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### **Pastor Robert Voss: Dedicated to Christian Education**

The license plate is familiar to most people who might see it in Watertown, Wisconsin. It reads, "NWC." Many who see that license plate probably think it belongs to a man who is holding on too long to a school that is no longer called Northwestern. But, really, that is not the case. That license plate is, in many ways, a reflection of what is important to Pastor Robert Voss. I found this out as I was able to sit down with him for an interview in which we talked about the way that education has shaped his entire life. Through a lifetime of service, Pastor Robert Voss has been dedicated to Christian education.

Pastor Voss began studying for the public ministry in 1939 at Northwestern Prep School in Watertown, WI. After graduating, he moved on to Northwestern College on the same campus. From there, he continued his education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I wanted to ask Pastor Voss about his time at the worker training schools and how they shaped his views on the importance of worker training in our synod. The one thing that stood out most from his time on the Northwestern campus was the tremendous camaraderie that was built between all of the men who were there studying for the ministry, regardless of if you were in college or high school. Pastor Voss also mentioned three men who had a great impact on his life and his ministry. They were Prof. Franzmann, Prof. Lawrenz and Coach Umnus. Each had an impact on how Pastor Voss would lead in his ministry.

After graduating from the Sem in 1950, Pastor Voss served as a tutor at Northwestern. It was interesting to hear about his perspective on being on the other side of the classroom.

In 1951, Pastor Voss was assigned to Faith in Fond du Lac. During his four years there, Pastor Voss was very involved in Winnebago Lutheran Academy and organizing their building committee. In 1955, Pastor Voss moved to Siloah in Milwaukee. Serving a church with more than 2,000 communicants, Pastor Voss was thrown into the fire when the elder pastor died suddenly, leaving him by himself. Pastor Voss reflects on this as a time when he really had to concentrate and develop his administration skills. These are skills that would serve him well later in his service. While at Siloah, Pastor Voss had the unique privilege of serving with his father, Pastor Luther Voss. In talking with Pastor Voss, it was easy to see that this was a special time in his life. In regards to his time in the parish, I wanted Pastor Voss to talk about a pastor's involvement in the education provided by Christian day schools. He had great insight on the need for pastors to be deeply involved and interested in the students from his church. He also spoke of the special opportunity that pastors have to influence young men and women to consider serving in the public ministry.

Pastor Voss made a shift in ministry in 1963 when he became President at Wisconsin Lutheran College. It was at this point in his ministry that Pastor Voss would become fully focused on worker training. It was extremely beneficial to hear Pastor Voss as he shared his thoughts on his service there. Specifically, Pastor Voss shared a great deal on the relationships that he had with teachers he served with. Through these experiences, Pastor Voss has a great deal of insight to offer on an issue that is continually present for pastors; that is the pastor-teacher harmony.

Pastor Voss' service in worker training continued in 1970 when he became the Executive Secretary of the Board for Worker Training. As the lead administrator, Pastor Voss led this board as they worked to unify all of the worker training schools in the Wisconsin Synod.

After 17 years of work on the Board for Worker Training, Pastor Voss took a call back to where he started. In 1987, he became just the 6<sup>th</sup> president in the long history of Northwestern College. In talking with Pastor Voss, it is clear that the pride that he continues to have in NWC is not in what ceased to be in 1995, but is in what has continued even through the amalgamation. He is proud of the purpose of our worker training schools. This pride is very evident as you speak with Pastor Voss and he shares what he values in Christian education and worker training.

Through this interview, I wanted to go through more than just a biographical sketch. I wanted Pastor Voss to reflect and teach through his words. I was able to learn much about a different aspect of the pastoral ministry and am very thankful for the insight that he gave.

This interview was conducted by Thomas Voss with Pastor Robert Voss on December 2, 2009 at his home in Watertown, WI.

#### Chapter Titles and Times

- I. Pastor Voss Reflects on His Years as a Student – 0:21
- II. On the Other Side – 15:46
- III. Starting a Life of Service – 17:48
- IV. A Shift in Ministry – 26:35
- V. Executive Secretary of Board for Worker Training – 45:53
- VI. Back to the Start – 56:14
- VII. General Observations – 1:05:46

## Interview Questions for Rev. Robert J. Voss

I would like this interview to be about your ministry, specifically focusing on Christian education.

1. Northwestern Prep:
  - What led you to attend Northwestern Prep School?
  - What stands out from your time as a student there?
  - Speaking on your time there as a student, what would you list as positives of the prep school?
  - What would you list as negatives of the prep school?
2. After that you moved on to Northwestern College:
  - What do you remember most from your time there as a student?
3. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary:
  - What was most memorable from your years at the Seminary?
  - Looking back at all of your school years at various institutions, did you have anyone that influenced you, somebody that you took a lot from?
  - How well did the WELS system train you?
4. Tutor at Northwestern
  - Talk about what it was like to be on the other side of the classroom:
5. In the Parish
  - You served two congregations, did either of those churches have Christian day schools?
  - How important is it for churches to be a part of children's education?
  - How involved were you in Christian education while serving as a pastor?
  - How influential do you think pastors and teachers can be in encouraging young people to serve in the public ministry?
6. A Shift in Ministry: WLC

- In 1963, you moved to a different aspect of ministry, what attracted you to the position of President at WLC?
- Of course, WLC back then was a teacher training college. What were some of the goals that you had as President?
- In 1967, you presented a paper on Pastor-Teacher harmony. What brought about this essay?

What challenges in regards to this were present in the synod?

- How were you able to work on this directly through WLC?
- What insight were you able to have as a pastor serving as president of the teacher's college?
- Obviously, this has continued to be an issue in our synod. Without focusing too much on the amalgamation of NWC and DMLC, how would you assess this harmony through the years?
- How important is this topic for the church?
- How can we continue to build this harmony?
- What positives came out of the combination of all of our teacher training schools?
- Reflect on your 7 years at WLC:
- In 1970, you presented another paper entitled, "How to Hold the Respect of a Pupil." Would the thoughts of that paper be one of the main things that you tried to instill in the graduates of WLC?
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#### 7. Executive Secretary of Board for Worker Training

- What were the parameters of this call? This board?
- How much did your past experience with the Synodical schools influence your decision to take your call as Executive Secretary of Board for Worker Training?
- What were some other attractions to this call?
- You were the first Executive Secretary of the Board for Worker Training, what brought about the founding of this board?
- Who did you serve with and what did those men bring to Worker Training?

- What challenges did you, as a board, face?
- What were the goals for this board?
- What were some of the accomplishments in your long tenure in this position?

#### 8. NWC

- After 17 years on the Board for Worker Training, you received the call to serve as President of NWC, how difficult was it to leave a position that you had served for so long?
- You came as only the 6th President in the 121 years of Northwestern, how much of an honor was it to be called to such a position at a school with so much history and tradition in our Synod?
- Were there any specific reasons, that you are aware of, that you were called to be President?
- Shortly after taking over as President, you addressed the administration team, stressing a need take the school into the 90's. What problems did you see in the current setup that needed to be addressed?

What were your goals in this area? What were you able to accomplish in this area?

- What were some of the other goals that you had for yourself and for the school?
- Did you see any problems in worker training at the school that you hoped to change? If so, what were they?
- What did you hope to build upon that was already present at the college?
- What made NWC such a special place?

#### 9. General Questions

- After your many years of service in the area of education, reflect on the blessings of Christian education and worker training in our Synod?
- What do we especially need to hang on to and continue as we go forward?
- Are there any areas of concern that you see that affect us now or could do so in the future? If so, what can we do to change that?