

# How to Research for a Biography

## *Resources for Preserving and Proclaiming the Story of Christ's Church*



**W**riting biographies of past pastors of a congregation is both meaningful and important because it aligns with the biblical call to "remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Hebrews 13:7). These accounts honor those who faithfully shepherded the church, often embodying the humility and frailty described in "we have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4:7), as they carried the gospel through seasons of challenge and triumph. By capturing their stories, we preserve the legacy of God's work through imperfect yet devoted servants, reminding the congregation of His grace and faithfulness across generations. Such biographies not only inspire gratitude and reflection but also encourage future leaders to serve with the same faith and perseverance.

### Know Your Sources

In theory, biographical information is available on all past and present clergymen and teachers in the service of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, there is no one single source that will readily divulge all the information a researcher may desire. If the interest lies simply in pinpointing important dates in the lives of these people, usually one or two sources will suffice. If, however, the interest goes deeper than this, additional steps generally will become necessary. These steps and their usefulness are outlined below:

- Find obituaries appearing the *Gemeindeblatt*, the *Northwestern Lutheran*, and other church publications. Please bear in mind that not every clergyman and teacher was "written up" at the time of their death. Some notable exceptions are individuals who did not die in service, individuals who died in retirement and, on occasion, may have been omitted, and an obituary assigned to an author who failed to comply. Others may have ended their ministry in other synods and would likely have an obituary in their publications.
- The synod archives may have biographical files that contain copies of biographical sketches, orders of service, obituaries, photographs,

personal writings and other information on individuals. Portions of these files may be restricted. Materials found in this section will generally represent the total of available resources on a certain subject. Thus, for example, sermons, other writings, letters, etc., will be found in the same file. They also may contain copies of articles about the subject and other primary and secondary resource material that is usually classified as biographical.

- The seminary historical essay file online contains many research papers that have biographical focus or content.
- Congregational histories can be another excellent resource. After it has been established which parishes were served by the subject, additional leads may be obtained from the histories of these congregations. Since not all parishes have published their histories, this source may not always be available. Additional notes, orders of service, and smaller documents on congregations are also found in vertical files, which are partially indexed. Congregational histories may also contain photographs of the subject.
- District and synodical proceedings may also yield biographical information. Lists of convention delegates present and absent and the president's official report of pastoral and teacher changes may help to pinpoint dates.

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