

July 6, 1862

by

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for

Professor E. Fredrich

on

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Senior Church History

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To the people of David's Star Evangelical Lutheran
Church, who by the grace of God, stood firm in
God's Word amid controversy and turmoil.

July 6, 1862

My dear friend Henry,

I have had a very busy day today. Because of the many problems which have arisen in my congregation I am unable to lay my head down in peace, so I am writing you, my dear friend, before I lay down to sleep, hoping that writing to you will help ease my troubled heart.

As you know, I have been pastor of this young congregation since the summer of 1857 when I entered the ministry. My predecessor, Pastor G.A. Kindermann passed away on Easter Sunday, March 27, 1856, therefore leaving the vacancy. The German Evangelical Lutheran Church to the Star of David here in Kirchhayn was founded 19 years ago by Pastor Kindermann and our present parochial school teacher, Mr. Carl Stiemke. The founding fathers, who are still very fine members today, left Stettin, Pomerania, because they didn't agree with the false idea that it was not wrong for Lutherans to send their children to public schools which taught at the same time religion according to false, reformed doctrine. These true Christians felt constrained, out of love and respect for God and His infallible Word, to leave their homeland and settle in America.

The first services to the glory of God were held in the log home of Mr. Carl Retzlaff in 1843. In 1844, Mr. Ferdinand Bublitz built a two story log cabin. The lower floor served as the home for the pastor and his family. The upper floor

served as the school and church. A permanent school was built in the summer of 1844 with Mr. Stiemke's home attached. The home in which we live was built in 1844. On February 12, 1845, the church purchased 80 acres of land from John and Charlotte Kressin for \$100.

Henry, let me tell you about Pastor L.F. Krause. He was the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Freistadt. Here was a man who caused more trouble for this congregation and several other congregations in the area than any other man. Pastor Krause's character, which unfortunately led him to hasty and unjust actions, was the chief cause of these problems. You see, when Pastor Krause became excited, he would bring things into the pulpit which didn't belong there. He would forget himself so completely as to scold and rant and would use expressions which could not be excused, much less justified. Because of his misuse of excommunication and his tyrannical actions his congregations in Milwaukee and Freistadt split. In fact, some of the people here at Kirchhayn left our church and organized another congregation which joined the Missouri Synod. Already in 1845, he was causing trouble here. Our congregation invited orthodox Lutheran pastors from various parts of the United States to assemble here to form the Buffalo Synod, but at the last minute Pastor Krause diverted the meeting to his congregation in Milwaukee, and our people were left high and dry after extensive preparations. Our people were not happy with being snubbed by Pastor Krause and the Buffalo Synod.

Then in 1848, Pastor Krause insisted that the Freistadt and Kirchhayn teachers be examined by the state of Wisconsin, bringing our schools under state rule and state support. The people of my congregation left Pomerania because of the parochial school and state school problem. But Pastor Krause insisted, however, on blind obedience to the ministry, as does the Buffalo Synod. But the Buffalo Synod settled the problem at its convention in 1848, by saying that the parochial school was not to be supported or under the supervision of the state.

Due to the separation of our members caused by Pastor Krause and by some of the actions of the Buffalo Synod, services were discontinued in the school building and were transferred to the home of Mr. Voegnitz. In 1848, however, our congregation built its first log church.

Over the next eight years God blessed this congregation and the little log church could not contain all our members, so in 1855, a new building was started. When Pastor Kindermann died in 1856, the contractor hesitated to continue fearing that the mutual contract would not be honored. But thanks be to God, who provides the means to satisfy all demands. The blessings of God crowned the work of the mason and our congregation with tremendous success and on the first Sunday in Advent, 1856, the Church was dedicated to the glory of the Lord.

My first couple years here were good. We had a new church building. The school was growing and people, who spoke our mother tongue, moved into the area. We welcomed the rich blessings of God with thanks and praise.

My problems started in 1859, when Pastor J. Grabau, who was and still is president of the Buffalo Synod, sent us a letter saying that we were to set out a "mite box". One cent per communicant member was demanded by him for his support as "Senior Ministerius." He has a wrong view of the relationship of the congregation to the Synod. I don't agree with Pastor Grabau or the Buffalo Synod. The Buffalo Synod is only a human ecclesiastical institution. It is not commanded by God in His divinely inspired Word as Pastor Grabau proclaims.

Over the past couple years the question of excommunication has surfaced. I wrote to Pastor Grabau and the Buffalo Ministerium that according to Matthew 18, only those could be excommunicated whom the local congregation, according to God's Word, recognized as impenitent. But the Buffalo Synod vehemently states that an excommunication is only valid after it is approved by the Ministerium. Henry, this is wrong. This is false doctrine.

Because of this we looked closely at the constitution which Pastor Kindermann and the church had set up in 1849. We discovered, to our dismay, that it was recorded "that all property of David's Star Church remains with the Buffalo Synod as long as ten members wish to remain with the Synod." After much discussion we changed that part of the original constitution. This change was voted through by an unanimous vote. The majority of this congregation was standing firm against synodical tyranny and false doctrine. Little did

they know what was to come. Little did I know that my faith would be tested so severely.

My dear friend, several days ago, on the 3rd, I received a notice in the mail that the Buffalo Ministerium had suspended me from my office of pastor of this congregation. At first I was stunned. Then I was angry. But after some contemplation I realized that I could not stay in fellowship with a Synod which so flagerantly put God's Word aside and listened to humand reason. I informed the chairman of the congregation what happened. I told him that I had been suspended from office and that I could no longer serve this congregation.

Yesterday, he and the other officers of the church decided to hold a congregational meeting and that this meeting should be announced in church today. This meeting was very important to these people because they sent out men to go to every household and bring the voting members to church for the meeting this afternoon.

Needless to say, the meeting was quite lively. My stand against the Buffalo Synod was thoroughly discussed. The pro's and con's of my suspension were completely investigated by all the voting members. After this thorough investigation it was moved that all the accusations against me be dropped and that I continue to serve this congregation. Henry, my heart felt like jumping out of my body with joy knowing that these Bible believing Christians found no fault in my teachings and beliefs and that the majority of this congregation supports me in my efforts against the Buffalo Synod. Henry, 118 voting members signed their name in my behalf.

What grieves my heart though is that there is an opposing faction forming who feel that I should be suspended from office for disobeying the "rules" set down by the Buffalo Ministerium and its leader, Pastor Grabau. This faction is headed by Teacher Carl Stiemke.

It seems that the matter of the church keys came into question. Who was to have possession of them and the property of the church? In the meeting it was decided that Mr. Froehlich, an elder, would have the authority to get the keys and whatever else belongs to the church from Mr. Steinke who is the custodian of the church. They decided that since Mr. Steinke was with those who opposed the stand of the church, which is firmly founded on Holy Scripture, that he should be relieved of his duties. Mr. Peterson was asked to be the new custodian of the church, which he readily accepted.

After this was decided, the congregation gave me a vote of confidence. They stated that I had the full backing of the major part of the congregation and that they would go to court, if they had to, to make sure that Mr. Steinke turned over the keys, wine and other church property to me or Mr. Froehlich. The meeting closed with them deciding that the trustees were to go to court in West Bend and find out if there was anything else they could do.

I am glad that these people are standing up for what they believe and know is true according to God's Holy Word, but I am grieved that some of this congregation is following blindly in the false doctrine taught by Pastor Grabau and the Buffalo Ministerium. Another meeting has been scheduled for July 8 after consulting the court in West Bend and with

much consultation with Mr. Stiemke and others who oppose the Biblical stand taken by me and the majority of the congregation. I'm worried Henry, and I fear that a separation of the members, who are long time dear friends, is in the making. Maybe by the will of God, they can see their errors and there can be peace in our midst and we can separate ourselves from the Buffalo Synod and join another Synod which teaches God's Word in its truth and purity or maybe with the help of God we can go it alone for a while.

My dear friend, it is quite late now and I am very tired. Thank you for listening to me. I can now go to sleep in peace, because from writing to you I realize that the truth will prevail and that everything is in the hands of the Lord of the Church. God's will be done. Good night my friend and give our greetings to your family. Pray for us.

In the name of the Lord of the Church,

Ludwig W. Habel

Pastor Ludwig W. Habel may have written a letter like that on July 6, 1862. According to the church minutes that day was a big day for him and for his congregation. Unfortunately, their troubles didn't end that day. As it turned out their troubles were just beginning. They finally had to go to court. The court ruled that the church was not guilty of any crime because the majority had the affirmative vote. They had to dissolve their old corporation and form a new one with new trustees. A 15 day notice had to be posted

before the new election of officers. In the meantime, Mr. Stiemke was trying to get a lawsuit against the congregation to keep the keys and to make sure that the property stay in the possession of the Buffalo Synod, so the congregation had all the locks changed on the church and the school and Mr. Stiemke's lawsuit failed. July 6, 1862 was the day David's Star severed its affiliation with the Buffalo Synod and became an independent congregation. A rather sad note: Mrs. G.A. Kindermann followed Mr. Stiemke and remained loyal to the Buffalo Synod. Mr. Stiemke and his group founded the congregation which is one mile west of David's Star, which is still in existence, with its affiliation with the ALC.

During the next several years Pastor Habel tried to organize a synod of his own, without success. He also started a seminary training students for the Holy Ministry. As far as is known, three men were graduated, serving churches in the former Iowa Synod. There were many faculty changes in the school during Pastor Habel's ministry which hurt our school. In 1866, a new school house was built of native stone. Also in 1866, a new parsonage was built which was used until 1924.

Pastor Habel also organized a church near Cedar Creek which later joined the Missouri Synod. There they started a school and had a fulltime teacher.

In 1870, Pastor Habel received and accepted a call to a congregation in Cedarburg. He continued to serve David's Star as well as the congregation in Cedarburg until October of 1870, when he installed Pastor Fredrich Eppling in our church. After serving the church in Cedarburg for several

years, Pastor Habel died in an accident and he was buried in Cedarburg.

With the consent of the congregation, Pastor Eppling became a member of the Ohio Synod, but the congregation remained without synodical affiliation. David's Star came into close contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Resulting from this, David's Star came into close doctrinal fellowship with Missouri Synod men in the area.

Efforts had been made to join the Ohio and Wisconsin Synods, but a difference in the doctrine of election arose and Pastor Eppling favored the Ohio Synod stand which taught that God called "intuitu fidei." At the Ohio Synod convention in which Pastor Eppling intended to apply our congregation for membership, he realized that the Ohio Synod's stand did not conform to God's Word, so he severed his ties with Ohio and joined the Wisconsin Synod. After 15 years at David's Star he resigned and accepted a call to Van Dyne, Wis. Pastor Zacharas Stiemke accepted the call and was installed in 1885.

Application to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for membership was made in 1892 by Pastor Stiemke and acceptance was granted. The first synodical meeting attended by our delegates was the Constituting Assembly of the Assembly of the General Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan meeting in the fall of 1892. A little ironic note: The thorn in the flesh of the congregation in 1862 was a man by the name of Stiemke. The man who led David's Star into the Wisconsin Synod was also a Stiemke. (unknown if related)

So for 30 years David's Star was without synodical affiliation. On July 6, 1862, the congregation remained loyal to its pastor, who stood firmly grounded in God's Word against the Buffalo Synod and Pastor Grabau who practised false doctrine with regard to church and the ministry, excommunication, and the relationship of the individual congregation to the synod at large. They made a firm stand, even going to court to maintain what was legally theirs. It was not easy for them to part company with many of the people, with whom they fled the unionistic ideas of Germany. Much prayer and much soul searching went into the decisions made on that day in July of 1862. It was by the grace of God which led those people to affiliate with a synod which, again by the grace of God, proclaims, confesses, teaches, and practices God's Word in its truth and purity.

It is the hope and sincere prayer of this writer that the present and future generations of this congregation never forget the rich blessings, the never-ending grace of God, and the tremendous dedication to God's Word which our forefathers had. As the torch of the congregation is passed from the older generation to the younger generation, may the younger generation pray: "May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers; may He never leave or forsake us. May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways and keep the commands, decrees and regulations He gave our fathers." I Kings 8:57-58.