

Olaf Storaasli Memorial Service  
Tuesday - May 22, 2006  
St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN

I'm honored to speak on behalf of the seminary today. It's a daunting task to represent not only Olaf's faculty colleagues over the years, but also the two generations of students, as well as all the pastors who knew Olaf as a seminary professor of New Testament.

Olaf and I overlapped one year at the beginning and at the end of his tenure here. My last year as a student was his first year on the faculty, although he spent that first year in Edinburgh. Then we overlapped one year in the school year 1985-86, his last year and my first year.

In the summer of 1959 Olaf and Arndt Halvorson were the last two to be elected to the seminary by the whole church convention, which is how the ELC elected its seminary professors. Olaf was nominated at that convention by my father.

I remember my Dad talking about Olaf's coming here. Beth and Carolyn and I were trying to think when our two fathers would have met and how long they knew each other. We think it was probably forever. People just knew people then, with every pastor attending every church convention at Central Lutheran Church. My father felt somewhat guilty about calling Olaf to come here, because he knew how much he was appreciated at Saskatoon. But he figured Olaf could make the call and was delighted when he came.

The biography you have in the bulletin is not even the half of it. Olaf represented the ELC and ALC in all sorts of committees, commissions, groups and organizations. The ALC clergy book of 1970 needed 13 whole lines to summarize all Olaf had done up until that time. He was a great representative of our church because he was so learned, yet so insightful and so personable. He was a person of keen intellect, strength of character, great kindness and wisdom. He was truly a role model for our generation.

There is a lot of twaddle around here about who are the orthodox Lutherans and who are the pietists. Nobody would ever have put Olaf into either of those boxes. He was a recognized scholar, solidly Lutheran, yet he embodied all the best of Lutheran pietism. He came from the United Church stream of Norwegian American Lutheranism, and that's exactly what he was. Both sides could claim him as one of their own, because he spanned the whole spectrum.

Olaf's great love as a teacher was the Gospel of John. He taught the course on John year after year. Maybe the most appropriate memorial service for him would be for us to sing these great hymns, say a few prayers and have somebody read the entire Gospel of John!

I remember back when I was in Duluth and he was visiting his grandchildren there he let me read part of a book he was working on. I never forgot the title he had chosen---*The John I Know*. The reason that title stuck with me was that it was exactly like Olaf. It could have had a scholarly title like *An Exegetical Study of John's Gospel*, or *A Lutheran Interpretation of John's Gospel*, or *The Language and Grammar of John's Gospel*, something like that. But no. It was *The John I Know*. The Gospel of John, the New Testament, the whole Bible was not just Olaf's academic field---it was that, and he did it masterfully well---but it was for him his very life. The

Gospel of John was not just the basis of his lectures and scholarship, but it was that which gave him life, which sustained his faith, which made him what he was. The John he knew was the John that informed who his Lord was---the Logos made incarnate, the “I am” sayings---Bread of Life, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, the Way the Truth and Life, the Vine, the Resurrection and the Life, and so on. He knew John because those words made him what he was. *The John I Know*---the perfect title, because Olaf wasn't just teaching a book. In everything he taught his purpose was not just to have us fill our notebook with facts, but he wanted us to know John---and Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and the others---and through those books that we also might come to know our Lord!

Olaf was a great blessing for everyone he taught and worked with at the seminary. Thanks be to God for all Olaf has meant to so many of us, not just as husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather and great-grandfather, but also as teacher, colleague, pastor and finally brother in Christ.

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**From:** MRogness@luthersem.edu  
**Subject:** Memorial  
**Date:** June 1, 2006 11:59:51 AM EDT  
**To:** [olaf@cox.net](mailto:olaf@cox.net)

Olaf - Here is what I said. As I told many people, it wasn't hard to talk about your Dad, because I had such splendid material to work with! Your Mom came by our house yesterday to drop off some dishes. She seems to be doing pretty well in what has to be a hard time. I've been doing a lot of that red tape stuff for my 91-year old aunt after my uncle died almost two months ago.

Best wishes for a good summertime! Michael Rogness

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