

Not Flashy, Just Faithful.

A Couple of Afternoons with Professor Nitz.

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EARLY YEARS

Paul Ernest Nitz was born to Henry Carl Nitz and Alma Marie Pingel on November 19th, 1926 in the mountains of Whiteriver, Fort Apache Reservation, Arizona. He was baptized at the East Fork Mission. Henry Carl was a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran pastor and missionary. Alma Nitz was the daughter of long time Bethesda Lutheran Home superintendent, Louis Pingel. At the time of his birth, his father was a missionary in Apacheland. Professor Nitz's time in Arizona lasted less than three years because of his mother's health. The doctors told her that if she continued to live at the high elevation of Whiteriver, that her heart would give out. It was a traumatic time for the family. Henry Nitz decided for the sake of his wife to resign as an Apacheland missionary. He subsequently received a call to Minnesota.

Professor Nitz does not recall much from his early childhood in Arizona, but one of his most vivid memories was standing on a sidewalk. He was fascinated by them since on the reservation, there were no sidewalks. That day, the family had gone to town and the doctor had broken the news to them about Mrs. Nitz's heart condition. As Professor Nitz was playing with gum stuck to the sidewalk, his parents drove up next to him frantically. Apparently they were so upset by the news that they had driven off without him, only to return and find him enjoying the sidewalk. Because of the news that day, the family moved to the Midwest as the Great Depression began to hit.

In 1929, Paul's family packed up the car and moved to Rockford, Minnesota located about twenty-five miles northwest of Minneapolis. This is where the majority of his childhood was spent. His earliest memory from Rockford was at about the age of four or five. He was pushed into a bonfire and seriously burned especially in the hands. This he remembers vaguely, but the most vivid memories of Paul's childhood was here in Rockford.

On one occasion, Paul and some of his friends were swimming in the Crawfish River. They didn't have permission, so they also didn't have their swim trunks. They went skinny dipping. The swimming hole was near a sandbar. As they played tag on this sandbar, one of the kids was trying to get away from the other and stepped off of the sandbar into a drop off with an undertow. Paul responded to his friend's cries for help, but was soon drug under by the panicky boy. Both of them could have been drowned. Finally the boys were swept into shallower water where they regained their footing.

Often our most vivid memories are those that are life threatening. Probably just as often, the most vivid memories are those that *seem* to be life threatening. This was the case with Professor Nitz and his struggle with Toddy Hintz. Toddy Hintz had become notorious as the town bully. He had no mother. His brothers were gangsters in the Minneapolis area. Professor Nitz knew him well because at one point, Toddy had broken his nose with a frozen snowball on the school play ground. Toddy had already been in the same classes as Professor Nitz's two older brothers and sister. The way his education was proceeding, Toddy would soon be in the same class as Professor Nitz.

One afternoon, Professor Nitz was returning home from across the bridge where he had been listening to the radio at a friend's house. Coming from the other direction was Toddy Hintz. Professor Nitz was at this time about nine years old. Toddy was a teenager. There was no way to avoid running into him. When they met in the middle, Toddy picked him up and held him over the river by his feet as Toddy laughed like a hyena. This was a terrifying experience for Professor Nitz.

In 1937, the Nitz's moved to Waterloo, Wisconsin. Here they would stay for the next twenty-eight years. In 1965, Henry Nitz resigned as district president because a hearing problem was making the work difficult. He accepted a call to Eitzen, Minnesota where he and his wife spent the twilight years of their lives.

EDUCATION

While in Rockford, Minnesota, Professor Nitz attended the public grade school because there was no parochial school. During his sixth grade year, the family made the move to Waterloo, Wisconsin. He finished his grade school education at St. John Christian Elementary School, Waterloo in 1939. After his eighth grade year, he assumed he would go to Northwestern Preparatory School as his two older brothers had. But because of financial constraints, his father worked out a deal with the local high school principal. Professor Nitz was not required to take the usual courses. He took the Latin course normally reserved for sophomores and upper classmen. His father also reserved the right to keep his son out of any classroom that he felt had an immoral teacher. In the case of the math teacher and football coach, he exercised that right. After one year at the public high school, Paul attended four years of Northwestern Prep. He was not a year behind, because he had skipped a year in parochial school. Apparently one of the female teachers didn't feel comfortable teaching a boy, and so at that time he was moved up to a male teachers class.

Finally, when Professor Nitz got to Northwestern Prep School, he was able to play football which was his first love. Because Professor Nitz's high school days were during World War II, it had an impact on his thinking. His older brother's class had caught the war spirit. Half of his brother's class, including his brother, had gone into the army. During those days, students enrolled at Northwestern College could obtain a 4-D classification because they were studying for the ministry. This would make them exempt from military service. At this stage in their life, these students had to seriously consider whether they wanted to go into the ministry. If they did not, they would sign up for the draft. The students were quite aware of the snide remarks that might accompany becoming exempt from military service. This is probably what prompted Professor Nitz and his friends to try to sign up for the

Navy one day. After their physical and eye test however, the recruiter found out that they were only sixteen. The sergeant told them to go home and keep eating their carrots. The war spirit during those years was high.

The dilemma of going into the service caused Professor Nitz much consternation when he turned eighteen. Now the choice was directly in front of him. The question was not whether he wanted to be a minister or not, but rather, "Will I be a draft dodger if I obtain the 4-D classification?" Just by attending Northwestern College, you had a good idea that you would eventually go into the ministry. But if one would take a 4-D classification and wouldn't become a pastor, he would be seen as a draft dodger. Professor Nitz knew his dad wouldn't be able to give him a non-bias opinion since he was rather concerned about his first son who was now at war. Professor Kowalke offered some valuable advice. He told Professor Nitz that if he knew he wasn't going to be a pastor, to file for the draft. If he wasn't positive about being a pastor, Kowalke told him to file for the 4-D. If for some reason he didn't become a pastor, he would just have to deal with the abuse at that time. So Professor Nitz filed for a 4-D classification and got it, not because he was trying to avoid the army, but because he had not ruled the ministry out of his future.

Professor Nitz graduated from Northwestern Preparatory School in 1944 and enrolled in Northwestern College that fall. He was in a class of only about 17 students. Almost all of them went on to Northwestern College. At that time, the college and prep school were very close. Many of the professors taught at both institutions. The college students always roomed with prep students. In fact, the Prep school was not really considered a separate part of the school. It was just assumed that if you went to the prep school, you would continue on to graduate from Northwestern College.

The friends that Professor Nitz made in prep and college he recalls fondly. There were three Pauls in his class. He happened to be the tallest and so he was dubbed "Paulus Magnus." Paul Ruege was the smallest and so nicknamed "Paulus

Parvus.” Paul Hollander was simply called Paul. Paul Hollander was a natural leader with the ability to see the good or funny side of everything. As seems to be often the case with an outgoing personality, Paul was also a bit mischievous. He was Professor Nitz’s closest friend.

Paul Hollander had quite an effect on Professor Nitz at the end of their junior year. Paul Hollander on the night before graduation went on a joyride with a senior friend early in the morning. They ran a stoplight in Watertown and a police officer attempted to pull them over. The senior tried to outrun the officer, but lost control on a hill and hit a tree. Paul was seriously injured and died twenty four hours later. The school was deeply affected. Professor Nitz doesn’t know exactly how that impacted his decisions in the future, but certainly at a very early age, he was able to see the importance of the gospel message and the hope it brings in eternal life. One thing he always remembered from the funeral service of Paul was the promise of salvation even when a death is the result of sin.

In interviewing Professor Nitz, he spoke of some of the teachers that influenced him in his school days. It is interesting that the most memorable people were not the ones who were most gifted linguistically or the brightest of scholars, but those professors that seemed to have a heart for the students. Professor Kowalke was good at giving advice but sometimes a bit aloof. As teenagers sometimes do, they did find out he had a human side too. It seems that at one point before his death, the new inspector was riding Paul Hollander pretty hard. He wouldn’t put up with anything. In fact, it got so bad, that Paul’s name was coming up for expulsion. Kowalke took it upon himself to talk with Paul. Although Professor Nitz doesn’t know exactly what was said, the matter was cleared up and Paul Hollander never spoke poorly of Kowalke again. Kowalke had shown personal concern for Paul which the students quickly picked up on.

Professor Rhoda was a real friend to the students. He watched out for the students and showed his concern more than any of the others. Professor Berg was

the inspector for most of Professor Nitz's Northwestern days. He was very evangelical in his approach to the students. He stood out as a fatherly type in which people could confide. In fact, they looked at Professor Berg with such admiration that when they would sneak out of study periods, they would go up and confess to him later. The other professors were all faithful in their work, but these were the ones that stuck out the most as showing personal concern for the students.

Professor Nitz was caught in the middle of a controversy between Inspector Berg and the food service manager. At that time, the sick rooms were above the cafeteria. Professor Nitz was the hebamme, which was the student nurse. The Inspector and the food service manager were not on speaking terms and so Professor Nitz had to carry messages back and forth between the two. This controversy eventually lead to Inspector Berg resigning from his position. The new Inspector decided to come in and do things differently because he had heard that Inspector Berg was lax. This was the same inspector that was hard on Paul Hollander and almost had a nervous breakdown after Paul was killed. Eventually he learned where he fit in as an inspector of a school and gained the respect of the students.

Professor Nitz graduated from Northwestern College in 1948 as the 1000th student to receive a diploma. He enrolled at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary that same fall. Professor J. P. Meyer was remembered as the most influential teacher while Professor Nitz attended the Seminary. He was both the dean and the president at that time, so naturally he had a lot of contact with the students. Professor Nitz graduated as a candidate for the ministry in 1952.

After receiving a call to teach at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Professor Nitz attended graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison starting in the summer of 1974. After a long year and much hard work and sweat, he received a masters degree in Biblical Hebrew during the summer of 1975.

FAMILY

Professor Nitz had several influential relatives in the Synod that served him well as wonderful role models. Louis Pingel was a school teacher that set up the Bethesda program. He dedicated much of his life in teaching the mentally handicapped. One of his talents was working with wood. He taught his students, if capable, how to turn wood on a lathe.

Another giant of a man in Professor Nitz's life was his father. Henry Nitz had a huge heart for missions. He spent ten years on the Apache Indian Reservation before resigning because of his wife's health. While he was there, he established the first orphanage in his living room, a nursery, and a boarding school. He was also the editor of the Apache Scout, which was the voice of Apache Lutheranism. After he left the Reservation, he was always on some mission board. During his life, he did translation work and contributed many articles to the Synod.

Professor Nitz had three brothers and two sisters. Frederic was the oldest and went on to be a pastor. Joel went to Northwestern Preparatory School and a year of Northwestern College, but he felt inadequate for the ministry. He was one of those students who was caught up in the war fever and so signed up for the draft. Incidentally, after he returned from the war, he went into the National Forest Service and played a large part in starting many congregations in the south. He even ended up filling in for the pastor and reading the sermon from the pulpit on more than one occasion. Ramona was the oldest girl and went to Doctor Martin Luther College for a year, but ended up becoming a nurse. Marcus was Professor Nitz's younger brother who graduated from the Seminary and became a pastor. The youngest sister Naomi, graduated from Doctor Martin Luther College and served as a school teacher for a number of years. This was the family in which he grew up.

Professor Nitz met Carol Jean Solsrud after his junior year at the Seminary. A

friend of his, John Hoeneke was living with his aunt in a flat above the Solsrud residence while Professor Nitz and another friend were living and working construction on the north side of Milwaukee. John Hoeneke's aunt decided to play match maker. She talked to Carol occasionally and encouraged her to go out with one of the fine young Seminarians. Carol wasn't too interested. Meanwhile, Aunt Esther Grunewald gave her phone number to Professor Nitz and encouraged him to call. One day Professor Nitz was waiting for the contractors to show up so he had some time to kill. He called her from a friend's house and asked her out on a date. She said yes. That started a courtship that lasted four years.

After Professor Nitz's junior year at the Seminary, he emergency taught at Mt. Lebanon for a year. He then graduated in 1952 and went on to be a tutor at Northwestern College for a year. Finally after a long wait, Professor Nitz and his wife were wed on June 13, 1953 At Sherman Park, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Professor and Mrs. Nitz are blessed with eight children and twenty-six grandchildren. The oldest, Stephen, works for a computer programming company and lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He and his wife Susan have five children. Laura Becker is the oldest girl. She is married to Ed Becker who is a teacher in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. They have six children. Andrew is a librarian for the Government's printing press in Washington DC. Thomas is a special education teacher in Eagle River, Wisconsin who also has a stepson. Joel is a pastor in Lacy Washington. He and his wife Kathy have three children. Kristine Cherney is married to Ken Cherney who is a pastor in Mandeville, Louisiana. They have four children. Karla Wolff is married to Scott who works for a utilities company in St. Paul, Minnesota. They have four children. Paul is a missionary in Malawi, Africa. He and his wife Susan have three children.

WORK IN THE MINISTRY

Often as a Seminary student, people have asked me why I want to become a pastor or when I knew I wanted to become a pastor. This question is not always an easy one to answer. It is not easy for Professor Nitz to answer either. Professor Nitz did not have an immediate or flashy calling from the Lord like the Apostle Paul. Instead, the Lord used a gradual, slow approach. Professor Nitz was not like some pastors who knew that they wanted to be a pastor as soon as they were old enough to crawl into church. He never recalls any real conscious thoughts about being in the ministry but he never really had any doubts about going into the ministry. He is not quite sure where the desire to become a pastor came from.

There were a few influences that pointed him in the right direction. His father was probably the biggest influence. He never campaigned for it, or put any pressure on any of the kids to enter into public ministry. It was always just assumed in the Nitz family that the kids would go on to whatever synodical school was available. This was probably due to the example that his father led as well as the ministry in general. Living in the pastor's family was a good life. The congregations took care of the family.

When he attended Northwestern Preparatory School and College, there was no pressure to continue on to the Seminary. Even at that point, he felt no burning desire to be a pastor. In fact, he was pretty content just to play football. Graduating from Northwestern College did not necessarily mean that you would go on to the Seminary. But the influence of friends can be an impressive force on a young man, and that seemed to be the biggest reason for going on to the Seminary. He was swept downstream with the rest of his class to the Seminary. Once at the Seminary however, there was no question that he would become a pastor. His mind had been made up.

In 1952, Professor Nitz began his public ministry by serving as a tutor at Northwestern. After getting married, he received a call to serve Faith in Tacoma, Washington beginning in 1953. It was a small, struggling mission. They had called over ten pastors in the last year and finally the district president told them to go to the assignment committee. At one point, they had even voted to disband, but the district president convinced them to stay together. They were meeting in a building that had been abandoned once as a store and once as a church. It was in a rather poor building in a rather poor location. Professor Nitz served this congregation for eight years. In that time, the church relocated to a new piece of land after getting rid of the old building and parsonage. They built a new church and parsonage on the new plot of land. This congregation is still in existence today. During that time, he served the Synod on the Pacific Northwest Mission Board from 1957 to 1961.

Professor Nitz was in the Pacific Northwest District when the split between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod was heating up. It seemed that on the coasts, the doctrinal lines had already been drawn more clearly at a much earlier time than in the Midwest. The coasts seemed to be almost flippant about their liberalism. Even before Professor Nitz had arrived in Washington, the battle among the brothers had been raging. There was only one joint conference between Wisconsin and Missouri left. A breaking of fellowship, had already taken place in 1953. After the battle among the ranks had been fought, the Pacific Northwest men began their attack on the St. Louis Seminary led under a capable and strong leader, Maynard Witt.

Maynard Witt was a kind, father-like figure to the District, especially the younger pastors. He was the District President and a capable leader who had emerged from the internal battles over fellowship with Missouri. Already in 1953, he denounced the Missouri Synod and their practices. Because of the small numbers and the close relationship that the District had with Witt, the whole District was behind Witt when he denounced the Missouri Synod. Unfortunately in 1957 when the

Wisconsin Synod did not break with Missouri, Witt resigned from the district presidency. This caused much turmoil and hardship in many of the pastors, including Professor Nitz. It was a struggle not easily forgotten.

In 1961, Professor Nitz accepted a call to serve at Centennial on the south side of Milwaukee. This was a mission congregation that had been started in the centennial year of the Synod. Interestingly enough, while he was a student at the Seminary, he had canvassed this same area while helping out a friend. Now he would return to be their pastor. He served that congregation for ten years. During that time, they built a two room classroom addition on to their grade school. The church and school both flourished during this time. They were the largest contributors of students to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, percentage wise, in Milwaukee.

These were also busy times for Professor Nitz. This is where his family grew up. It was here that as an energetic young pastor, he took on the responsibilities of being the Meditations editor for a year in 1968. He was called to serve on the Seminary Board from 1968 to 1971 as well as the Synodical Audio Visual Aids Committee from 1965 to 1968. He served as the chairman of that board for the last three years of his service. During this time, he was also appointed as secretary on the Advisory Committee on Education which later became the Commission on Ministerial Education. From 1964 to 1970, he was appointed to the Wisconsin Lutheran High School Board. Professor Nitz served as the contributing editor of the Northwestern Lutheran from 1968 to 1974.

Professor Nitz was then called to serve at First Lutheran in LaCrosse, Wisconsin as the first associate pastor in 1971. Fritz Miller was there at the time but was suffering from some health problems. It was a large congregation that easily needed two pastors. During that time he sought to improve the church's public image, solve some internal conflicts and minister to a large number of sick people and shut-ins. He served there for three years until he accepted the call to teach at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. During those three years, he served on the Luther High School

Board in Onalaska, Wisconsin. From 1972 to 1974, he also served on the Commission for Inter-Church Relations.

In 1974, Professor Nitz arrived at the Seminary. He joined the teaching staff with such stalwarts as President Carl J. Lawrenz, Dr. Siegbert W. Becker, Hienrich J. Vogel, Gerald O. Hoeneke, Erwin J. Habeck, Armin W. Schuetze, Martin Albrecht, Frederic E. Blume, and Wilbert R. Gawrisch. The younger members of the faculty included John C. Jeske, Edward C. Freidrich, Joel C. Gerlach, Richard D. Balge, Martin O. Westerhaus, and David P. Kuske. Professor Nitz was the first sixteenth professor. That is, it was the first time the Seminary had a sixteenth man and he was the one. He was called to teach Old Testament and Pastoral Theology. In 1981, he served on the Publication Review Committee until 1985. Professor Nitz will retire in the spring of 1997.

There was much that Professor Nitz enjoyed while teaching at the Seminary. The humor and energy of the students was always enjoyable but what he enjoyed the most was the worship. There is nothing quite like the singing that goes on in chapel, either good or bad. He recognizes the privilege he has enjoyed in singing in that chapel. This he will also sorely miss. There were a few classes that were more difficult to teach than others, but the most enjoyable to teach were Isaiah and Genesis.

Professor Nitz always enjoyed the parish ministry the most in his ministry. The one hard part of becoming a professor was leaving the parish ministry, but probably the hardest part of being a minister was time. There was never enough of it. The two areas where time became difficult was with the family and with the parish. Trying to juggle parish time and family time seemed to be the hardest trick. Professor Nitz said it was difficult to come back from a meeting with all the kids already asleep. One thing he did in order to spend more time with the family was to do everything as a family. He never went fishing alone, but always brought the family along. If he and his wife would go out and play tennis, they would have one

child under one arm while swinging the racquet with the other arm. Family trips and picnics were always time to spend together as a family. Professor Nitz figures that he probably cheated his parish out of more time than his family.

The matter of time in his congregation was also a struggle. After time with his family, he would spend time in his church. Because his service on various boards and committees however, he ended up taking away time that could have been spent in his parish. His biggest regret was that he did not make as many visits to his people's homes as he would have liked to. If he were to do it all over again, he would have gotten into his peoples homes more often.

During his ministry, Professor Nitz later recognized his weaknesses as a young pastor. When he first entered the ministry he didn't ask as many questions as he should have in order to get the full picture. For example, one of his members in Tacoma had moved to Alaska with her husband. She had come back to Tacoma to visit and wanted her child baptized in the parsonage. Professor Nitz agreed. Later he figured that her husband, who was a strict Roman Catholic, probably had the baby baptized in Alaska. She had come to him to have that baby baptized as Lutheran. He thinks he should have probably asked more questions. In spite of being too trusting however, being a young pastor provides one with vigor and high ideals that the Lord uses for his good.

During his time as a more experienced pastor, Professor Nitz notes that there isn't much you can do when you don't catch wind of a problem in your congregation. The one thing that he regrets as a pastor later on in his ministry was not getting into his people's homes. As he became more learned and responsible, more responsibility was put upon him. He wasn't sure quite where to draw the line. This kept him out of his people's homes in his parish. This period of time was during the 1960's when society was experiencing a growing problem in the family, including unwed pregnancies, hurried marriages, and adultery.

There was also much gratification to see the Lord's hand at work in Professor

Nitz's ministry. In the midst of that difficult period of the 1960's, there were cases of adultery where the wounds were healed and the marriage was patched up. In every congregation that he served, there were always problems with alcoholism. In one case, he had a member that struggled with alcoholism for five years. Finally after a long struggle, he was able to stay away from alcohol and became a pillar of the congregation.

CONCLUSION

Professor Nitz leaves us with some wise words as he retires from the Seminary. One thing he would like to warn the younger generation about is materialism. As this country grows and prospers, so do our expectations for earthly gain. A well placed warning is given to all who enter the ministry to avoid the effects of materialism in our lives. On the positive side, Professor Nitz applauds our efforts to study Scriptures for personal devotion. Always back to the Scriptures is good advice for any Christian. Finally, the last bit of advice that Professor Nitz will leave with us is this, "Replace yourselves." He realizes that we are the best recruiters for the ministry. He has many spiritual sons that he feels closely attached to because he sees how the Holy Spirit worked through him to send these young men and women on to be pastors and missionaries. Without someone to spread the gospel, how will it get spread?

Professor Nitz dedicated his life to the ministry. In his retirement, he hopes to do some of those things he hasn't been able to do for a long time. He has two model airplanes that he has been carrying around for the last thirty years that he hopes to put them together. He also likes working with his hands and hopes to use his woodworking tools. Along with woodworking, he would like to read for fun. He plans on reading some of those things that have sat on his shelf for many years as well as rereading some of the things he read as a younger person. His retirement home will

also keep him busy with all the chores that come with being a homeowner.

When Professor Nitz was young, he became fascinated with semi drivers. One of his dreams is to drive a semi truck. Along with driving trucks, he also became fascinated with aviation. Amelia Erhardt was one of his first heartthrobs. Professor Nitz and his wife hope to visit their son and his family in Malawi as well as spend some quality time with the rest of the family.

It was once said by a wise church history professor that a good Lutheran pastor will never become famous. What he meant was that a good Lutheran pastor believes that being a faithful, hardworking pastor is the best way to give glory to God. They do not appear flashy or try to come up with a new spin on the Bible. This is the life of Paul Nitz. He will never become famous in history books. There will probably never be a statue of him in front a university. But Professor Nitz is loved by his students who remember him for the kind, compassionate man that he is. To his family, he is remembered as an excellent example and a loving father. And to the Lord, he is remembered as a sinner washed clean in the blood of Jesus Christ and a faithful minister to his word.