheran church of this city.

Mr. Diehl graduated from the local high school in 1928. From 1928 to 1931 he attended Concordia College at Milwaukee, being graduated from that institution in June, 1931. The next three years were spent at the Lutheran Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod at Thiensville, he being one of the graduates in the class of 1934.

## Rev. Walter Diehl is Installed at Elkhorn

### Son of Local Pastor Takes Lutheran Pulpit

In spite of the inclemency of the weather, Peace Lutheran church at Elkhorn was filled to capacity Sunday evening for the ordination and installation of the Rev. Walter A. Diehl, who had been called to fill the vacancy caused by the departure of the Rev. W. Reinemann.

To the strains of the prelude played by the church's organist, Miss Mary Amann, the new pastor, accompanied by his father, the Rev. H. J. Diehl of Lake Geneva, and the members of the church council of Peace church, took his place before the altar. After an opening hymn by the congregation, a short liturgical service was held.

Thereupon the Rev. F. Zarling of Iron Ridge, an uncle of the new pastor, delivered an inspiring address in German on First Timothy three, verse 1, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." He showed that the desire to enter the ministry and to serve God in the ministry is a desire that does not proceed from man's natural inclination, but that it is born of faith and love, begotten by the Holy Spirit. He showed further, that the work of the ministry is a good work inasmuch as it seeks the good, the eternal welfare of the souls committed to the pastor's care.

The sermon in English was delivered by the Rev. S. A. Jedele of Wilmot, one of the seniors of the Southern Conference in point of membership. On the basis of Jeremiah 3, 15, he pointed out in a masterful way that it is God, the great Jehovah God, who gives pastors according to his own heart and that He imposes upon them the solemn duty to feed the flock of the great shepherd with knowledge and understanding. "Don't look upon your pastor," said he, "as a hired man, but as an ambassador of God, a servant of the Most High, a steward of the mysteries of God. If you consider him in that light, you will never despise his youth, but receive his word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God."

The ordination and installation followed, being performed by the father of the new pastor, assisted

by the preachers of the evening. The Pastors Carl Buenger, W. K. Pifer, and E. W. Hillmer of Kenosha, Martin Buenger of Caledonia, Edmund Sponholz of Slades Corners, Louis Baganz of Burlington, Candidates Guido Kohlstedt, and Frederic Zarling, the Jedele family of Wilmot, the Zarling family of Iron Ridge, the Zache family of Milwaukee, deacons and many members of the First Lutheran church at Lake Geneva were in attendance in addition to the members of Peace church.

ts and Collections





Saturday, April 20, 1968

4 MESA TRIBUNE, MESA, ARIZ.

Saturday, Apr

# Diehl Gives Final Sermon Tomorrow

When Rev. Walter A. Diehl, founding and only pastor of Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church, 715 West Southern avenue, gives his farewell sermon tomorrow (Sunday) at the 11 a.m. services the day will also be marked by other historic highlights.

A new altar will be dedicated in memory of Mrs. Jeanette Jaeger as a gift from Mr. Ben Jaeger and friends.

An honor of the 57th wedding anniversary of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. O.H. Miller, the Samuel Johnsons will provide altar frontlets with crosses.

The Ladies' Group has provided new Fair Linen for the Altar and Credence table, which were sewn by Mrs. John Nelson and Mrs. Wendell Nehls.

At the same service a plaque provided by the Ladies' Group will be unveiled in memory of Mrs. Valberg Kinsley, a charter member who passed away January 30. The plaque will be affixed to the new Sunday School wing in remembrance of Mrs. Kinsley's interest in and work for the children of the church.

"I Commend You to God" will be the theme of the sermon by Pastor Diehl, who has served since December 2, 1951 — the longest term of service of any pastor active at a congregation here. He served the congregation here until November 1955 from Phoenix and at this time he moved to Tempe. In February of 1956 he was widowed, and he married in April 1958.

During his pastorate the congregation first bought property at Seventh street and Mrytle avenue, which it sold in 1963 when they moved to the present location at 715 W. Southern avenue. Last year a Sunday School wing containing five classrooms was built, and contracts for paving the parking lots are about to be let.

A call has been extended to Pastor David Tetzlaff of Whitefish, Wis., to fill the vacancy here, but he not as yet given his answer. Pastor Diehl will become the pastor at Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church at Dallas,

Sunday evening at 7:00 o'clock the congregation and the ladies' group have arranged a covered dish dinner as a farewell gathering.

Wednesday at 7 p.m. the Children's Groups will hold their final meeting of this school year.



**Rev. Walter A. Diehl**

This organization provides devotion, games, and crafts for children of first through eighth grade, meeting twice a month during the school year. Mr. and Mrs. John Nelson, Mrs. Harold Weimer, Mr. and Mrs. Gayle Meske, Mr. Joseph H. Worischek, and Mr. and Mrs. Darwin Bacon have served as leaders during the past year.

## Mesa Tribune CHURCH

Edited by Pat McElfresh

### Farewell Sermon For Pastor Diehl

The farewell sermon of Pastor Walter A. Diehl of Pilgrim Evangelical Lutheran Church will be on the theme "I Commend You to God!"

The 9 a.m. service will end Pastor Diehl's 10 years and seven months with the church. Rev. David V. Schultz of Casa Grande will take over next week.

Pastor Diehl began services at the old Melcher Mortuary on Sept. 15, 1957 with a group which had been attending Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church at Tempe from this vicinity.

In January of 1958 the group moved to the Woman's Club. In 1960 the present church was built at 1456 E. Broadway Avenue at the corner of South Barkley. In 1963 a Sunday School addition was dedicated to the memory of Karl Kloss the first president. In 1965 the interior was remodeled and beautified.

At present the congregation is seeking information concerning buying or building a parsonage and also considering the purchase of pews. The congregation has been a joint partner with Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tempe and has been self-supporting since December of 1959. Both congregations of the parish resolved to call separate pastors because of the growth of the congregations and the amount of money involved.

The congregation now

has 140 communicants and 210 members, though it serves over a hundred visitors also during the winter months.

Pastor Diehl is assuming the work of a Mission congregation, Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church of Dallas, Tex. Last Sunday a covered dish dinner was held as a farewell gathering. A billfold was given Pastor and Mrs. Diehl containing a gift of money. A program included musical selections by Mrs. Arthur Hudson, Mrs. Merlyn Heller, Mrs. Lavere Schieber, Judy Schmitz, Karen Schieber, a reading by Mrs. John Kilber, and an address by President Carl Carstens. Mrs. A. C. Mehl baked and decorated a cake with a large cross.



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Rev. Walter Diehl

**Lutherans  
To Install**

The Rev. Walter A. Diehl of Tempe, Ariz., will be installed as pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Synod, at 7:30 p.m. Sunday. The church is at Church and Audelia.

The Rev. Robert C. Hartman of Duncanville will preside at the installation, assisted by the Rev. J. Neffendorf of Edna and the Rev. V. Glaeske of Houston.

The Rev. Mr. Diehl is now chairman of the Mission Board of the Arizona-California District of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod, which includes the synod's new mission field in Texas.

The 360,000-member synod, with headquarters in Milwaukee, has been active in Texas since 1964. The synod is regarded as a conservative and independent synod.

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THE MID VALLEY TOWN CHER  
WESLACO, TEXAS DEC. 2, 1961 PAGE 26

# Pastor Diehl's 47 Year Ministry Includes Only One Day Of Absence

By Bob Thrane  
It's difficult enough to go through one year without missing a day of class, or one year without missing a day of work, but Pastor Walter A. Diehl of Abiding Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church in Weslaco has had almost perfect attendance at church services for 47 years. Pastor Diehl said he remembers missing one service, in February of 1934. He was attending to his wife, Irmgard, who was near death.

The 69-year-old minister said he's had days when he's "dragged on the side of the pastor" but he has missed only that one time. The Peshtigo, Wis., native is able to make all services at his church on Sixth Street, and be chairperson of the Texas Mission District Mission Board.

In addition, Pastor Diehl is one of the 28 members of the general board for home missions of the Wisconsin-Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the synod with which his Weslaco church is affiliated.

On Sunday, Nov. 22, Pastor Diehl travelled to Trinity Lutheran Church in Temple to install two missionaries, one for Trinity church and one other for the synod's Lutheran mission at Fort Hood-Killeen. The 1931 graduate of Concordia College in Milwaukee, Wis., said he



PASTOR WALTER A. DIEHL

would like to continue in the ministry until the Lord tells him to quit.

He has followed in the footsteps of his father, Pastor Henry J. Diehl, former minister in Lake Geneva, Wis., where Walter spent most of his young life.

The Weslaco pastor said he was unsure about pursuing the ministry only once in his life.

He had to make a decision when he was a senior in high school. His choices were the ministry, law and medicine.

"After four years at Concordia, I decided on the ministry," he said. His preparation for the ministry was done at the

sa. Both started from the Redeemer Mission in Phoenix. Emmanuel and Pilgrim grew so quickly, that Pastor Diehl was called to Dallas, where he was pastor until coming to the Valley to keep Abiding Savior on its feet in 1976.

It is difficult time for religion, because of "humanistic influences," said Pastor Diehl. He said he has thought of quitting the ministry because of the pressures involved.

He would like to continue being pastor of the Weslaco church, at least until the church becomes self-supporting. It is now being partially supported by Wisconsin synod funds.

The attendance at Abiding Savior increases considerably in the winter months, when the Winter Texans arrive. During the summer, church attendance dwindles distressingly low, said Pastor Diehl.

Pastor Diehl said his church has some loyal members, including one who makes a trip from Brownsville every Sunday, he said.

After his first wife's death, Pastor Diehl married Louise Straus in April of 1958. He has a son, James, who works with the Wisconsin Employment Service in Kenosha, Wis., and a daughter, Mary Hess of Berlin, West Germany. In spite of making

trips to preside at mission board meetings and participate in synod home mission board meetings, Pastor Diehl still manages to see his Sunday.

son and daughter occasionally. He also manages to make it to the service at Abiding Savior every

WinnigSouls" 1981

Booklet by  
Mission Coordinating Committee of Boards for Home and World  
Missions

# SOUTH CENTRAL

When historians review the history of the WELS in the South Central District, the name of one man will figure prominently on nearly every page. Pastor Walter A. Diehl served for thirty-five years on mission boards in Arizona - California, Texas, and the South Central District. For many years he served as chairman of these mission boards.

Pastor Diehl was one of three men who visited Texas in September 1962. The team met with six families who were interested in a confessional Lutheran church. The visit resulted in the General Board for Home Missions giving permission, in November 1962, to begin our first WELS mission in Texas. Calvary Lutheran Church of Dallas became the first congregation in the four states which now make up the South Central District. Pastor Diehl later served Calvary congregation.

In talking to Pastor Diehl, one could not separate the man, the message, and the mission. He was a man of prayer. He was a friend. He was a servant of God. He was a pastor, faithful missionary, and an evangelist. The Lord blessed the man with over fifty-two years of service in His church.

Pastor Diehl was fond of talking about the mission congregation he served in Weslaco, Texas, "down Mexico way." The mission has eighty-seven souls, but its average attendance in the winter months is three hundred and fifty. This was a result of serving what Pastor Diehl called "winter Texans." Each of these visitors could be sure of a personal visit from their "winter pastor."

On May 8, 1987, the Lord called Pastor Diehl home. We thank God for the years of service given our district, our church and the church militant. By the Savior's grace Pastor Diehl reigns with his Savior in the Church Triumphant.



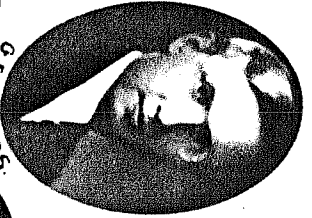




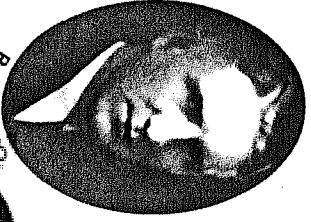
Walter  
&  
Margaret



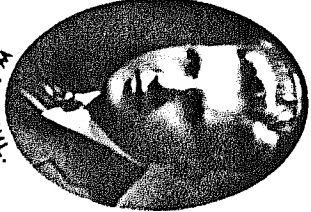
Walter Diehl - Age 21.



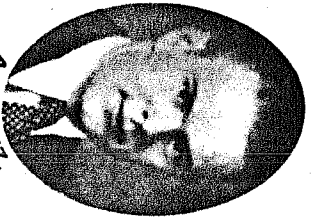
G. E. PETERS.



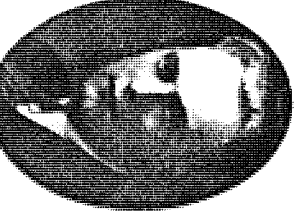
R. P. OTTO.



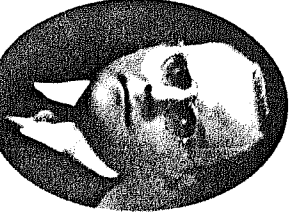
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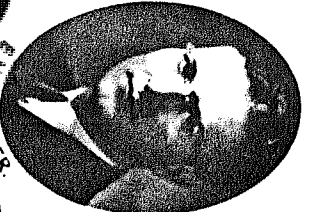
A. M. GATZ.  
(Drove in  
Summer of 29)



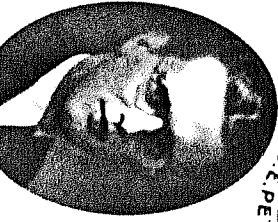
O. ENGEL.



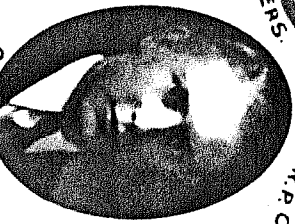
A. SCHERER.



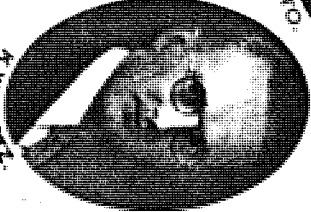
E. K. KRUEGER.



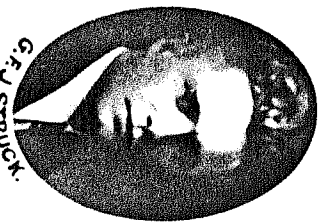
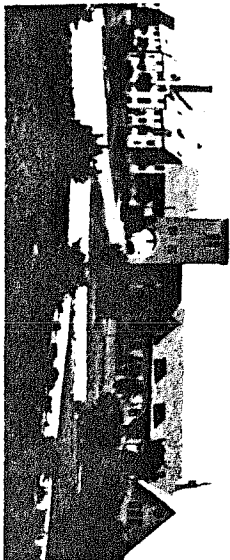
H. A. SCHULTZ.



Q. L. MAUNH.



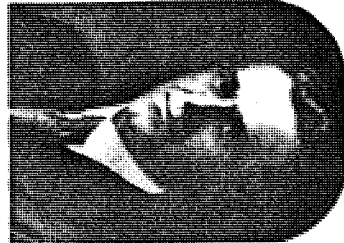
K. W. VERTZ.



G. F. J. STRUCK.



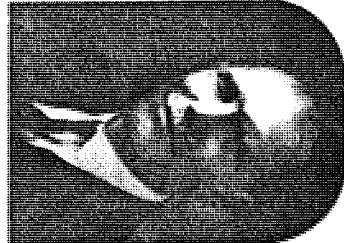
PROF. M. LEHNINGER.



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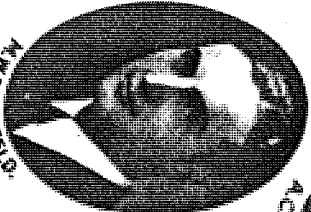
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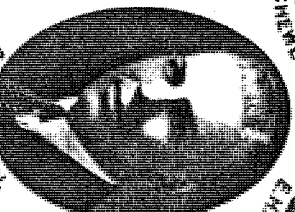
PROF. J. ZICH.



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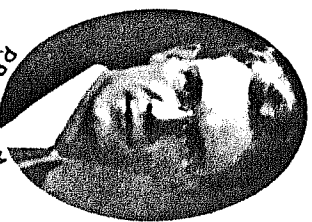
M. W. DORNFELD.



A. G. SCHERWIN.



E. B. FROELICH.



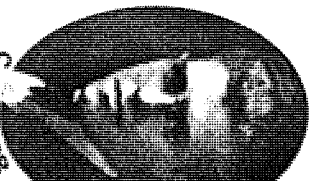
P. M. HEHN.

# Lutheran Theological Seminary,

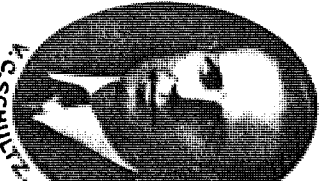
Thiensville, - Wisconsin.

## Faculty and Class, 1934.

Robert Kober - Photographer.



C. L. TRAHER.



K. C. SCHUCH.



Walter

Walter & Margaret

H. J. Will

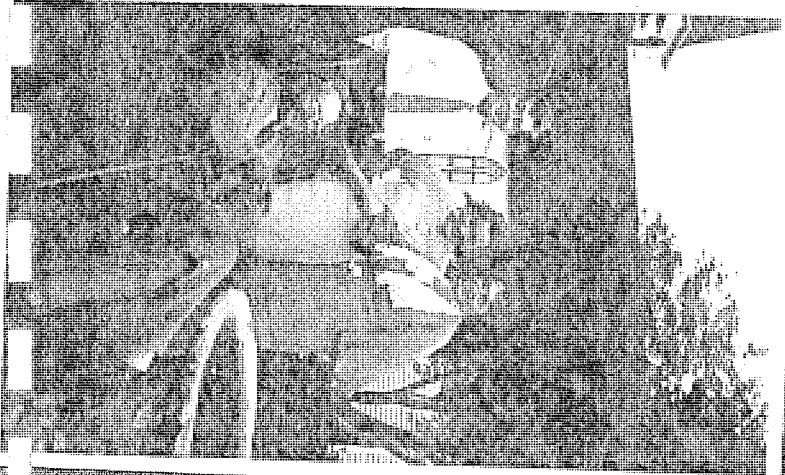
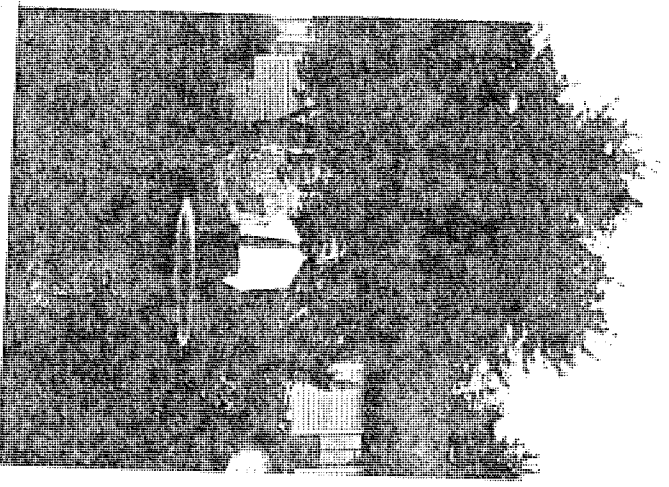
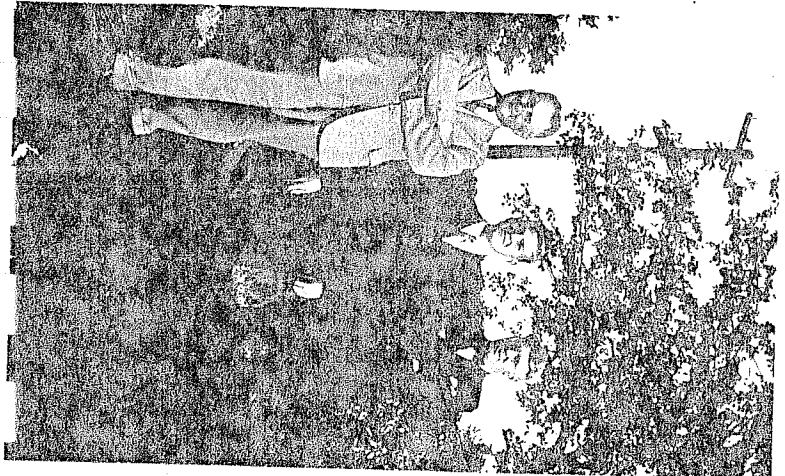
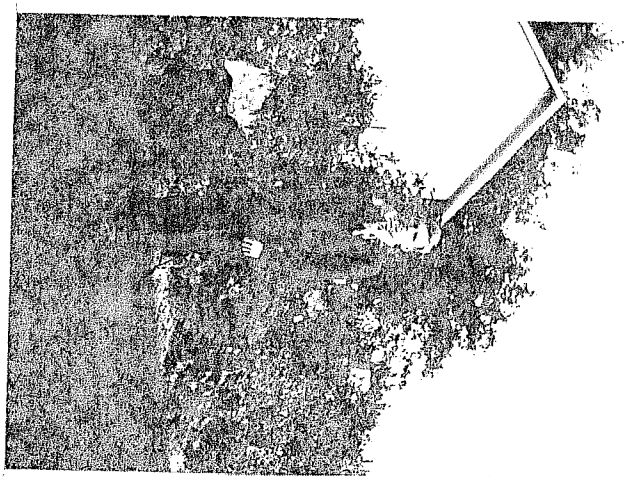
Walter & Will

George W. Gault

Walter - Margaret

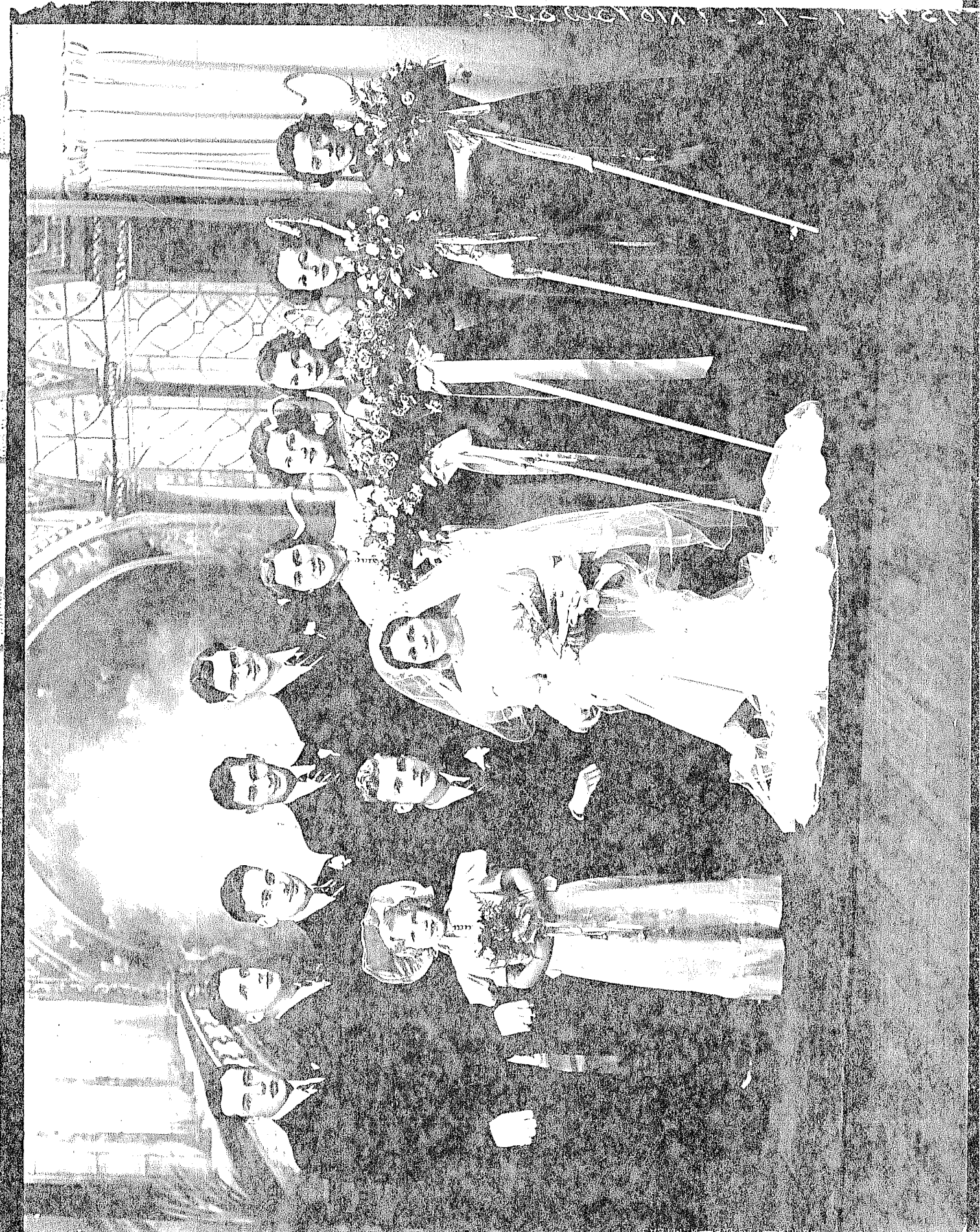
Willie & H. J.

Last picture





Walter and Irmgard's Wedding Picture



Walter and Louise  
at Walter's 50th  
Ann. in the  
ministry. (Weslaco, Tx)





*Pamela Gibbs*  
LONDON

Louise greeting Margaret Thatcher



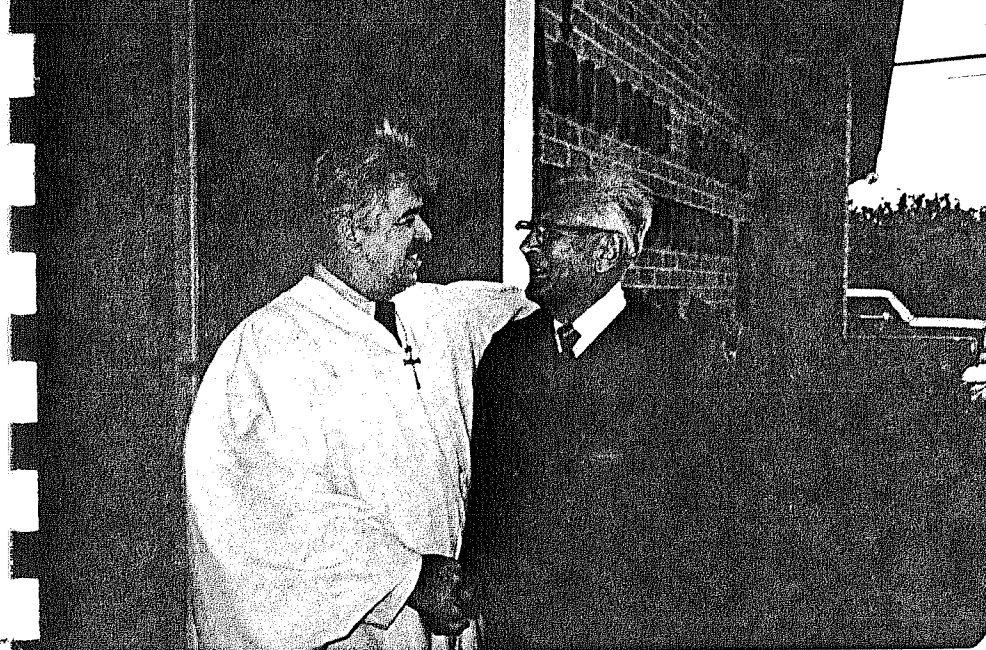
The Diehls in London

1987



Walter relaxing in Dallas

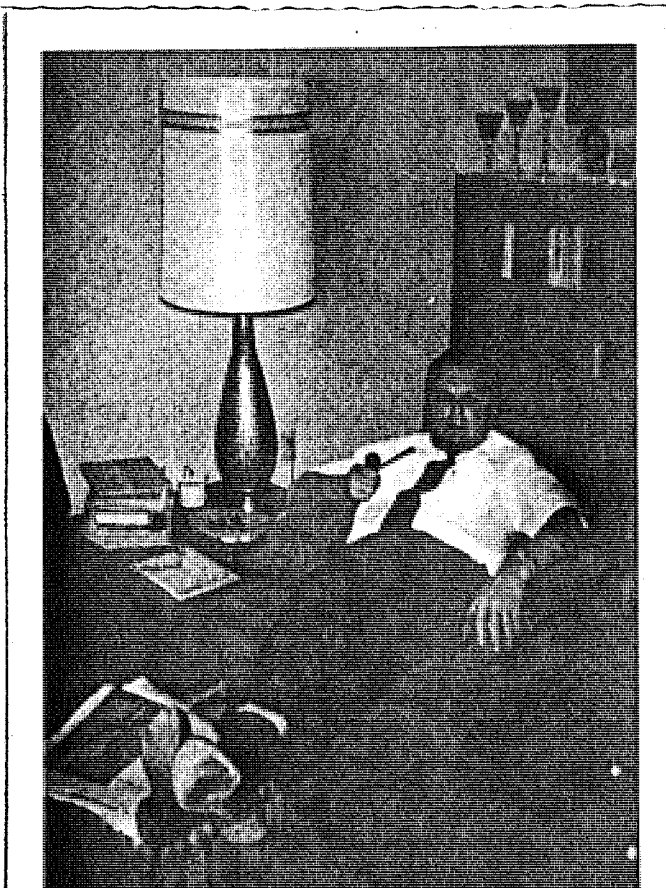




Pastor Diehl and  
Pastor Vilas Glaeske  
at Pastor Diehl's  
50th Anniversary in  
the ministry.



Busy days in Arizona.



Relaxing in Dallas.

Pastor and Louise's Wedding Picture







WALTER A. DIEHL CONFIRMATION