

517 West Second Street
Northfield, Minnesota 55057
July 1967

Dear family and friends,

The idea of a general letter to all my family and friends was suggested by a similar letter produced by my uncle Wesley. It impressed me as a very good way to get a lot of information across to a number of people at one time.

At this writing, I am enjoying a month's vacation after my first year in the Methodist ministry. As most of you know, I have been serving (and will continue to serve for another year) what might be called a four-point charge. Two of the points are the two colleges here in Northfield, Carleton and St. Olaf, where I am responsible for the Methodist students. The other two are small rural churches near Northfield, which itself has a population of under 10,000. Carleton is one of the best private liberal arts colleges in the United States; sometimes it is called "Midwestern Ivy League". It has a student body of about 1400, with about 170 Methodists among them. St. Olaf is a Lutheran liberal arts college with about 2400 students, 130 being Methodists. About 87% of the students at St. Olaf are Lutheran. The enclosed campus ministry report will give you a good idea of the work with students.

One of the small rural churches, McKinley Chapel Methodist Church, is in the little town of Castle Rock, 6 or 7 miles north of Northfield. (Since I did not know where Northfield was until I was appointed here, there are probably some of you who do not know that it is 40 miles south of Minneapolis.) Castle Rock has a population of about 100. There is a bank, a general store, a grain elevator, and a scattering of homes--and of course, the one church. Most of the members come from the surrounding farm community; many of these however are not actually engaged in farming. There are 65 members but only about 25% of these are to be seen in church on an average Sunday morning. Altho the church is not doing well as a church, it is able to turn out large numbers of people for annual special events like the Ice Cream Social which will happen again this month. The parsonage in Castle Rock has been rented to one of the families of the church and I am living in an apartment in Northfield, which puts me closer to both the campuses and to Little Prairie.

The Little Prairie Methodist Church is about 6 miles southwest of Northfield. You will not be able to find it on your map because there is no town there. It is just the church standing alone at a country crossroad. Across the road stands the Little Prairie schoolhouse, which was built in 1885. The community takes its name from this little one-room building where many of the members of the Little Prairie church got the first 8 grades of their education. The school of course is no longer in use and is now owned by the church and is used occasionally for Summer Bible School classes. The Little Prairie Church has 95 members, about 60% of whom are likely to be present on an average Sunday morning. About half of the members are engaged in farming--usually with modern techniques and the rest are retired or living in Northfield or the small near-by town of Dundas. There is much more community spirit in Little Prairie than in Castle Rock, which is one of the major reasons the Church is doing better.

It has been a new experience for me to be in churches this small since my upbringing in the 4400-member Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church in Minneapolis. There are many advantages to small churches, especially in human community. Everyone literally knows everyone else, and it has been easy for me to learn the names of all of the members and some of their children. But there are also disadvantages, such as the narrowness which necessarily comes from a small circle of friends. The older traditions of church life hang on longer in small rural churches than in urban churches. This has presented a theological problem for me this year. It has been a continual struggle to bring the theology I developed a year ago at Union Theological Seminary in New York City down to the level of these people, and I do not think that I have done a good job of it. But I will try harder this coming year. There are some signs that some of the things I have been saying have been getting thru.

Just for the record, here are the titles of the sermons I preached in this first year of my ministry:

Why Do We Suffer?

Preoccupation

The Freedom of Christian Man

The Fact of Death and the Fear of Death

Education vs. Indoctrination

PERSPECTIVES ON THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT AND ITS SOLUTION (This is the general title of a 30-sermon series which is still in process; hereinafter it will be abbreviated "PERSPECTIVES")

PERSPECTIVES: 1. From Indictment to Justification

Seeing God in Nature

PERSPECTIVES: 2. From Angst to Peace

PERSPECTIVES: 3. From Slavery-to-sin to Redemption

Something About Luther

PERSPECTIVES: 4. From Meaninglessness to Meaningfulness

PERSPECTIVES: 5. From Doom to Salvation

Why Thank God?

PERSPECTIVES: 6. From Emptiness to Fullness

How Does God Guide Us?

PERSPECTIVES: 7. From Estrangement to Adoption

Unpacking the Incarnation (at the Northfield Methodist Church)

PERSPECTIVES: 8. From Thrownness to Picked-upness

PERSPECTIVES: 9. From Enmity to Reconciliation

PERSPECTIVES: 10. From Boredom and Purposelessness to Purposefulness

PERSPECTIVES: 11. From Sin to Sinlessness (Dying to Sin or the Death of Sin)

PERSPECTIVES: 12. From Having-to-die to Freedom from the Anxiety of Death

PERSPECTIVES: 13. From the Old Self to the New Life (Dying and Rising with Christ)

How Race-Relations Sunday Promotes Segregation

PERSPECTIVES: 14. From Superfluity to Usefulness

PERSPECTIVES: 15. Having Your Demons Cast Out

Special Service of Self-Examination: Are You a Christian? (bulletin enclosed)

Why Are You Untying that Colt?

Shall We Be Raised from the Dead?

PERSPECTIVES: 16. From Forlornness to Orientation

What Protestantism Stands For (at Salem Methodist Church in Inver Grove Heights--south of St. Paul)

The Future of the Little Prairie Church (at Castle Rock, new Hymnals dedicated)

PERSPECTIVES: 17. From the Old Eon to the New Creation

PERSPECTIVES: 18. From Guilt to Freedom from Guilt

The Tensions Between Faith and Family

PERSPECTIVES: 19. From Life Under the Law to Life Under Grace

PERSPECTIVES: 20. From Insecurity to Security-in-Dependence

Belonging to the Church

The Distinction between Jewish Methodism and Christian Methodism Further Considered

The Point of View for My Work as a Preacher

(Note: There were some Sundays when there was no sermon because of a special service, and there were also Sundays when only a Communion Meditation was given--these have been omitted above.)

My life as a minister has included all of the things that one might expect, besides the preaching, I conduct a Bible study group in each church. We are currently studying some of Paul's letters. I have baptized about 20 children, conducted about a dozen funerals, and performed two marriages (one of which was on the North Shore of Lake Superior--my younger brother Warren and his wife Doris).

Altho my apartment is rather modest, the other conditions of my life are more luxurious. I have a carpeted, air-conditioned office in the new Northfield Methodist Church--complete with secretarial services. My means of transportation is a tan 1963 Buick Special Deluxe with power steering and air-conditioning. I also bought a used IBM Executive electric typewriter whose work you are now reading.

Another event of interest to my family and friends was the publication of my first article, "Bultmann's Understanding of God" in the Fall 1966 issue of the Christian Scholar. I have a few more reprints of this for those of you who did not get one and would like to read it.

I am still single and am likely to remain so for a number of years yet. Any attempt to explain this would only offend those of my family and friends who are married.

"How is a SARTREAN THEOLOGY Possible?" my Bachelor of Divinity thesis will soon be mimeographed and will be available to anyone who wants to read it. It is my own existentialist theology beginning with the world-view of Jean-Paul Sartre.

I enclose one of the Sunday bulletins used at Little Prairie. It gives you a glimpse of that church (drawn by one of the girls in the church) and of what I have been trying to do theologically there.