

# Pastor and wife fill their 'retirement' with challenges

By Mary Fastenau

Alvin Petersen is a pastor. He lives in a pastor's house with his pastor's wife and reads his pastor's newspaper.

He lives the life of a pastor, thinks the thoughts of a pastor and dreams the dreams of a pastor.

He has been a pastor since 1936 and will continue as long as he is physically and mentally able.

As he sits in his living room with his wife Edel, he reflects on his life as a pastor with an obvious fondness for the 35 years he spent as campus pastor at the Lutheran Student Center.

It was Alvin Petersen who was responsible for building the church at 535 N. 16th St., and he was instrumental in some of the innovations of the worship service.

### Retirement irrelevant

Although he speaks of the past, it is only in passing. After his retirement from the campus ministry, he began doing all the things he always wanted to, making retirement a misnomer.

His wife describes Petersen as a "doer" who is always looking for adventure or a challenge. She said that instead of complaining about things that need to be done, Petersen does it.

His latest adventure is his attempt to become the chaplain for the Nebraska Legislature.

Petersen explained that he became interested in the position about four years ago. He said his goals for the position would be to do more than give the prayer at the beginning of each legislative day.

### Legislative family counselor

He said he would like to be a friend and a counselor to the "legislative family," meaning the legislators themselves, and their families.

Petersen was approved by the Legislative Executive Council Nov. 16 and his nomination will be voted upon at the beginning of the next legislative session.

Besides his long list of activities and honors, Petersen said he thinks his creativity would help him with the job. He described himself as "an adventurous kind of fellow," and said he enjoys "creative things and new things."

He said he has always been interested in community affairs and politics and thinks the future of the church is in the community, not in institutions.

### Official statements

Petersen said the church cannot give official statements about its position because it represents such a variety of people and interests. He added, however, that because the church does not give opinions, its members also tend not to become involved.

One way Petersen is attempting to help overcome the problem is by the formation of Lutherans for Equal Justice, a group



Photo by Jerry McBride

### Rev. Alvin Petersen breaks stereotypes with his lifestyle.

which is for equality for all citizens in every field.

The bespectacled gentleman speaks in a well-modulated voice, but the ideas he expresses are the kind that most people shout from rooftops.

He begins most sentences and thoughts with "we", instead of "I."

The other part of "we," his wife Edel with her curly brown hair and a smile that seems to second his opinions.

### Work together

Mrs. Petersen explained that in their relationship they have tried to "compliment and supplement" each other. If Petersen received the legislative appointment that too would be a real effort, but she said, the legislative position is only one option they have.

Petersen explained that he and his wife have been asked to help with a new concept called "leisure ministry." This ministry is for people who have experienced "temporary or forced leisure." He said there are no definite plans yet.

The Petersens also will begin leading workshops in January to prepare people for retirement.

He said they attended a conference in October for SMART, Senior Membership and Retirement Training. Petersen said they will give eight workshops with groups of eight to 12 couples.

The workshops, he explained, will deal with attitudes, money and legal matters, housing and leisure time.

Mrs. Petersen said that one of the reasons they became interested in this project was because retirement hit them as a "bolt out of the blue."

The Petersens do not like to be referred to as "retired," they said.

Petersen said people are classified by what they do and in retirement you are not supposed to do anything.

"We tend to classify people by what they are doing, not who they are," he said.

The stereotype of a retired person is not the only one that Petersen tries to break.

He said he also fights the stereotypes associated with ministers. Whenever riding in plane or train Petersen said he will talk freely to people until they ask what his occupation is. When he says, "pastor," he said there is normally a change in the person's attitude.

### Lunches monotonous

While involved in the campus ministry, he said he was a member of the Faculty Club and would go to the Alumni House to eat. He said if anybody came to sit with him, they seemed to feel the need to talk about religion—one of the reasons he eventually quit.

Mrs. Petersen said there is also a stereotype of what a pastor's wife should be. She said she appreciated working with students at the Lutheran Student Center because they allowed her to be herself.

"They did not push me into a box," she said. "but they let me be me."

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