

Niemann, Edward Ward (1908–1999)

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Edward Ward Niemann was an Adventist pastor, department director, pioneer missionary, treasurer, and church administrator. A missionary from Germany, he oversaw the early years of the Adventist mission work in Indonesia.

Early Life

Niemann was born in Dessau, Germany, on May 13, 1908, to Wilhelm Niemann, a German citizen, and Mary Ward, who was English but acquired German citizenship.¹ The young Niemann was raised in an Adventist home and spent his early years in East Germany. When he was twelve years old, he resided in England for a short time. At the age of fourteen, he was baptized into the Adventist Church at Dessau by Otto Kelle during a public evangelistic effort.²

Education and Marriage

Niemann attended the boys' secondary school in Dessau, Germany, from 1915 to 1923. From 1923 to 1926, he was enrolled at the Technical School for Merchants, at Hasselfelde, East Germany. In 1926, he attended the Neandertal Missionary Seminary at Mettmann, Germany, where he finished the ministerial course in 1929.³

Niemann's first marriage was to Magda Elisabeth Reimers. They had a son named Rolf Niemann, who was born in Surabaya, Java, on October 24, 1938.⁴ Magda Niemann died while a prisoner of war in the internment camp in Java on August 22, 1946.⁵ He later remarried an American, Ethel Jean Fessler, on January 30, 1949, in Hutchinson Kansas.⁶ Ethel Jean Fessler, was born on October 3, 1913, to Archibald H. Fessler and Elsie May Green in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.⁷ She attended Arlington Heights Township High School.⁸ She also went to Northwestern University, Emmanuel Missionary College, and graduated from the University of Chicago in 1935 with a Bachelor of Science in mathematics.⁹ She taught high school in Streator, Illinois, and at Campion Academy in Loveland,

Colorado. She was the cashier/accountant at Glendale Adventist Academy. She also worked at the Wyoming and Colorado Conference offices.¹⁰ These work experiences were acquired before her marriage to Edward Niemann.

Ministry

Niemann started denominational service in 1929 as an intern and licentiate in Germany. From 1935 until 1937, he served in the same capacity in Holland.¹¹ It was in 1937 that he was called to serve as a district leader, secretary-treasurer, and director of the Sabbath School, Home Missionary, and Missionary Volunteer departments of the East Java Mission until 1940.¹²

When World War II broke out in 1940 and Japan declared war, the Dutch brought Niemann together with other German missionaries who were working at that time in Dutch West Indies Mission to the internment camps in India.¹³ He stayed there for six years until his release in 1946.¹⁴ His wife, Magda Reimers died in Java shortly after the war in 1946.¹⁵

After his release in 1946, Niemann moved to the United States where he was called to serve in several states as a pastor. During this time, he married Ethel Jean Fessler.¹⁶ He served the Kansas Conference as a district leader from 1946 until 1949. From 1949 until 1951, he served in the California Conference as a pastor of a German church in Los Angeles.¹⁷ He spent over a decade, pastoring churches in the United States before receiving a call to be acting president for the North Sumatra Mission in place of Pastor A. Bartlett's furlough.¹⁸

On June 8, 1959, Niemann and his family boarded the SS *Steel Chemist*, and headed to Indonesia.¹⁹ In 1960, he served as acting president, but later became president of the North Sumatra Mission in 1963, serving until the middle of 1964.²⁰ The year before, he served as president and treasurer of the South Celebes Mission.²¹ In June of 1964, he returned to the United States to answer the call from the Columbia Union Conference to connect with the New Jersey Conference where he became pastor of the Salem District.²² He continued to pastor in New Jersey until his retirement in 1973.

Later Life

Niemann retired in Williamsburg, Kentucky, and for the next twenty years continued to assist the Williamsburg, Kentucky, and Jellico, Tennessee, churches. Even though officially retired, he continued to serve the church in different functions. He assisted with many Red Cross and ADRA disaster relief efforts.²³ In 1981, he served for three months as a volunteer chaplain in one of the many refugee camps in Thailand.²⁴ He and his wife continued to travel to many places around the world for different functions.²⁵

In June 1995, the Niemanns made Rockville, Maryland, their home. In the later part of 1998, Niemann underwent heart surgery, but four months later he died on February 9, 1999, in Columbia, Maryland, at the age of 91. His wife, Ethel Jean Fessler Niemann died within the same year on October 17, 1999, in Rockville,

Maryland.²⁶

Contribution

Niemann's impact as a pioneer missionary was felt throughout Indonesia. His pastoral leadership during the foundational years of the mission work was the epitome of dedication and self-sacrifice. During the World War II years, he showed unwavering dedication to the Adventist work. His first wife, Magda, even died during this most challenging period in the mission field. His legacy of administration in those early years provided the foundation for future missionaries to expand, such as creating an educational institution to train young people in Indonesia for mission service.

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NOTES

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4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. See also G. K. Lasher, "Weddings," *Central Union Reaper*, February 22, 1949, 2.
7. Biographical Information Blank, Ethel Jean Niemann, General Conference Archives.
8. Ibid.
9. "Ethel Jean Fessler Niemann obituary," *Southern Tidings*, March 2000, 18.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. E. D. Dick, "Day of Special Intercession for Interned Missionaries October 30," *Canadian Union Messenger*, October 20, 1943, 2.
13. Ibid.
14. "Edward Niemann obituary," *Southern Tidings*, March 2000, 18.
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16. Lasher, "Weddings," *Central Union Reaper*, 2.
17. Biographical Information Blank, Edward Niemann.
18. See "Recent Compound Guests," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, August 1959, 20.
19. E. E. Roenfelt, "From Home Base to Front Line," *ARH*, July 9, 1959, 23.
20. "North Sumatra Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960), 98; "North Sumatra Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1963), 107. See also See J. B. Th. Umboh, "An Event of Historical Importance," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, October 1963, 6-7.

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22. See North American Division Committee Minutes, June 18, 1964, 79, General Conference Archives, accessed June 3, 2021, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/NAD/NAD1964-06.pdf>.
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