

This Week in Eden History December 18 | Julius W. Varwig

Julius W. Varwig, the first institutional chaplain in the United States, died **Dec. 18, 1937**, in St. Louis. Varwig was born in Tecklenberg, Westphalia on Aug. 5, 1876. He began his training at the Colony of Mercy at Bethel, near Bielefeld, studied theology at the Johannesstift in Berlin and worked in the city mission there, 1894–96. He immigrated to the United States and entered Eden Theological Seminary in Wellston, graduating in 1898. His first parish assignment was at St. John’s Evangelical Church (now St., John’s UCC), Bretzville, Indiana, 1898–1908. He then served at Evangelical Christ Church (now Christ UCC), Maplewood, Missouri, 1908–1925.



*Undated photo of Julius F. Varwig
| Eden Seminary Archives*

Responding to a long-felt, growing concern for the sick and poor, he resigned his pastorate and asked the Evangelical Synod to support his hospital mission work in St. Louis. The goal was to minister to the hospitalized who had no religious affiliation but desired spiritual advice or comfort. The Synod eventually established the Hospital Missions and appointed Varwig as full-time city missionary on March 16, 1926. Within a year he reported that he was visiting four city hospitals and eight private hospitals, including Lutheran, Barnes, St. John’s, Missouri Baptist, St. Mary’s, Mt. Rose, St. Luke, Jewish, and Pacific. Initially he did not have a car, so he travelled between hospitals by streetcar.

Varwig died somewhat unexpectedly in 1937. During the eleven years of his institutional work, he had identified and organized a new ministry for the ESNA while attending to the needs of thousands of hospitalized individuals. The work was continued by Harold Peters Schultz (Eden 1931) and Raymond F. Frankenfeld (Eden 1935). Because of his work in the Hospital Missions program in St. Louis, Schultz was able to help shape the developing field of hospital chaplaincy at the national level.

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