

# A Special Man Helping Special People

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The Wisconsin Lutheran Synod has been blessed with many men (past and present) who are serving their Savior in the public ministry. They are known as pastors (shepherds of their flock). They serve as teachers, pastors, and administrators in all parts of the world. They vary in abilities and talents, but serve their area of ministry to the best of their God-given ability. St. Paul writes to Timothy and reminds him that serving the Lord is an honorable profession. Timothy should be proud to serve in this role. **If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (1 Timothy 3:1).** Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck also confess this truth when they write, “With these words the apostle indicates that those who are pastors ought to be in the ministry because they have desired it. The apostle furthermore implies that the desire for the office of a bishop will spring out of a living faith in the Savior and a desire to serve him.”<sup>1</sup> I never truly understood these words from Paul until recently.

After arriving in Zumbrota, Minnesota, on August 16, 2001, I met a man who demonstrated to me how important the words of Paul are to any pastor. The first time we sat down in his office he read 1 Timothy 3 to me and then said, “Troy, you have to have heart and a desire to serve in the ministry.” With a puzzled look I thought to myself, “Isn’t that why I am here?” He looked at me and said, “Watch your brothers in the ministry! They will show you the zeal of shepherd. They will demonstrate 1 Timothy 3 to you. You will be amazed by the Lord’s hand.” His statement was a correct one, but he probably didn’t expect me to model him and use him to demonstrate this passage from Timothy. As we journey through the life of Pastor Carl Ziemer, I will demonstrate to you the desire and the heart of serving in the public ministry. I will show you a special man helping special people.

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<sup>1</sup> Schuetze, Armin W. and Irwin J. Habeck. *The Shepherd Under Christ*. Milwaukee: NPH, 1989, p. 1.

The zeal for the ministry started early for Carl Ziemer. The Lord was working through his parents to develop him not only for the public ministry, but also for a very special part of the public ministry. Carl's father had a deep love for sharing the gospel with those who had both mental and physical problems. It was this love that led Carl Ziemer to think about the public ministry. His father contributed with money and manpower to these people with special needs in order to help such people hear the gospel too. This planted the seed, but Carl Ziemer needed time to observe his parents and, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the desire to be an overseer.

Carl Ziemer's desire grew over the years. His parents sent him to Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown, WI. While attending Northwestern Prep, his desire and abilities to serve those with special needs grew, but he still did not see God's hand in this. During his time there, he listened to the professors as they spoke about spreading the gospel to all people. The spark that his parents had ignited was still small, but growing. His parents continued to support him with words of encouragement and by their actions. Pastor Ziemer testifies to the witness that his parents gave about serving the Lord and becoming a pastor of the Lord's sheep, "They (his parents) held the office of public ministry as one of the most important things that one could aspire to become."<sup>2</sup> Carl even had some contact with those of special needs while at Northwestern Prep in Watertown. As a student, he would once and awhile make visits to the local Lutheran Home. While on these visits, he came to understand and appreciate the time spent talking and sharing the gospel with the people there. For you see, the people at this home were mentally handicapped.

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<sup>2</sup> Ziemer, Carl. *Interview*. 2929 North Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI. February 10, 2003

After attending Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, Carl Ziemer graduated in May of 1973. He was called to a home mission at Faith Lutheran Church in River Falls, Wisconsin, and also served as the campus pastor at UW-River Falls until 1983. He then received a call to serve a congregation in Zumbrota, Minnesota. Pastor served there from 1983-2002. While serving in these congregations, Carl's God-given abilities would bloom. His love for serving the gospel to those with special needs would drive him. His love for the Lord would build him into an overseer and the desire for a noble task. God's plan was coming together.

While serving as a campus pastor at River Falls, Pastor Carl Ziemer was introduced to the area of Special Ministries. He provided Bible Class and Adult Instruction to those students who desired to know more about their Savior. Pastor Ziemer comments on those years, "They (UW-River Falls students) were special. They had been plucked out of their churches and placed on a campus with no real identity or church to cling to. The Lord provided me with the opportunity to serve them so that they could have an identity. They would grow up stronger every day as children of God. They were special and a challenge, but not in the same way like the people I would encounter later."<sup>3</sup> He would be elected as the first Special Ministries District Coordinator of the Minnesota District soon after his call to Zumbrota, Minnesota. As the coordinator, he would travel to different churches and ladies' groups in Minnesota informing them about groups of people that needed and desired to hear the gospel as much as they did, but who needed help in understanding God's Word. He also provided seminars in helping those with special needs (like the mentally handicapped, those with hearing impairment, those in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

nursing homes, those suffering with dementia and the like). While in Zumbrota, Pastor Ziemer developed and organized for Bible studies, devotions, and chapel services for those with special needs. God had led him down this path for a purpose. God had a special plan in mind for Pastor Carl Ziemer.

In February of 2002, Pastor Ziemer received a call to serve as the Administrator of Special Ministries. He accepted this call in late February. Although it was tough to decide whether he should stay in Zumbrota or head to Milwaukee, God led him to Milwaukee. The 29 years that Pastor Ziemer served in the parish ministry and Special Ministries would serve him well in his new role. His duties, however, would expand greatly. He not only would develop ways to share the gospel with the seniors and the mentally handicapped, but he would go out to the deaf, to those in the prison ministry, to the mentally ill, and to those with other special needs. Pastor Ziemer will not only have to maintain the present programs, but he will have to develop new ones to serve the needs of those who desire to hear about their Savior. This is the new chapter of his life, but God has blessed his 29 years in the parish ministry. He continues to pray that God will bless this new capacity as Administrator of Special Ministries.

The first thing that I have learned from Pastor Carl Ziemer is that God develops and nurtures us for a purpose. Although our lives seem like a series of hits and misses, God does not miss his targets. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of this certainty when he writes, **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).** We can see now that God had a great plan for Carl Ziemer. His parents showed him a love for those who needed to hear the gospel in a special way. His professors and peers

reminded him that the gospel message is for all. The hand of God is truly at work in the life of Carl Ziemer and all his people. As we soon prepare to serve our Lord in the public ministry, we wonder how our experiences will serve the Lord in the future. While serving in a steel mill, a nursing home, a fast food restaurant, or somewhere else seems to have little impact on forming us as pastors, it does. Pastor Ziemer is just one example of how the Lord's hand developed and nurtured a man for service in the Lord's kingdom.

Another thing I learned is the importance of sharing the gospel with all people. There are many people out there who desire to hear the gospel, but their physical and mental disabilities make that very difficult task. We should not turn our eyes away, but seek to find ways to bring the gospel to them. Pastor Randy Ott makes this comment about serving those with special needs. "People who have special needs are no different than us. They need to hear about their sins and that Jesus saved them from their sins. The way in which we present the message, however, will be different. Some learn by seeing and others learn by memorizing just like you and I."<sup>4</sup> Pastor Carl Ziemer exemplified this by treating everyone as an equal. He did not talk down to them, but communicated the gospel in a way that met their needs. We will be faced with those who have special needs in our congregations on a regular basis. Seek them out and share with them the love that Christ has for them. They will smile and you will never regret the honor of serving those with special needs.

Pastor Ziemer also demonstrated that one needs to love the work that he is doing. Although he did not have a smile on his face every minute of the day, you could tell that he loved serving the people that were under his care. Sylvia Buck (one of those special people who recently passed away) expressed that love that Carl Ziemer had for his

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<sup>4</sup> Ott, Randy. *Interview*. 2929 North Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI. March 13, 2003.

people. “He always came in with a smile. He asked me how things were going and always showed concern. The thing I remember most is that as he left, I knew that he cared about me by sharing some wonderful words from God’s Word.”<sup>5</sup> When administering to your people, show them the love that you have for them. They will have comfort and assurance and you will have lasting memories to share.

The final thing that really comes to mind when I think of Pastor Carl Ziemer is that he always treated his members and other pastors as equals. At his farewell ceremony, I told him that it was a pleasure to serve *under him*. He interrupted me by stating that it was his pleasure to serve *with me*. We all have different gifts and characteristics, but none are of lesser value for the ministry. He always spoke with love and respect to members who had disagreements with him and the church, but he never denied the gospel in doing so. Because of his evangelical approach to his members and peers in the ministry, he gained and retained souls for the Lord’s work and kingdom. Pastor Ziemer reminded me of this always on our car rides to circuit meetings. **This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers** (1 John 3:16). Pastor Carl Ziemer did not lead just by words, but by example as well.

Why did I write this paper and produce a video? Why Pastor Ziemer and not someone else? Who is this person? Carl Ziemer is a man whom the Lord guided to serve in a special way. We honor people like Hoenecke, Bading, Mischke, Pieper, and others. These men were known by their accomplishments and by their failures. They were seen as the future of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod during their life on earth. We recognize their work by studying their past. God has and continues to bless this synod

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<sup>5</sup> Buck, Sylvia. *Interview*. 584 East 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Zumbrota, MN. May 2002.

with gifted and talented men. Pastor Carl Ziemer is one of these men. His life, his work, his dedication, and his love for Christ may not be remembered as a historical event in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, but his members in Zumbrota and River Falls, his peers, his family, his parents, <sup>I</sup>me, and the Lord have seen his desire for a noble task. He will forever live in our hearts and minds. His zeal will leave a lasting impression on me, on all those who have had the honor of working with him, and most importantly on those special people with whom he had the privilege to share the gospel. His message, his zeal, and the impression that he left on me, and all others can be summed up in this hymn.

**What a friend we have in Jesus,  
 All our sins and griefs to bear!  
 What a privilege to carry  
 Everything to God in prayer!  
 Oh, what peace and we often forfeit,  
 Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
 All because we do not carry  
 Everything to God in prayer**

**Are we weak and heavy laden,  
 Cumbered with a load of care?  
 Precious Savior, still our refuge—  
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 In his arms he'll take and shield you;  
 You will find a solace there.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Synod. *Christian Worship*. Milwaukee: NPH, 1993, p. 411 vs. 1,3.



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