

Church History Interview  
with Pastor Edward & Ruth Renz  
by David Bendix

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Church History  
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Professor Korthals

**Church History Project**  
**Interview with Pastor Edward & Ruth Renz**  
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*"May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other."  
~ Genesis 31: 49*

The passage cited above was first spoken by Laban to Jacob when they parted ways at Mizpah. Today this passage is the motto for Pastor and Mrs. Renz. They saw this passage as their mission statement when they went to minister to our service people in Europe back in 1973. They were eager to go and help "keep watch" over God's people as they served in a distant land - a land far from their families, from their pastors, and from their churches. Their greatest joy in life was to be able to serve in such a capacity.

From childhood, it was determined by his mother, that Edward was going to be a pastor. He never argued that fact. In December of 19~~65~~<sup>4</sup>, that became a reality. Pastor Renz grew up near Ann Arbor, MI, always wanting to get back and visit Europe where his Father had been born. At the first Synod Conventions that he was able to attend he listened to the controversy in the WELS over military chaplaincy. His time at the Seminary was altered and sped up because of World War II. It is interesting that as you look back, his whole life was preparation for his future calling as the WELS first European civilian chaplain.

He served in places in South Dakota and Michigan before accepting a call to the infant South Atlantic District. While he was in Tampa, Florida he saw the increase of 16 preaching stations, and at the same time saw a district maturing. In December of 1972 however, he received a call to serve in Europe. His immediate reaction, "Give me a

couple of minutes to pack my bags.” He loved what he was involved with in Florida, but to go and serve in Europe, that is what it seemed he was destined for.

The timing was perfect. Pastor Carl Otto had just been in Europe doing a feasibility study. While there, he found nearly 300,000 American troops, with over 220,000 in Germany alone. Quite a few of these were WELS members with no one there to look after their spiritual needs. The timing for Synod was perfect as well, for they were still basking in the “Golden Years” under Synod President Oscar Naumann where money wasn’t a deterring factor.

While living in Gau-Bischofsheim, located in West Germany, he proceeded to minister to nearly all of Europe. During their time there, Pastor Renz served military personnel, as well as overseas American businessmen and women in more countries than can easily be recounted. Throughout their nine years of service there (1973-1982) they visited people and/or people came to them from as far away as Iceland, Turkey, Denmark and even North Africa. All told, Pastor communed 5,140 people, baptized 77 people, and did 24 confirmations, 12 children, and 12 adults.

A normal month of work would include services at various military bases, as well as trips to visit individuals all over the continent, including various naval stations, all in order to try to catch “his members” while they were docked. In the highly concentrated area (for WELS Lutherans at least) of Frankfurt, services would be held at the otherwise vacated Atterberry Chapel every month. Services were also held at Manheim and Nuernberg on a regular basis. Every service that he conducted, whether it was at a chapel for hundreds, or in a ship’s quarters for one, was a communion service.

One of the other ministry opportunities which they started (and still continues today) were the European Retreats. These were extensively planned gatherings of WELS service people for an entire weekend, usually one over Reformation in the Fall, and over Easter in the Spring. They recall that people couldn't wait for these to come and didn't want to leave when they were over. The reason, they enjoyed the Christian fellowship they experienced while they were there. Pastor said that they also enjoyed them because they didn't have to wear their uniform!

Ruth played an integral role alongside her husband. She was the Typist, the Gravy-maker, the Hostess, the Sunday School teacher, and certainly a great supporter of her husband. All of the correspondence to the military personnel, which had to be typed and mailed, was something she took care of. She also was the children's Sunday School Teacher, often meeting in a hallway, or on the floor. She would also help the young wives of military personnel, who often had no one to teach them or mentor them. For instance, when Pastor and Mrs. Renz would visit a young couple for a service, it would often be followed by a nice meal. On numerous occasions Mrs. Renz would help the young wives with things like showing them how to make the gravy. Cookies and refreshments would follow every service, and of course Ruth took care of that too. Pastor commented how great of a blessing it was that she was able to go along on nearly every trip he made.

Their experiences are far too many to totally be put down on paper, or in a video. But one thing is certain, they will always be pondered in their hearts, and be remembered in the hearts of those whom they served. They loved serving their Savior and meeting such a great need in other people's lives. They were greatly appreciated by the people

they served, shown in the fact that many have still kept in contact with them to this day. They currently are planning on attending a wedding down south of one of the young children Pastor baptized and for whom Mrs. Renz served as a sponsor.

What a privilege to be able to talk with, and get to know people who found such joy in their life's work of serving and ministering to others. The Lord certainly used Pastor and Ruth to keep watch over his people while they were serving in Europe. But he is still using them, and their story, today.

Church History Questions  
Interview with Pastor & Mrs. Renz  
David Bendix

Pastor, let's start with a you telling me a little about your background.  
(father born in Germany, you in Ann Arbor, never got to go to Europe as a child)

Mrs. Renz, please tell me a little about your background.

Pastor, describe your trip to the ministry.  
(pre-determined, schools you went to)

Mrs. Renz, how did you meet your husband?  
(driving up Friestadt Road)

When did you graduate from the Seminary?  
(explain Dec. graduation)

Where have you served?  
(everything up until Europe)

When did you receive the European Chaplain Call?

What was your immediate reaction?

What was your reaction Mrs. Renz?

As far as you are able, please explain what events led up to the Synod extending this call?  
This is really a 2 part question I guess.  
First, what were the circumstances in the Synod that led to this?  
And, what were the circumstances in Europe that led to this?

When did you arrive in Europe?

Mrs. Renz, tell me a little bit about where you lived once over there, and what living arrangements did you have?

Was it easy to acclimate to life over there?  
(did you know the language?)

What were the experiences of the WELS chaplaincy program up to this point?

Where there other chaplains serving over there before you arrived?  
(no WELS; But there were Missouri Synod chaplains)

In what capacity were the Missouri Synod chaplains serving?

What was their reaction to you being there as civilians?

What was the reaction you got from the WELS service-people and their families?  
(they viewed you as their Pastor)

What were the differences in being a Pastor over there as compared to here?

How was it then that you served these people?

Describe one of your services, would it be like one we normally see on a Sunday morning around here?  
(always Communion, offerings as normal)

What did your mission offerings go to?  
How far spread out where these people you were called to serve?

How did you know where they were, and how did you find them?  
(show the paper from the WELS)

How did you communicate with this vast array of people spread over most of Europe?

What kind of information did this newsletter have in it?  
(show one briefly)

Understanding you didn't have services at the same place every week, what would a normal month of service have looked like over there?

What other types of interaction did you have with the people you served?  
(Retreats – explain and examples)

Who planned these? How often did they occur? What was the attendance?

How many countries did you serve people in while you were serving over there?

Any idea of how many people you were able to minister to?  
(# of Communion, Baptisms, Confirmations)

Any contact with them still?

Were you alone in serving over there?  
(Klug call)

Comment on your wife's role while there?

Mrs. Renz, describe the reaction you received?

Overall, what feelings are you left with after being there?

*\*\*Italicized remarks were provided from information I had received on former visits with Pastor and Mrs. Renz. Their sole purpose was not to direct their flow of thought, but merely to help explain why I was asking the question I was.*