

Questionnaire/Interview with Rev. David Keck  
Conducted by Shannon L. Smith  
Crumley Archives  
July 19, 2020

- 1) David, you were born in Sterling, Illinois in 1938. Tell us a little bit about what life was like for a Lutheran in this part of the country.
  - a) What are some of your earliest memories about parish life? At St. John's Lutheran I first learned the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23 (and mom tried to teach me how to behave when my dad was preaching! – not too successfully!
  - b) Do you have many early memories of wartime America? Stomping tin cans; Mr. Shoemaker being our air raid warden; learning about ToJo, Hitler and Mussolini and singing "I ain't gonna study war no more" at a Lutheran summer camp at Long Lake; also singing all those wonderful patriotic songs ("Anchors Away", "Off We Go ...") and hearing Kate Smith sing "God Bless America". In First Grade there were "patriotic" movies shown and a memorial service at our school when President Roosevelt died.
  - c) Were wartime-politics a part of Church life? No memory of that but my dad did have 1100 members and so must have had many dozens in service with whom he kept up with by letter in those days of no email or cell phones.
  
- 2) You were baptized at First Lutheran in Albemarle, NC by Dr George Rhodes. It seems like you come from a long line of Lutherans. Can you tell us more about your family history? Grampa Rhodes was my mom's father and my other Grampa, Dr. Albert Keck, Sr., was a Lutheran pastor in Indiana. I became a fourth-generation Lutheran pastor (Rhodes side) and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the Keck side and now our son, the Rev. Dave Keck, Jr. at St. Mark's, Mooresville, continues those lines. Interestingly, my grandfather Keck preached at my dad's ordination in 1934 (as President of the Indiana-Michigan Synod of the ULCA); my father preached at the ordination of 13 of us at Trinity Lutheran, Rocky Mount, NC (101 degrees that Sunday afternoon w/ no a/c! So I've joked for years about being ordained by fire; and then I was asked to do the same when Dave and four others were ordained at St. John's Lutheran, Salisbury, in 1996, the 3<sup>rd</sup> father in succession to preach as his son's ordination.
  
- 3) In 1952, you were confirmed at Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Columbia SC.
  - a) Can you share some of your memories of that congregation and your contemporaries? We were confirmed on Palm Sunday with first communion on Maundy Thursday (pretty much the practice then). Dr. Carl Honeycutt was pastor. I remember riding the bus from Eau Claire to Ebenezer every Monday for the two years of classes, and having to memorize much of the catechism (which stuck with me later on and to this day). Several of my classmates were close including James Dickert, Zenith Hallman, Elaine Mayfield, and Wade Hampton Dent (also, like me, an Eau Claire Jr/High student). We were all together in a wonderful 4-part youth choir directed by seminarian T.C. Plexico and we sang not only at Ebenezer but at a woman's prison outside Columbia. Our youth group was most active, but one of my saddest times was when seminarian Marvin Shealy, our beloved youth advisor, died suddenly one night of a cerebral hemorrhage, and we all attended his funeral at Wittenberg, Leesville (I think). I couldn't understand how God could have allowed this, but it did get me to thinking that maybe I should take his place (I learned many years later that his older brother, Armand Shealy, a teacher. also entered the ministry in part for that reason!). I loved Ebenezer and

by 9<sup>th</sup> grade was singing in the senior choir. It was a thrill to go back in the early 60's as a seminarian to worship there. My older brother George ended up an intern there 1960-61 so we had that connection, too.

- b) What was life like in post-war America for a young man? We probably didn't think much about this in our youth, except that 1) I remember after we moved to Lincolnton, NC in 1945 and lived on Main Street that there was real jubilation in August when Japan surrendered and the cars went up and down the street blowing horns; 2) In the mid 1950's I remember on the way to Lutheridge for a week (from Columbia) that the radio had news of Soviet Union atomic bombs and I remember being afraid we'd be attacked! 3) In 1955 I was Hickory Hi's first American Field Service exchange student abroad (to Denmark) , and I saw first hand the "remains" of WWII ruins when we landed in Bremerhaven, Germany and spent our first night in a former luftwaffe air force base; sobering, just 10 years after that war ended! At LTSS (1948-53) I had known and loved students from Germany, Austria, Japan, etc. (Eberhart Pellens, Gottfried Clapper, Ernst Glacier, Atsumi Tasaka, etc. so understood that former enemies did not have to remain such! It was also in Columbia that my love of classical music "blossomed," as I sang in choruses and played clarinet in the high school band as well as the Columbia Youth Symphony.
- c) Was Christianity a deeper part of the culture than it is today? In what way? Greater church attendance and involvement; it was just expected.

Many of our readers "hail" from Ebenezer, and would enjoy your reflections.

- 4) You graduated from LR in 1960. This was a contentious time to live in the South. Please give us some insight of day to day life, public concerns and unrest, and how Lutherans in your community faced day to day challenges. As a Protestant denomination concerned with racial equality, do you recall any efforts made to bring communities together? Growing up in the segregated south, I knew few African Americans. I knew and loved Mirell and Arnold, custodians at Grampa Rhodes' church (who taught me "Hambone, hambone, you ain't sick; all you need is a Hickory stick!"). Then there was O.T. Barr, custodian at LTSS (who was still there in the 60's!). We had a professor at L-R, Dr. M.L. Stirewalt, Jr. (whose father had been on the LTSS faculty in the 40's & 50's), who tried to bridge the gap between some of the white and black congregations in Hickory. One of the three summers I worked as a singing waiter at Blowing Rock's "Farmhouse," there was a young black student, Robert, who was a dishwasher in the kitchen, but who could sing as well if not better than most of us white waitstaff. But his "place" was in the kitchen, and I really began to question the inequity of such a system; he was a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta. At L-R (1956-60) we had only a few students of color – all foreign - but no American blacks.
- 5) It was the same with LTSS the next four years. However, Professor Benny Bedenbaugh spoke many times about the problem of Race incl. when the 4 young girls were killed in a church bombing in Birmingham. Two of my fellow students, Henry Mann McKay and Andrew Jackson Zipperer, did go to mission congregations in Jackson, Mississippi, which spoke well of their willingness to begin ministry in places of conflict.
- 6) In 1964 you graduated from Southern Seminary.
  - a) Tell us about the professors that made the greatest impression on you, your favorite classes, what the spiritual formation was like, extra-curricular activities, and how your time at seminary prepared you for ministry. See #5 above. Seminary life was good in the early '60's; my first year I was single living in Beam Dorm with roommate Gene Beck. My wife to be,

Diana Rudisill, was rooming in Eau Claire with Linda Lockrow, and on June 10, 1961, Diana and I married, as did Linda and seminarian Phil Deese (same date, separate venues). Diana was teaching first grade at Hyatt Park School across from the seminary, so it was an ideal situation (she continued there incl. my senior year after internship in Charlotte); that was interesting because I'd been in grades 5 & 6 in that school after we moved there in 1948. Things I remember best: singing in the seminary choir, and wonderful choir trips to Virginia, the SE and Florida; watching the new student union being built and getting to play pool and eat there; doing my thesis under the supervision of Dr. H. George Anderson (a favorite professor); living on Kinderway Avenue and then on Horry Street (in the days of high heat and no a/c; Dr. F. Eppling Reinartz as beloved President, and watching him kneel in chapel after President Kennedy was killed (I don't remember any kneeling prior to that time – and the chapel was on the west end of Beam Dorm;

- b) What were your favorite subjects? Church History; homiletics;
- c) Did you have any theologians you especially admired? Reinhold Niebuhr, Luther
- d) What were the major social and cultural concerns on the minds of your fellow seminarians? Getting our first calls!<sup>1</sup>

7) Your father, Dr Albert Keck, was a professor at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. Tell us about his teaching and what it would have been like to be his student [presuming you were]. Dad left LTSS in 1953 to become pastor of the Lenoir-Rhyne College Church, St. Andrew's, so I never had him – not even, regrettably, for confirmation. I do remember that life was difficult for him in Columbia as he'd left Emmanuel, Lincoln, at a lower salary as a professor (with 4 of us children to support; mom didn't work outside the home), and was not willing to go along with the prevailing view of most of the faculty that EVERY student should be passed regardless of ability; he taught homiletics, liturgics, and practical theology, and when he left they replaced him with 3 new profs (he was pretty overwhelmed in those days but very dedicated to being the best he could be). He and mother would have students over (the big square brick house on the

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<sup>1</sup> Addendum. When I asked Rev. Keck if he could elaborate, he added:

"6D - Major Cultural & Social Concerns: I was being honest when my answer was "getting our first calls" (by then I was also tired of writing answers!!!), for most of us were not very involved in that "outside world." There was the issue of race, just as today, but I honestly don't remember much concern on our parts other than Bedenbaugh's and Hoefler's talking about the same and our thinking about such. Some of my classmates were very anti National Council of Churches (because of their racial stands) but I only learned of that sentiment AFTER we graduated and were out in the world. I assumed all my classmates were of the same mind, but that wasn't the case. In my first congregation, we had a black Mo-Synod seminary student to preach one Sunday, and also invite the men's group from the black Mo-Synod Grace Lutheran (G'boro) to eat with our men's group. I had some pushback, but nothing major, and I was always open to such.

On Nov. 24 of my senior year, I turned 25, and made the decision to stop smoking (cold turkey), but on the 21st President Kennedy was killed and that was a terrible time for us (and for my cessation; I did stop smoking however). Before that was the unsuccessful "Bay of Pigs" Cuban invasion and constant threats of war with the Soviet Union, so those issues were on our minds. I don't remember any of us being very "political." My thesis, e.g., was pretty tame: a study and indexing of the seminary and the Lutherans in the South from about 1840-60, via the Lutheran Observer, Intelligencer, etc. on microfilm." July, 22,2020.

corner behind the Voigt classroom building on Wildwood Ave.) for games and refreshments. I remember he was gone many Sundays out supplying to help augment his meager salary.

- 8) You also married while you were at seminary.
- a) What was life like for your spouse, Rachel, as the wife of a seminarian? Diana fit right in becoming President of the Clergyettes; in our Kinderway apt. we were in a quad with Ed and Emily Trexler, Dermon and Jean Sox, and Harry & Joyce Crout, and enjoyed their company; in the Horry St. apt, we were between Gene and May Frances Beck and Bill ("Mitch") and Jane Mitcham who also have been life-long friends.
  - b) What organizations was she a part of? Clergyettes; she also played the chapel organ on occasion, but was busy with Hyatt Park school work. She went with me many Sundays when supply preaching (SC, NC, VA, GA!), and when home on Sundays, we remember going to Ebenezer and then to the student union cafeteria at USC for a delicious Sunday lunch for under \$2! Our intern year at St Luke's, Charlotte, Diana was in the choir there and taught school at Wesley Heights Elementary, so when we graduated, we had no debt (certainly not the case for many today)
- 9) In 1964, you were ordained and throughout your career, you served at:
- . Lutheran Church of Our Father, Greensboro, 1964-64
  - Grace Lutheran Church, Boone, 1967-76 (and Lutheran Campus Pastor at ASU)
  - Kimball Memorial Lutheran Church, Kannapolis, 1976-94, *and named Pastor Emeritus*
  - Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Southern Pines, 1994-2000
  - *Retirement November 30, 2000, and named Pastor Emeritus OSLC*
  - Visitation Pastor Our Saviour, S. Pines, 2002-03
  - Supplying congregations in Southern Pines and Mooresville area, 2001-2019
  - Interim Pastor, including St. Paul, Hamlet; Living Word, Laurinburg; Salem, Salisbury; Holy Trinity, Troutman; Mt. Hermon & Sharon, Statesville; Salem, Lincolnton, and Lebanon, Cleveland until last sermon preached in Sept., 2019
- a) Please share a fond memory from each parish that attests to the church's uniqueness and mission. I'll comment ONLY on the 4 congregations I served "full-time" (not that the interims were less important, wonderful and not much less time and effort involvement). OUR FATHER was a wonderful mission congregation begun 3 years earlier under Pr. Carl Ritchie; our first born, Dave, was born there; we grew from 200 to 400. GRACE, BOONE was an exciting congregation to serve – lots of students; visitors; snow; 2 daughters born (Charlotte & Fran); newsletter started; property purchased; new parsonage built; lots of involvement with ASU, Resort Area Ministry, Watauga Co. Ministerial Association; good growth in membership and finances (e.g. from 3 faculty to 15 incl. the ASU Chancellor, Dr. Herbert Wey, as members. KIMBALL MEMORIAL – our longest served congregation – 18 years; Diana was organist 16 of those years; 4 Associate pastors: Palmer Clemmer, chip Lingle, John Futterer (returned as our pastor now), John Stoudemayer; renovation of office and choir areas; wonderful 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration with 844 in attendance and over \$50,000 raised to help others – over and above regular giving; Kannapolis Ministerial Association involvement; Kannapolis Christian Ministry started. OUR SAVIOUR – following Pr. Palmer Clemmer's wonderful work there when the new sanctuary was built and membership increased from ca.200 to 600, we grew to 900 and doubled our budget in 7 years; new Fellowship Hall and major renovations to office and

- classroom areas; visitors from all over the country every Sunday! In the fall of 2000 Diana and I led a group of mostly Our Saviour members to Europe, incl. 8 countries and the Oberammergau Passion Play; wonderful experience, and the first of several dozen ground and cruise trips since!
- b) Did you have much interaction with congregations from differing denominations? In every place I served I was part of ministerial associations with many having joint Thanksgiving and/or Holy Week services; these seem nowadays to be going out of style but I treasure my association with sisters and brothers of other denominations. In Greensboro we also had an "All Lutheran Conference" made up of the ALC, LCA & Missouri Synod congregations.
- c) What was that like? We usually met weekly or monthly and sponsored social ministry efforts and community services. We took turns as officers.
- 10) You've served the Lutheran Church as a pastor for more than 55 years. You saw the formation of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and then, nearly 25 years later, the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA).
- a) Over the half century you have served the church, how has Lutheranism transformed and progressed? I've been thrilled to be a part of several mergers (as a visitor in Detroit in 1962 for the formation of the LCA, and as a delegate (voting member) in the 1987-88 meetings to form the ELCA). As I used to teach in Pastor's Classes, at the beginning of 1900 we had over 100 Lutheran groupings in the U.S. and by the 1980s we were down to just a handful (ELCA, Mo-Synod, Wisconsin Synod, and a few others). I celebrated that, just as I worked on bringing together better relations and understanding among differing faiths. But, alas, we seem to be going the other direction now, at least in U.S. Lutheranism, which I deeply deplore!
- b) What do you see for its future? I'm thrilled to be a part of a Church which takes the GRACE of Christ Jesus (for ALL people) seriously. Some call us too liberal, but I believe we are being true to the Gospel of Jesus. It may take a while for others to catch up with us, but I'm grateful to be in the ELCA which understands the true meaning of evangelical and gospel.
- 11) Finally, if there was one thing that you could have done differently as a pastor, what would it have been? I would have started playing tennis (as I did in high school) and not waited until retirement.

P.S. When the NC Examining Committee (forerunner of today's Candidacy Committees) met with me in 1964, a Lutheran pastor/professor from Duke Divinity School asked me to comment on Dr. Niebuhr. Of all the theologians he could have asked, this was the only one I had concentrated on, having read most everything he'd written, so I was able to wax eloquently (probably should have disqualified myself on that)! But, hey, why look a gift-horse in the mouth (or whatever that saying is!!!).

Finally, I'm a terrible speller so please check that, and my keyboard doesn't want to space between words unless I hit the space bar really hard, so there maybesomewordsthatarettogether!! On top of that, my eyesight is going, so I don't see things clearly any more (the reason I stopped preaching last year). Feel free to omit and edit any way you see fit.

Thanks for your good help in this; I've enjoyed doing it.

*Addendum received from David Keck 10/24/2020:*

The interview indicates that David lived in Columbia (1948-53) as well as when in seminary (1960-64). It doesn't state that his father, Dr. Albert H. Keck, Jr., was a professor at LTSS those

five years (teaching homiletics, practical theology, liturgics), before returning to the parish ministry (St. Andrew's, Hickory, NC).