

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD:
DAVID'S STAR'S SHORT, UNHAPPY ASSOCIATION
WITH THE BUFFALO SYNOD

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It may seem only harmful and destructive to us, but God can use it for the good of his people. Consider the case of Joseph. God used the hatred of his brothers and the lies of his master's wife to put him in a position where he could "save much people alive." Though perhaps not so dramatically as Joseph, we Christians see time and again the truth of the Apostle Paul's assurance to the Romans: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." A look at the early history of David's Star congregation in Kirchhayn, Wisconsin, shows again that God used his guiding hand for the benefit of his children. The physical problems of life in Wisconsin in the 1840's would have made survival as a congregation difficult enough, but add to them the church related difficulties that the people encountered and the odds were stacked against these pioneers. Yet the Lord saw them through every trial. They emerged not only intact, but prospering. It is our intention to demonstrate in this paper that David's Star congregation endured some

very great trials, especially in its relationship with the Buffalo Synod, but with God's help, even these tribulations became blessings for the congregation.

David's Star is a congregation with a long history; longer, in fact, than all but three other congregations in the Wisconsin Synod.¹ The charter members of David's Star emigrated from Prussian territory in the year 1843 rather than continue in the confessionally weak church there. In the early 1800's King Frederick William III of Prussia made it his aim to unite the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his kingdom by enforcing a compromise between the two. He tried to water down what was characteristically Lutheran and Reformed so that the new "Brand X" religion would be palatable to everyone. But this was not to be the case. A group known as the Old Lutherans resisted any type of union with the Reformed. Some of them, including the leaders of America's Buffalo and Missouri Synod's, came to the United States rather than submit. In 1840 Frederick William died, and with him, the attempt at uniting Reformed and Lutheran. However, even when the freedom of worship was restored, there were still serious problems in the Prussian church. The earlier confessional conviction had been lost. Many Lutherans were content to educate their children in schools run by the Reformed.

1. The 3 older congregations are Salem, Ann Arbor, Michigan, organized in 1833; St. Paul, Monroe, Michigan, 1838, and St. Jacob, Grass Lake, Michigan, 1841. St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio, organized in 1821, has a WELS pastor, but is not a Synod member.

Rather than continue in this atmosphere, yet another group of Lutherans left Stettin, Germany, in June of 1843. With Pastor Adolph Kindermann as their leader they landed in New York, proceeded to Buffalo in western New York, and then took the Great Lakes route to Milwaukee. In Milwaukee the group split three ways, with a portion going to Cedarburg, some to Lebanon (near Watertown), and the majority settling in Kirchhayn (the church in the wild wood), about 5 miles west of Cedarburg.

To understand this portion of David's Star's history correctly, one must keep in mind the deep interest the congregation had in Christian education. In the wilderness that was Wisconsin then, they met with extreme cold, deep snow, Indian scares, and illness, but in spite of it all they would not abandon their dedication to a Christ-centered education for their children. When they left Germany they brought with them a teacher named Carl Stiemke and he conducted lessons for the pupils during the course of the eleven week ocean voyage. By the time the winter of 1844-45 set in the immigrants had erected a sturdy log cabin which was to serve as a combination church, parsonage, and school. Already that year Stiemke had 23 children sitting at his feet. Yes, there were trials and tribulations in moving from Germany to this wild territory, but the people were overjoyed just to worship freely and to bring up their children in accord with God's Word.

It would be nice to go on and report that the congregation went peacably about the work of preaching and teaching the Gos-

pel without any major obstacles, but that was not the case. Into the idyllic wilderness setting enter L.F.E. Krause. Pastor Krause had come from Hamburg to Milwaukee in September of 1841 to be the first Lutheran pastor in Wisconsin. Upon arriving he immediately began to serve ^{SOME OF} the Pommeranians who had immigrated with Pastor John Grabau in 1839. These people had gone ahead to Milwaukee while Grabau stayed in Buffalo and so they had been without a pastor.

The two congregations, at Freistadt and Milwaukee, were in dire need of a minister, but Krause was perhaps not the best man for an outpost type of ministry where the ability to get along well with people is a necessity. His sincerity cannot be doubted, but just the same, the man was given to sudden mood swings which often resulted in hasty excommunications and wounded feelings. J.P. Koehler described Krause's manner as "severe and tempestuous."²

That description might have been a bit of an understatement. Krause is still remembered in these parts for one example of his vicissitudinous temperament which would be amusing if it had not had such grave consequences. It seems that the pastor tired of having to call for a ride each time he wanted to go to his other parish in Milwaukee and thus presented his congregations with a request for a horse and wagon of his own. The congregations, however, could not come to an agreement on the matter since it involved the rather major expenditure of \$90.

2. J.P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, p. 33.

Another pastor might have chalked the delay up to legislative bumbling and patiently made the best of the situation. But not Pastor Krause. He was a man of decisive action. Not always the right action, but always decisive. One of his first moves after getting off the boat in Milwaukee was to insist that the people there reaffirm their subscription not only to the Lutheran Confessions, but also to John Grabau's Hirtenbrief. This Pastoral Letter tended to be more papistic than pastoral. Witness historian Edmund Wolf's description of it in The Lutherans in America:

In his "Pastoral Letter" and the correspondence to which it gave rise, Grabau maintained that a minister not called in accordance with the ancient "Kirchenordnungen" was not properly called; that ordination by other clergymen was by divine ordinance essential to the validity of the ministerial office; that God would deal with us only through the ministerial office; that a minister arbitrarily elevated by the congregation was unable to pronounce absolution, and what he distributed at the altar was not the body and blood of Christ, but merely bread and wine; that through her Symbols and Constitutions and Synods the Church at large must decide what is in accordance with or at variance with the Word of God; that the congregation is not the supreme tribunal in the Church, but the Synod as representing the Church at large; that the congregation is not authorized to pronounce excommunication; that Christians are bound to obey their minister in all things not contrary to the words of God.³

It was this last point, that Christians must comply with their minister in all things not contrary to the Word of God, which Krause relied on heavily. When he didn't get the horse he began consigning the dissenters to the depths of hell. Needless to say, the congregations in Freistadt and Milwaukee were

3. Edmucnd Wolf, The Lutherans in America, p. 413, 14.

upset about this. The resulting upheaval brought Grabau himself all the way out from Buffalo to pour oil on the troubled waters. He succeeded in fabricating an uneasy truce, but eventually the Freistadt congregation split on account of the matter.

They had other gripes too. A reading of Krause's own Chronicle gives the impression that the pastor was occasionally more like a bull in a china shop than a servant of the Word. The church in Freistadt once complained that Krause had labelled them "bloated louts," "stupid oxen," and "old pigs," from the pulpit.

Now somehow Krause managed to get his fingers into the Kirchhayn pie. It is difficult to understand how this came about since no mention is made of a break in Pastor Kindermann's 13 year ministry and there is no record of Pastor Krause being called to serve Kirchhayn. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Kindermann had a triple parish (Cedarburg, Lebanon, and Kirchhayn) and Krause had a dual parish. It may be that they helped each other out during extended absences. Whatever the case, it is obvious that Krause had some input into the affairs at David's Star, and where Krause went, trouble never seemed to be far behind.

The first bit of discord arose over the issue of state school inspection. Again this whole matter is somewhat confusing since the German versions of David's Star's history date the incident at November 1844. But Wisconsin was not granted statehood until 1848 so that state school inspection

would have been an anachronism. Education itself was a hit-and-miss affair in the 1840's in Wisconsin, to say nothing of school inspection, but somehow Krause must have found a way to get money for the schools in Freistadt and Kirchhayn if they would open themselves to government inspection. Krause does make reference to an inspection at Freistadt in the Chronicle. He wrote during 1843, "Monday after the 20th Sunday after Trinity, 22 October, the school inspection took place. The children had made good progress. Lord, prosper the garden of Thy holy Christian Church among us. Amen."⁴

The issue was a sore spot in Kirchhayn though. They had packed up in Prussia just because of this type of command. They feared a return to false religion in their schools. Still Pastor Krause insisted on the inspection in his usual heavy-handed manner. He even preached a sermon on the matter, ^{AT KIRCHHAYN} basing his message on Romans 10:16, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?"

It is not clear whether an inspection ever took place in Kirchhayn, but the matter seems to have festered until 1848 when the Buffalo Synod settled the issue in its second convention. David's Star had been in on the organization of the Buffalo Synod in June of 1845, in fact, depending on which history one reads, Kirchhayn's or Freistadt's, David's Star may have been the site of that first convention. As yet they

4. L.F.E. Krause, The Chronicle of L.F.E. Krause, 1843.

were not faulting the Buffalo Synod for Krause's aberrations, but indirectly they could have. Krause was following Buffalo's doctrine of church and ministry to the letter in the way he dealt with his members and those in David's Star. The 1848 convention probably soothed quite few though with its verdict.

It adopted the following sentences:

1. According to Mark 10 the church can only maintain Christian schools
2. These schools cannot be under the supervision of the state superintendent of schools.
3. Only confirmed children of our school may attend state schools.
4. Religious instruction may not be given in the state schools.
5. Therefore it is wrong if the church accepts money for its schools from the state.
6. To help support public schools, however, does not militate against the conscience of a Christian.⁵

Thus the immediate danger of an upheaval was taken care of, but the hostility toward the characteristically Buffalo doctrine of the church and ministry was in the air. Kirchhayn was a young congregation in need of wise guidance, not the epithets and invective that Krause so often resorted to.

The year 1846 was after the beginning of the school inspection controversy, but before its resolution, and it too was a turbulent year. In Freistadt, the people were still smoldering about Krause's demand for a horse and wagon. A request for these items might have been understood, even if they did not consent to furnish them. Even a demand would probably have blown over, but this was a demand with the claim

5. David's Star 1943 Anniversary Booklet, p. 45.

of Scriptural backing. Finally the congregation split. The court decided that Krause's opponents were legally entitled to the church building and half the property, but Krause was still not giving an inch. He viewed the controversy in this way in the Chronicle:

This church year of 1846 has been a miserable but purifying and faith strengthening year, for in this year half the Freistadt congregation fell away from the Christian Church.....The instructions and admonitions directed to them by their pastor and from the whole ministerium they despised, and they persecute their pastor, whom they have deposed, contrary to all divine right. Even though this apostasy is depressing, yet it is also comforting, for according to the Word of God it is a sign of the Judgment Day, for which Christians are yearning. There is also another comfort, namely this, that God has cleaned off his stage and preserved his small group in grace and separated them from the chaff. May he give grace that the separatists will permit themselves to be led to repentance, since he has already extended his chastening rod among them in the form of various judgments.⁶

The shock waves from this tremor also affected the little community 6 miles to the north at Kirchhayn. A portion of the Kirchhayn congregation had seen enough of Krause's antics and formed a new congregation 2 1/2 miles from David's Star. Their search for new synodical affiliation led them to the Missouri Synod, where the doctrine of church and ministry must have been right down their alley. Missouri had had a Krause of its own in Martin Stephan and in the turmoil which followed Stephan's banishment, came to espouse a teaching on the church and ministry which was almost the exact opposite of Buffalo's.

16. L.F.E. Krause, The Chronicle of Rev. L.F.E. Krause, 1846.

This new parish became part of the triple pastorate of C.F.W. Walther's brother-in-law, the Rev. E.G.W. Keyl.

This affair was strike two against the Buffalo Synod and Krause as far as Kirchhayn was concerned. The split in the congregation was nearly a death blow. The group that remained in Kirchhayn was so small that they now met for worship services in a private home rather than in the cabin they had built. The Prussian experiment in freedom of religion had come close to expiring, but the Lord sustained them until ~~in~~ the following year, ^{WHEN} they had regained enough strength to erect a proper church. It was in connection with the dedication of this church that Pastor Kindermann coined the unique name for the congregation, David's Star.⁷

The third strike and the end of the Buffalo Synod's turn at bat in Kirchhayn came in 1859. The sainted pastor Kindermann had passed away in 1856 due to a stroke and was no longer present to smooth the feathers that the other Buffalo men ruffled. In the year long vacancy which followed, the congregation heard preachers from the Iowa and Indianapolis Synods, but finally, amazing as it may seem, settled on another Buffalo man, Deacon L.W. Habel. Habel, however, had no compunctions about differing with Grabau. He was a younger man and considerably distant, doctrinally, as it turns out, as well as geographically, from Buffalo.

7. The name of the congregation is based on Numbers 24:17 and Revelation 22:16 and on Luther's introduction to Daniel where he refers to Christ as "David's Star."

In 1859 it first became apparent that David's Star would be following a different tack under Habel's direction. Back in Buffalo Grabau had introduced a one cent per communicant tariff for the support of his ministerium. It would probably not be a wild exaggeration to say that it was one cent too much for the people in Kirchhayn. Habel not only went with the tide of sentiment; he spearheaded the attack on Buffalo. He questioned Grabau's claim to the divine institution of the Buffalo Synod and then asked about the Synod's method of carrying out excommunications. Young Habel cited Matthew 18 in declaring that excommunication was the business of the Church, not the divine right of the Buffalo Ministerium.

The final step in the ending of the turbulent association with the Buffalo Synod came when, at Habel's urging, the congregation amended the portion of their constitution which stated that all the property of the church would remain in the hands of the Buffalo Synod so long as only ten members remained true to the Synod. When news of this reached New York, Habel received the awaited suspension from the Buffalo Synod and the congregation was an independent. A minority of the members left David's Star to continue their allegiance to the Buffalo Synod, among them Pastor Kindermann's widow and the faithful teacher Stiemke. Today Mrs. Kindermann's remains still lie in an overgrown little cemetery about a mile west of David's Star, while her husband, who died at a more peaceful time, is buried in the David's Star plot.

To make the story complete, Pastor Habel was called away from Kirchhayn in 1870 by a Cedarburg congregation which had broken with Missouri. His successor was Friedrich Eppling from Canada. Eppling himself had joined the Ohio Synod and the congregation was about to follow suit, when at the last moment Eppling decided that the Ohio doctrine of election did not square with the Bible. In quick succession Eppling took David's Star into the Wisconsin Synod and then submitted his resignation. He consented to serve until a replacement could be found and thus was still on hand in 1885 to install David's Star's first Wisconsin Synod pastor, Zach. Stiemke, the son of the congregation's first teacher. Stiemke had just graduated from the Wisconsin Synod seminary in Milwaukee. His pastorate marks the beginning of an association with the Wisconsin Synod which has not been broken.

As for Pastor Krause, his trail is a bit more difficult to trace. In 1848 he went back to New York, but returned to Wisconsin in 1850 to seek admission to the Missouri Synod. That association was short-lived, though, and in 1853 he returned to Germany. In America once again he resumed his membership in the Buffalo Synod and went to Minnesota to organize St. Martin's in Winona. In succeeding years he was a member of the Illinois Synod, the Synod of the West, and the Ohio Synod. He finally wound up in Australia, where it is reported that he sang his own funeral hymns and delivered his own funeral address from his death bed in 1885.⁸

8. Roy Suelflow, History of Trinity Congregation, p. 14.

A multitude of results could have come from David's Star's tumultuous link with the Buffalo Synod, among them extinction or a partnership with a scripturally unsound group of congregations, but as God provided for Joseph, so he provided for his people in Kirchhayn. He has blessed them and their succeeding generations with membership in a synod where the gospel of the crucified Christ is still preached and taught. He has caused them to grow into a congregation of nearly 900 souls. The Lord turned those early trials into a myriad of blessings and showed the truth of the Apostles assurance: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

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