

# THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER

"The voters of North Dakota don't want a preacher for Attorney General." So chided Leslie Burgum's opponent in 1956, when Burgum was surprising nominated by the Nonpartisan League for that office. "As much to my surprise as anybody's I defeated him!" reports Dr. Burgum today, still with a twinkle in his eye. A visit with North Dakota's Lawyer-Preacher is a delightful way to spend an afternoon.

Dr. Leslie Burgum, now 91 years of age, lives with his wife Blanche in Bismarck, in the apartment they occupied the years he served as Attorney General for the State of North Dakota. Mrs. Burgum has been handicapped with Multiple Sclerosis for almost 50 years.

Burgum was raised by his maternal grandparents because his mother died of tuberculosis in his infancy. His grandfather was a Civil War veteran with "many a salty tale to tell." His grandmother, Dr. Burgum reports, "was one of the saintliest persons I've ever known. She believed in Christ; she believed in salvation; she was a devoted Methodist. My life in the ministry was just a projection of hers."

In January 1909 a woman preacher named Ginn issued an alter call and young Leslie Burgum responded. "It wasn't anything she said or did," he reports. "I was determined I was going to take a stand. That was my beginning."

And what a beginning it was! Burgum began lay preaching then in 1911 at a schoolhouse between Washburn and Underwood. He continued lay preaching right up to the time he was called into the army in 1917. "I got my exhorter's license in 1910, and my Local Preacher's License in 1912. Boy I really used them too."

When Burgum entered the army in 1917 they soon discovered he had been employed as a Deputy in the County Superintendent of Schools office in Washburn. "That made them think I belonged in education," he tells with a chuckle. So he reported to the School for Gas Defense at Camp Lewis, Washington and served as a Stenographer and Clerk. "I didn't accomplish much for anybody," he says, "but all experiences add up to something."

A lawyer in Washburn, for whom he had done some assistant work, encouraged him to go to Bismarck to attend business school. He returned to Washburn then and entered into partnership with a Lawyer named William

Nestle, eventually a member of the State Supreme Court. For a while he worked for the States Attorney, but at the same time continued to serve as a Local Preacher.

He entered the University of North Dakota in 1924, at 34 years of age. "I only had two years of High School and I said to the Dean, "There's probably no place for me here," but the Dean Said, "we'll put you on probation for a semester and see how it goes. I got the best marks of my University career that semester!"

In 1927 the Burgums were appointed to LaMoure. There they started "house-keeping." When appointed to Larimore in 1930 he finished up his work at UND Law School, and in 1933 he passed the Bar. Burgum served for six years as Superintendent of the Eastern District. "That opened my eyes to lots of things," he says. After serving on the District he returned to serve the church he had served before - First Methodist in Jamestown. "That was the height of my career."

The most significant movement in the church during his career, says Burgum, was the Holiness controversy. "The Conference was split wide open by it," he reports. The controversy centered around the question of what composed "Scriptural Holiness," and whether once "saved and sanctified" one could ever sin again. Samuel A. Danford was one of the District Superintendents at that time, committed to the holiness movement. "You couldn't get into his District unless you were committed to holiness. Well, maybe that's too tough a thing to say," quipped Burgum.

The Burgums raised one son and one daughter. The son, Tom, is presently working in Washington D.C. The daughter, Mary Lois, died of cancer a few years ago."

When asked how he sees the church now from his perspective, Burgum replied: "I've always felt the Methodist Church is the leading body of Protestant churches. It has the capacity to adapt itself to the climate where it is. That may or may not be a compliment, but I think it is. It has been a people's church. And because that's true, it has a bright future."

Dr. Leslie Burgum is remembered by many as an eloquent preacher and a great statesman of the church. The years seem only to have strengthened his interest in life and his love of the church. When asked whether his long years of ministry were "worth it" the reply came quick and to the point, "You bet!"