

Pathways to the Federation

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[Federation Centennial Symposium
St John Ev. Lutheran Church
8 & Vliet, Milwaukee, October 11, 1992]

Pathways to the 1892 Federation

Greetings to all of you in the name of the Lord of the Church,

Those desiring to celebrate the centennial of the General or Federated synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States, which, of course, was the prototype of the present church body, couldn't find a better time than this day. Today is just 99 years and 364 days from the first day of the first and founding convention of the Federation.

This is also the right place to celebrate. It was in this very building that the first convention was held. In the mind's eye it is not too hard to visualize that historic gathering in these hallowed halls. At that altar, serving as liturgist for the opening service, one can picture John Bading, president emeritus of the Wisconsin Synod and pastor at St. John's for almost twenty-five years. At the opening service, in that pulpit, stood Pastor Otto Hoyer from New Ulm's Dr. Martin Luther College.

In the official sessions that followed on that day, and the following two, one can visualize the 229 delegates spread through the church, probably very much like this gathering. Over there near the front one can picture Director August Friedrich Ernst of Northwestern College, soon to be elected first president of the Federation and to serve as such til his resignation in 1900 because of the press of duty at the college. Sitting side by side over there, one can picture C. J. Albrecht and C. A. Lederer, presidents of the Minnesota and Michigan Synods respectively, old friends and Chrischona classmates who inaugurated the Federation movement the year before. There near the middle one can spot young Gustav Harders, Milwaukee pastor who would become overseer of the Federation's Apache mission. Near him his friend and neighboring pastor, August Pieper, destined to serve the Federation's seminary in its golden age of theology. One could note in the gathering one of several father-son pairs, this one, Carl Gausewitz of Oakwood, fourth in Wisconsin Synod pastoral seniority just behind Goldammer, Bading and Phil Koehler. Next to him Carl Jr., who would be Federation president from 1900 to 1907 and then again from 1913 to 1917, and who would provide the Federation with the Catechism that so many of you used in your youth. Far to the rear is where one would expect to see Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, to the rear because Hoenecke never was much for monopolizing the convention floor. When, however, this convention or others to follow ran into some disputed doctrinal point, the thing to do was to look back and seek the opinion of Adolf Hoenecke. With a terse sentence or two he would cut the Gordian and theological knot.

We are scanning and, in a special sense I suppose, panning the scene at the first Federation Convention. You will in another presentation hear what developed out of the groundwork laid here. Before that becomes the subject matter, it will be in place to ask and answer the questions: Where did this Federation come from and how was it brought into being? The answer is eightfold, as "Pathways to the Federation" are traced.

For the Congregation

First to be described is the pathway for the host congregation. St. John, Milwaukee, in the previous century, was the congregation that on more than one occasion hosted synod conventions that enacted synodical federations with larger church groupings. Back in 1867, in a convention meeting June 20 - 29 at St. John, the Wisconsin Synod took steps to join the General Council that would be formed in the fall of that year. William Streissguth, pastor of St. John and synod president, had gained a favorable impression at the Council's preliminary meeting at Reading, Pennsylvania of prospective council members. He pushed for and achieved Wisconsin's General Council membership. But we will not dwell too long or too heavily on this short-lived

General Council association. It ended in 1869 at the Helenville synod convention, chiefly because of President Bading, who in 1867 succeeded the resigning Streissguth in the presidential post and the next year succeeded him as pastor of St. John.

More memorable and useful was a convention of church bodies held in the midst of St. John's in 1872. This was the constituent convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, of which the Wisconsin Synod was a charter member along with the Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Norwegian and Ohio synods. Its not so easy today to visualize the 1872 meeting in St. John's midst. It wasn't held here but instead at the predecessor building at 4th and Highland. The roster of convention delegates, however, at the 1872 meeting in St. John's midst reads like a roll of honor for a midwestern Lutheran church history. In attendance for Wisconsin were Bading, Ernst, Hoenecke; for Ohio: Lehmann and Loy; for Missouri: Walther and Sihler; for Minnesota: Sieker and Kuhn; and for the Norwegians, H. A. Preus, Koren, and F. A. Schmidt, who had written the Synodical Conference's founding document, *Denkschrift*, and who twelve years later would be a major cause of its first rending.

Incidentally, the doctrinal colloquy that would bring the old enemies Wisconsin and Missouri into spiritual fellowship, was also held in St. John's midst. As President Bading relates in his golden jubilee history of St. John, this Wisconsin-Missouri colloquy took place October 21 and 22, 1868 in Milwaukee, with formal sessions held at the home of the Eissfeldt brothers and a social gathering on the last evening hosted by Mr. Kuetemeyer, all of them St. John members.

St. John's Church was not unprepared to function as host congregation for a significant convention to found a new Lutheran federation in 1892. It had played the role before and conducted itself like a veteran host in 1892.

For Pastor Bading

President Bading did more than follow a pathway into the Wisconsin Federation. He helped blaze the trail and build the road. When Bading resisted re-election as synodical president in 1889, in order to devote himself more fully to the church building project of his St. John congregation, he summed up his long term in office - as long as any in our synod's history - by stating to the convention,

“My efforts during my long tenure in office, as is well known, were extended in one direction, to ward off all so-called union endeavors against the ecclesiastical independence of our synod; in the other direction, however, also to foster and maintain fellowship with those who are one with us in doctrine and faith. May that mind and spirit which I deem wholesome, also in the future prevail in our midst and may the future demonstrate that the Lord is with this mind and spirit.”

Bading, in a sense, worked for the formation of the Federation for more than thirty years - before, during, and after his synod presidency. He wasn't an ecumenical-minded enthusiast who rushed in whether God's Word ruled or not. He was quick to lead his synod out of the General Council when there was clear evidence that its good confession was not going to be matched by its fellowship practice. Presiding over the Synodical Conference convention in 1882, he risked the division of the Conference so that God's truth about our gracious eternal election might not be diluted in the least. But he did, as he says, “Foster and maintain fellowship with those ... one with us in doctrine and faith.”

Some of those were across the river. There was less opportunity to foster fellowship with those across the lake because of slow transportation and because of wrong association. Michigan was in the General Council until 1888. But across the river was the younger, smaller synod that often needed help. During Bading's first years in office the Watertown school was opened to Minnesota ministerial students. Bading spearheaded the effort to achieve a mutual recognition of orthodoxy between Wisconsin and Minnesota. At La Crosse in 1892, he and his synod stood shoulder to shoulder with Minnesota against those who were perverting the doctrine of election. It is no wonder the two synods could so easily federate ten years later.

For the Minnesota Synod

The Minnesota synod's quest for fraternal relations with their Wisconsin neighbors goes back thirty years from 1892 to 1863, when the Minnesota Synod was only three years old. In that year, "Father" Beyer, the Minnesota Synod founder, came to the 1863 Wisconsin convention in Milwaukee, this time at another local congregation with a bit of church history behind it, Grace-requesting the establishment of closer relationship. This kind gesture came in spite of a put-down in the Wisconsin Proceedings of the year before that states, "The Evangelical Synod of Minnesota consists of only eight pastors, of which only 2 or 3 are in full-time service...The others are farmers from Pennsylvania, who upon special request hold services in houses (and worst of all) in the English language." Beyer, nevertheless, came to Grace Church with his request.

Wisconsin answered it in part, appointing President Bading to attend the 1864 Minnesota convention. The purpose, no doubt, was to have an opportunity to check out the neighbors. But by the time of that Minnesota convention, Bading was actually off in the opposite direction, way over in Russia and Prussia.

A first step in cooperation was the 1864 agreement that the new school at Watertown be opened to Minnesota students, in exchange for which the semi-retired Beyer would solicit funds for the school on his trips to the east. Unfortunately there was no appreciable growth in Northwestern's enrollments or endowments.

By 1869 formal doctrinal discussions were being held by representatives of both synods. These discussions had been set in motion when the Wisconsin convention in 1868 was presented a Minnesota resolution expressing the wish to join with Wisconsin in forming one church body. The presenter was Pastor Sieker of the Twin Cities, Wisconsin's first home-grown pastor, and soon to become Minnesota president. Wisconsin reacted favorably and soon a doctrinal colloquy could be held. The colloquents found that a unity in doctrine and faith existed.

Minnesota's continuing membership in the General Council, from which Wisconsin had withdrawn for fellowship reasons, caused Wisconsin to refrain from giving its neighbor a final stamp of full orthodoxy. The end of that membership in 1871 paved the way for the historic working agreement that, (1) Minnesota would use Northwestern for worker training, and salary one professor at \$ 500 for the privilege; and (2) it would supply a member of the *Gemeinde=Blatt* editorial board and have the privilege of sharing in the annual profits. Joint membership in the Synodical Conference, achieved the next July, could not help but firm up the partnership.

But then came the grasshopper plague. The mission congregations in the Renville County area were hard hit and needed extra subsidy. There was a \$ 700 treasury deficit and the Minnesota Synod's 1875 convention begged for release from its \$ 500 obligation to the Watertown school. Wisconsin had to go along with the plea. Feelings cooled, especially because Minnesota began sending students and funds to Springfield.

By the end of the decade, that is the 1870's, the new Minnesota president, Pastor Albert Kuhn, was working hard to mend fences and was succeeding. In 1882 there were simultaneous conventions of the synods in La Crosse. Joint sessions were held when it came to discuss the burning doctrinal controversy of the day, election. There and at the Chicago convention of the Synodical Conference later that year, Wisconsin and Minnesota stood together with Dr. Walther of Missouri against the "*intuitu fidei*" election error.

That experience seemed to cement the Minnesota-Wisconsin fellowship. It ushered in an "era of good feeling" that was so very much in evidence in 1892 and thereafter.

By the time of the formation of the Federation, Minnesota had acquired a valuable asset to offer the Federation, a worker-training school that could become the teacher training school of the new church body. The school was erected at New Ulm in 1884 amid some disorderly procedures. Although synodical resolution stated that the building operations should not begin until interested areas could submit proposals along the lines of donations of land and money, the eager New Ulm Lutherans and their energetic pastor, C. J. Albrecht, jumped the gun. When the convention assembled in New Ulm to select the school site, the building was already underway on the bluffs above their meeting place. At the synod session Pastor Albrecht of New Ulm apologized

to President Albrecht of the Minnesota Synod for the unseemly haste and President Albrecht closed the books on the whole activity by freely and fully forgiving Pastor Albrecht.

The school served the Minnesota Synod for ten years as a combination prep-teacher, and ministerial college-seminary worker-training educational establishment. From 1894 on, Dr. Martin Luther College provided all of the Federation's teacher training and provided it so well that a century later we all hope nothing is done in a radical way to threaten or tamper with this success story.

For the Wisconsin Synod

Much of what was previously said about Minnesota-Wisconsin fellowship could have been a part of Wisconsin's pathway to the Federation. Since this has already been discussed, we will at this point focus attention on three Wisconsin Synod activities that furthered the three areas of Federation responsibilities: world missions, worker training, and publication.

After the failure of its aborted railroading mission to Indians along the Union Pacific tracks back in 1876, Wisconsin's mission conscience would not let the church body rest. At the time of the quadricentennial of the Reformer's birthday in 1883, the Wisconsin convention ordered a search for an orthodox mission society to which it could channel mission offerings. When no such society could be found, the synod resolved to train its own missionaries and send them out, preferably to Indians in this country. By the time the first three prospective missionaries were completing their training, the new Federation was able to send them into the Apacheland that had been scouted and had been found to be a suitable virgin mission field.

The 1891 Wisconsin synod convention resolved to put the church body into the publishing business, not without a great deal of discussion and some opposition. Up to that time, George Brumder had been doing most of the publishing, returning to the synodical treasury five cents for every hymnal sold. There was also a synodical book-selling operation that in 1891 earned a profit of \$ 1200 for the synod. In 1891 the Northwestern Publishing House came into being just in time to serve the Federation's joint publishing goals.

That same 1891 Wisconsin convention set up a building committee that should concern itself about seminary needs. The facility at 13th and Vine was in need of major repair and remodeling. A new building seemed to be the better option. Two sites were available: a donation by the leather manufacturers, Pfister and Vogel, of land in the as yet undeveloped Downer College part of today's University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus; and a three acre section of the Pabst farm donated with the stipulation that a \$ 30,000 building be erected and that any profits from a conversion to non-educational use would have to be divided between the synod and the Pabst estate. In a congregational referendum the Pabst farm site was chosen. That is how a Wauwatosa seminary came into being that would through John Schaller, J. P. Koehler, and August Pieper foster a "Wauwatosa theology" or "Wauwatosa gospel".

And that is why, on the closing day of the first Federation convention, October 13, 1892, the assemblage migrated to the present day 60th and Lloyd site for the cornerstone-laying of the new Federation's seminary. It must have been a remarkable occasion. Five chartered and jam-packed streetcars provided the bulk of the transportation for the over 450 in attendance. At the site a band supplied the accompaniment for the singing of hymns like '*Bis hieher hat mich Gott gebracht,*' and '*Lass mich dein sein und bleiben.*' Synod President Philipp von Rohr did the cornerstone laying honors, assisted by John Bading. President von Rohr preached at the service of cornerstone laying on Psalm 25, "We will shout for joy when you are victorious; we will lift up our banners in the name of the Lord." The preacher urged the convention to look upon the day of cornerstone-laying of the seminary as a day of joyful thanksgiving, hallowed resolve, and fervent prayer. His concluding prayer, that children and their children be blessed through the seminary, has been fulfilled. The cornerstone laid on October 13, 1892 now rests in the archway of the Seminary that replaced the one that served the Federation. The work is still going on. The Word is still being preached.

For the Michigan Synod

Like Minnesota, the Michigan Synod brought to the Federation's holdings an all-purpose synodical worker-training school, founded one year after Dr. Martin Luther College at New Ulm. For the first twenty-five years of its existence, the Michigan Synod suffered acutely from a serious shortage of pastors. There was extensive mission outreach, as far as the southwestern corner of the state and even as far as its peninsula. There were many mission congregations started by tireless workers like Christoph Eberhardt. There were, however, not enough pastors for the many mission congregations a tireless worker like Christoph Eberhardt could plant. Field after promising field was lost during an extended vacancy, often to the Ohio Synod. Despite its demonstrated mission zeal, the synod did not grow. In 1868 the communicant count was 3300. Ten years later it was 3350. The trickle of workers from Basel or from St. Chrischona or Kropp, was just that, a trickle.

There was really only one sure cure for the problem: build that worker-training school. In 1894, the Michigan Synod convention finally resolved in the matter of such a school that "now is the time to begin," and that "we in our own midst maintain an establishment in which young men may be trained for the office of the holy ministry." The year 1885 was the "now" time. In 1885 there were located at Manchester a large building provided by a zealous layman, George Hermerdinger, for two years, and an able teacher, Pastor Lange, formerly at Martin Luther College at Buffalo.

During the two years, 1885 - 1887, a permanent location had to be found. At the 1886 convention, Adrian was the clear choice. Somehow the official history of the synod, written less than twenty-five years later, claims it didn't know the answers - but somehow a specially called convention met in January, 1887, to scrub Adrian and to accept an offer of land in Saginaw, donated by the Saginaw pastor, Christoph Eberhardt, also president of the synod.

A building, old Main, was erected and the relocated school opened its doors in the fall of 1887 and was soon graduating candidates for the public ministry, forty of them in the next twenty-two years. The gift of this school was not an unmixed blessing for the Federation. The days would come when it could well have been said, '*Timeo Michigan, et dona ferentem.*' (I fear the Greeks, the poet said, even when they bring gifts. Or if it's Michigan, even when it offers me a school.) But all that is really another story.

Another pathway the Michigan Synod had to travel into the Federation was the pathway from the General Council. While Wisconsin and Minnesota withdrew promptly from the Council and entered the Synodical Conference in 1872, the Michigan Synod lingered in the General Council for almost two more decades. It was, to be sure, a restive membership, often registering protest against the lax fellowship practices of the Council.

Matters came to a head in 1884. The General Council held its convention in Monroe, Michigan. Following an old, bad practice of having prominent delegates preach in local pulpits on synod Sunday, two leaders of the Pittsburgh Synod, Dr. William Passavant and Pastor Gerbirding occupied Presbyterian pulpits. Members of Zion, Michigan's Monroe congregation were upset by what they recognized as false fellowship. Protests were filed to no avail. President Eberhardt was told to take up the matter, not with the General Council, but with the synod whose members had done the offending. It amounted to Eberhardt's protesting to leaders who were themselves the offenders. Soon Michigan ceased sending delegates to Council conventions. Formal severance of Council ties took place in 1888.

Events moved quickly after that. Michigan-Wisconsin-Minnesota doctrinal discussions were held. Michigan was told it would have to be a Synodical Conference member before Federation membership would be granted. In August, 1892, at Pastor Sieker's St. Matthew's Church in New York, one of the two oldest Lutheran churches in this country, the Synodical Conference accepted Michigan's membership application. The next step on the pathway would be the last step to the goal.

For the sons of the Nebraska Pioneers

The pioneers who trekked from the Lebanon-Ixonia area in some fifty ox-drawn prairie schooners to the Norfolk area in Nebraska did not make the long, hard move to establish a Nebraska Synod. Quite the contrary!

These “old Lutherans” were, in fact, fleeing from synods and synodical strife as Buffalo and Missouri battled over church and ministry and as congregations split over this and other issues around them.

All this the Nebraska pioneers were putting behind them as they migrated to Nebraska in 1866. The next year their spiritual leader, J. M. Hoeckendorf, arrived. Like his flock, Hoeckendorf held no brief for synodical organization. Way back in 1847 he had traveled from the Watertown area to Chicago to try to prevent the establishment of the Missouri Synod. This largely self-trained pastor trained his son to be his successor. All entangling alliances with synods and synodical schools were being studiously avoided. A man proposes. In 1877 the son died and the father died soon thereafter. The Norfolk believers were without a pastor.

In this dilemma, they turned to Director Ernst at Watertown. They had heard from relatives and friends in the area from which they had migrated that Ernst was opposing Walther in the matter of creating state synods. “This must be our kind of man,” the Norfolk people reasoned. Ernst never bothered to spell out the distinction between opposing a specific instance and opposing the general principle. He suggested the calling of Michael Pankow, a son of the Teacher-Preacher Erdmann Pankow, just graduated from the Springfield seminary.

It was a happy solution. Norfolk accepted Pankow, really one of their own, and he gradually, very gradually, wore down the old biases. Soon pastors were meeting at conferences. By 1901 the formation of a Nebraska District could be attempted. This is when Nebraska found its way into the Federation via its Wisconsin District status. But when distance made district membership impractical, the Nebraska Synod was formed in 1904 and became the “other states” of the Federation’s title.

For the Federation Planners

In the summer of 1891, a team of Michigan Synod representatives, President Lederer and Michigan Lutheran Seminary’s director Huber, went west to check out a prospective mission field. The trip offered the occasion for a get-together with C. J. Albrecht, Minnesota Synod president and a St. Chrischona classmate of Lederer. At the informal gathering Albrecht disclosed a plan that seemed to have been brewing in Minnesota circles, the union of the two synods and the synod that was the neighbor of both. The decision was to press on with this venture.

That fall, pastoral conferences in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan studied and approved preliminary proposals drawn up by representatives of Minnesota and Wisconsin at an August 8th meeting. Things were moving rapidly. Representatives of the three synods met on April 21 at Milwaukee to crystallize the previous planning. In attendance were Bading, Adelberg, representing President von Rohr, and Professors Hoenecke, E. Notz, and Thiele of the Wisconsin Synod; President Albrecht of the Minnesota Synod; and Pastor Mayer and Professor Huber of the Michigan Synod.

There were eight points in the proposal that was drawn up at the April meeting at Milwaukee for presentation to the 1892 conventions of the three synods. These eight points can be summarized in this way:

1. The three synods will federate into a general body named “The Joint (*allgemeine*) Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States.
2. For the present there are three districts in the general body.
3. The general body is to have its publishing house and bookstore.
4. The general body is to publish a church paper, theological journal, school journal, and an annual, along with books for churches and schools
5. Home missions are, for the present, the responsibility of the district synods under the supervision and guidance of the general body which will be in charge of allocating available manpower and monies.
6. Rights not delegated to the general body are reserved to the District Synods.
7. The general body will control present and future worker-training schools. These schools are to be: a theological seminary in Wisconsin, a general gymnasium and a joint teacher college-gymnasium and a pre-seminary in both Minnesota and Michigan.

8. Existing schools remain the property of the district synods until they are transferred to the general body.

At the 1892 convention of the three synods, these proposals were approved and the stage was set for the October constituent convention of the Federated Synod.

For the Delegates at the Constituent Convention

The organization that was effected was a general body with three districts at the present and with four after 1905. There were meetings once every two years. At these meetings there would be 120 delegates, half pastors and half laymen. Wisconsin would have one half or 60 of the delegates, Minnesota would have one third or 40, and Michigan would have one sixth or 20. Minnesota tried unsuccessfully for equal representation and then accepted with good grace the three sixths, two sixths, one sixth formula. One Minnesota congregation, however, bolted.

In the important matter of purpose and work the 1891-1891 agreement as already described stipulated three general areas of cooperation. The first of these was publication. The *Gemeinde=Blatt* was to serve all three synods. It took until 1904 to get the *Theologische Quartalschrift* underway. The fairly new *Schulzeitung* could continue with an enlarged subscription list.

The second field of cooperation was missions. The finally ratified constitutional paragraph on missions reads: "All missions are under the direction and supervision of the Federation, which is to elect for this purpose a superintendant and which is to allocate men and monies available for this purpose. Home missions is at the present the assignment of the district synods. World missions, on the other hand, should be the province of the Federation." The 1893 Federation convention eagerly adopted as its own the mission to Apacheland that Wisconsin had initiated.

The third cooperative endeavor was worker training. A major conflict developed in this area, to be treated in the second presentation. Here it is sufficient to emphasize that today's worker training scheme does not differ all that much from the planning of one hundred years ago. Translated into present terms, that planning called for a theological seminary in Wisconsin providing all training on that level for the Federation. It called for a college and preparatory school at Watertown. It called for a preparatory school and teachers college at New Ulm to provide all teacher training for the Federation. Finally it called for a preparatory school at Saginaw. Except for the move of the New Ulm preparatory school to Prairie du Chien, this is what we have today.

The 1892 Federation proceedings report these statistics:

	Pastors	Stations	Communicants	Teachers
Wisconsin	158	325	83,733	118
Minnesota	62	107	16,594	14
Michigan	37	80	9,552	5
	257	512	109,879	137

So much for the preparation and planning that preceded the formation of the Federation. How the planning and theory of the 1892 convention translated into action and practice remains to be heard in the remainder of this session.