

*An Account of a Faithful Servant: the Life and Ministry of
Pastor Marwin Putz*

Church History 331

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“Well done, good and faithful servant.” The words of Matthew 25:21 are often spoken in the farewell service for a retiring pastor. With those 6 words, much is being said. Those words look back and cover many years of public ministry, thanking God for providing such a dedicated servant, and thanking the pastor for striving to use the gifts he had been given. Those words also reflect a lifetime of memories for both pastor and congregation. Perhaps they bring to mind smiles of joy and grimaces of frustration stemming from experiences in sharing the Gospel. Perhaps they recall times of tender expression of Christian concern or Christian love and the tears well up in the corners of more than a few eyes. Perhaps they point to the evidence of a dedicated husband or father as his family beams with pride from the front pew. Perhaps they bring the realization of a man’s entire life dedicated to living his faith.

All of these things may indeed come to mind when those words are spoken. And they would all apply in the case of the man I interviewed for this paper, pastor Marvin Putz. He was, and still is a good and faithful servant. In doing research, faithfulness is the first adjective that leapt off the tongues of many that know him. He was a model of faithfulness and dedication to his family and to his ministry. But the first word that he himself would pick out in that passage, would be servant. Humility is the other overwhelmingly obvious characteristic of this man. In fact, when I told him what others thought of him, the first words off of his tongue were something to effect that he hadn’t been perfectly faithful all the time. He is deeply conscious of the fact that he is both sinner and saint at the same time here on earth. He indeed gives God the credit for everything he has been able to accomplish during his years in the ministry.

With this background in mind, here is the documentation of my interview with Pastor Marvin Putz and what I learned in the process.

I have known Pastor Putz since I was a baby. He was ^called to my home congregation of Redeemer in Fond du Lac, WI in 1975. He spent 18 years there before officially retiring in 1993. Since that time he has been serving a part-time ^call to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Eldorado, WI. During these last 25 years, I have been impressed with his faithfulness and dedication to the ministry. The first memory I have of him was coming to church one day during the summer with my mother and seeing Pastor Putz there working. I was amazed by the fact that Pastor was working at school on a Saturday when everyone that I knew didn't go to work on Saturday. As I got older, I realized that Pastor didn't just work on Sundays, but I also realized that Pastor always seemed to be working. Little things like seeing him in the hallways at school, hearing an encouraging word from him, noticing his meticulous attention and respect for church property, and above all, respect for the Word of God add up over the years. He lived his faith, and it was also reflected in his family. I have nothing but respect for him.

My reasons for interviewing Pastor Putz stem from several points.

1. He was very instrumental in my decision to study for the ministry and it will be helpful for me to learn how to pass on that love for the ministry to other young people in the future.
2. Having been born in 1927, he has lived through and experienced many different changes in society and in the church.
3. He has an incredible gift for storytelling and an incredibly sharp mind. Evidence of this was demonstrated in the fact that it took us 5 hours to get a 2 hour interview on tape. The amount of detail he can give is amazing, and the amount of material he can recall is extraordinary.
4. I will, God-willing, soon be entering the public ministry. There is much I can learn from such an example of faithfulness and dedication to the ministry.
5. Pastor Putz is wonderful at explaining the human side of history. Dates and facts are important also, but he can make history come alive with his detail.

Therefore, my goal in interviewing Pastor Putz was this: **To paint a picture of his life and ministry, focusing on how the Lord directed him into the ministry and how He guided and blessed Pastor Putz as he faithfully did His work.**

Before the interview, I did some research. After receiving his permission in February to do the interview, I had conversations with his wife Edna and his son David (a Pastor himself now teaching at Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac, WI), the long-time Principal, David Nell at Redeemer in Fond du Lac, my parents, my grandfather, and several other longtime members at Redeemer. I also talked with several ^{called} workers in the Fond du Lac area who remembered him from his days as Circuit Pastor in the area from 1979-1989. Finally, I spoke with Pastor Eckert who remembered him from his days on the Synod Board of Trustees and also sub-committees at Synod Conventions. Amazingly enough, these people, almost without exception, used the word "faithful" as their first adjective to describe Pastor Putz. The portrait they drew was a conservative WELS pastor, an "old school" kind of man who was deeply committed to spreading the Gospel and living his life as an example of Christian faith. He always wore the black gown, explaining that it was a sign of humility and a reminder to him and the congregation that he was a sinner too. He believed in the values of hard work and discipline and personal contact. He always emphasized respect for the Word and its power.

I also was intrigued by his insight into history. Some of the problems he wrote about many years ago are coming into focus today. For example, much has been made of the importance of Adult Education and Bible Class attendance in recent years. This was

the focus of a conference paper he wrote... in 1968.¹ A second problem he writes about already in 1968 and which is drawing attention today in WLS Summer Quarter courses, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, and *The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, is the subject of our catechism practices. He comments on "graduation syndrome,"

"Then, after about 14 years of a rather constant diet of God's Word, His mercy, and His comforting Gospel, most of the nourishment is suddenly cut off as the child 'graduates' from Sunday School by coming to the end of the 8th grade, by the rite of confirmation which means the end of confirmation instructions, and by reaching the age when his parents no longer teach him the simple Christian truths as they did when he was a small child."²

Another interesting observation found in the essay was his commentary on everyday life. We, today in 2000, consider life to have a much faster pace and seem to think that this is a new development in society. Yet Pastor Putz writes,

"Our fast moving daily lives seem to be crowded with so many secular activities that spiritual matters are often brushed aside, being satisfied to hear the Word in the formal services alone. Our superabundant society has evolved to the point of filling almost all our time with some type of activity – either for earning or spending, thereby seemingly giving a man a full and well-rounded living."³

After compiling this background material, I turned to his daughter, Rita, for some personal data and insight into the family life of the Putz family. She had compiled a family history of his ministry for his retirement in 1993. Her compilation was extremely useful for personal memories of Pastor Putz as a husband and father.⁴ Finally, the dates and historical facts about ^calls and congregations served, etc. I received from Pastor Putz himself in a preliminary interview over the telephone on March 6th.

¹ Putz, Marvin. "The Bible Class," Report to the Western Pastoral Conference, Dakota-Montana District. Aberdeen, SD. 1968. Essay is on file at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI.

² Putz, Marvin. "The Bible Class," pg.2

³ Putz, Marvin. "The Bible Class," pg.1

I used the data gathered from the personal conversations, the preliminary interview, and the family video history to formulate several pages of questions which are attached at the end of this paper. I sent the questions to Pastor Putz on March 11th and over the next two weeks we corresponded via telephone and email to set guidelines and clarify details. Pastor Putz himself did a large amount of research for this interview and went back over his ministry and memoirs and personal library to research the answers to my preliminary questions. For this I owe him a debt of gratitude.

Since we had such an extensive line of questioning worked out and Pastor Putz had many stories and interesting historical details to speak about, the interview was conducted with a minimum of questions on my part. I simply supplied the "triggers" for Pastor Putz so we could work within an orderly framework and answer the questions I wanted to be answered. With this in mind, it may be helpful to listen to the interview with the questions in hand so the listener can follow along.

A final note: Despite the fact that I tested the Seminary video camera twice in the week before the interview; despite the fact that I took along 3 brand new, high quality videotapes; despite the fact that I took along 3 handheld extendable microphones; despite the fact that we tested the recording 3 times during the interview... something went wrong inside the camera. We conducted the interview unaware of the fact that something went wrong about 30 minutes into the interview and the tape was effectively rendered un-watchable. What remains is the audio portion of the video interview conducted at St. Peter's Lutheran Church Annex in Eldorado, WI on March 27th, 2000.

⁴ Putz, Rita. *Family videotape history of Marvin Putz for retirement party, 1993*. Videotape can be found in the personal electronic library of Marvin Putz.

Despite the mechanical problems, this interview was a wonderful learning experience for me. I wanted to know what made a faithful minister. I wanted to know how to be a faithful minister and Christian leader in the Church and in the family even when society changes around us. These questions were answered. Pastor Putz taught me that to live in the future, we must appreciate the past. I noticed his respect for the faith of his fathers and for the office of the ministry. Hearing his stories makes me see how easy I have it today in terms of getting to church and hearing the Gospel. It teaches a lesson in commitment, faith, dedication, and setting priorities. Pastor Putz taught me that in order to raise a Christian family; the leadership in living a Christian lifestyle begins with me. He was a man who led by example and lived his faith. Pastor Putz taught me that true humility means not wallowing in failures and imperfections, but giving credit to God for everything He allows us to accomplish in life. It is a privilege that God uses human beings to be instruments in spreading the Gospel. And finally, Pastor Putz taught me that the key to being a faithful minister is staying in God's Word and letting the LORD rule my life. I put my life in His hands and live my life as best as I can according to His Word. Being faithful and staying faithful for years means staying in God's Word.

I thank Pastor Putz for showing me a wonderful example of what it means to be a faithful servant.

Bibliography

- Putz, Marvin. *The Bible Class: A Western Pastoral Conference Report for the Dakota-Montana District*. Aberdeen, SD. 1968 On file in essay collection at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI.
- Putz, Rita. *Family History of Pastor Marvin Putz*. 1993. Videotape on file in personal video library of Pastor Putz in Fond du Lac, WI. Used with permission of Pastor M. Putz.

Dear Pastor Putz,

Here is a tentative list of questions. These questions are designed to give you a little background and advance notice if you want to start thinking of answers before the interview. The interview itself may not include all of these questions depending on time and the flow of conversation.

My basic purpose in doing this project is based partly upon necessity, and partly upon my interest in history. I needed a project that would be both interesting for me to do and also practical for the ministry. I enjoy looking at the events of the past to learn from them and gain insight for the future. While I enjoy this type of work, I must also confess a bit of a selfish motive – I search for role models of faithful ministers to help me as I begin my own work in the public ministry. I will make enough mistakes, but hopefully, by learning from the past, I will make myself less of an obstacle to the spread of the Gospel.

With that in mind, I thank you for consenting to do this interview with me. I realize that in your “retirement,” (if I may call it that), your time is as valuable as ever.

Goal: To paint a picture of your life and how the Lord directed you into the ministry, and then how He guided and blessed you in the ministry until now as you faithfully did His work.

Part 1: Early years – your family

1. When and where were you born?
2. What was the situation into which you were born (e.g. place, state of the country, economy, etc.)
3. What are some of the things you remember most about your childhood?
4. What was it like growing up during the Great Depression?
5. What were some of the church traditions your family had?
6. What changes took place in church life as you were growing up, e.g. change of hymnal, change of “stewardship program,” change from German to English?
7. How were these changes received?
8. Who was/were your pastor(s) while you were growing up and what, if any, impact did he/they have on you?
9. Could you explain how you got on the road to entering the public ministry?

10. What effect did the history of our nation (e.g. the WWII) have upon life as you grew up?

11. Were there any obstacles your family had to overcome or sacrifices they had to make for their faith?

12. Were there any obstacles in your way of going into the ministry?

Part 2: College and Seminary

1. Do you have any memories of NPS and NWC?

(What were the classes like, the work load, the student life, the profs, etc.)

2. Did you have doubts about going into the ministry and if so, what kept you going?

3. Can you make any comparisons as to how your school experience relates to today? (as in differences between school then and now, how your schooling prepared you for the ministry, what has changed)

4. What did you value most about your Synod education?

5. Having experienced the prep school closing at Mobridge, SD, and now also your collegiate alma mater closing, do you see any similarities?

6. What were your feelings on the school closing "trend"?

7. What did you think of the decision to amalgamate the schools? Was it necessary? Has it been a blessing?

8. What was your student life like at the Seminary?

9. Did you have any one special experience during your college and Sem years that stands out as having prepared you for the ministry?

10. Were there any significant people in your life that encouraged you and helped you prepare for the ministry?

11. During this time you also were courting and preparing for marriage with your wife, Edna. Could you fill in the details about how you met her?

12. If my dates are correct, you were married while at the Seminary. How did this unusual (then) thing happen?

13. What would you tell a young pastor about to enter the ministry to gain from his training?

Part 3: Your early years in the ministry

1. What were your feelings as you were assigned to your first Call in Casa Grande, AZ?

2. Your second Call was to Valley City, ND. How did you feel when you received your Call and what were some of the deciding factors in taking the Call?

3. Could you share any significant happenings that you remember from your years in the ministry in ND?
4. While in ND, you received the opportunity to serve in a number of different areas and even some exploratory work. Could you tell us a little about your work in Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN?
5. Your next Call was to Mandan, ND. Are there any experiences you'd like to share from that Call?
6. While in Mandan, you also got to serve in several other capacities. Could you fill us in on all your activities?
7. Since you were so active in your Dakota years, here is as good a spot as any to ask this... could you detail and set the dates of all the different boards, committees, circuit visitor, circuit pastor, etc work you performed over the course of your ministry?
8. Your next Call was to Great Falls MT. Do you have any special memory from this rather short stay?
9. Your final Call was, of course, to Redeemer, Fond du Lac, WI. With all this moving, how did your family survive? (especially with 6 kids!)
10. One of the hardest parts about being a pastor is managing time and balancing it with his family. How did you manage to raise a large family and have time to do all the work of the ministry also?
11. How did you manage to raise your family so well and keep them faithful to the Word and living Christian lives?
12. Did you do anything to encourage the ministry to your family?
13. You also moved quite a bit. Here we could talk a little bit about the various places you served and special items and memories you would like to share.

Part 4: Later years in the ministry and various miscellaneous topics (These questions may have already been asked and answered as part of the earlier topics and memories)

1. Your final Call was to Fond du Lac, WI, where you stayed 18 years until retirement in 1993. Do you have any memories of high/low points that took place while you served here?
2. Were there any major problems that you had to deal with over the course of your ministry?
3. Redeemer had a church fire. Not many people will have to deal with that kind of a unique experience. What affect did it have on the ministry there?

4. You also served as a Circuit Pastor for 10 years here. Do you have any special memories you'd like to share about this experience?
5. During this time, you endured quite a rough period of time, experiencing the death of two children, Karen and Dale. If you would like (and you do not have to) perhaps you could share this with us, and share how you dealt with these sad times in your life and ministry.
6. What effect did the Church Growth movement have on you and your ministry?
7. What effect did the break with Missouri have on your ministry?
8. You obviously have made an impression on me as someone who is an example of a faithful pastor. What are some necessary ingredients or tips that you have practiced or sought for being a faithful minister?
9. Do you have any favorite Scripture passages or sections that have gotten you through tough times in your life and the ministry?
10. What are some of the challenges that pastors today face and are these different challenges that pastors faced 10, 20 or even 40 years ago? How has society changed the ministry?

Well, I hope this long list has not overwhelmed you. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list or even an exact list of questions. They are simply guidelines to help think about possible things you would like to talk about. The interview will be more conversational.

Thus, you'll notice that some of these questions are very general and I will not be asking all of these word for word in our interview. I kept many of them as general as possible because you know better than I do what things stick out as being memorable in your life. This allows us room to discuss what we would like and yet have some structure for the interview and get a pretty good outline for the points I would like to cover. I realize many of these questions will be combined and answered as you relate your significant experiences from your different Calls.

I hope this gives you some ideas as to what we can talk about on Saturday during the interview.

Once again, thanks for doing this interview with me!

God's Blessings,
Dan Rautenberg