

# **The Founding and History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Neighboring States**

[Presented to the Eleventh Convention of the Synod at First Ev. Lutheran (later St. Peter's Church) Church, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, May 31-June 7, 1860]

*by Johannes Muehlhaeuser*

Towards the end of the year 1846 Johannes Weinmann from Bernhagen in the kingdom of Wuerttemberg, who studied at Barmen and who was sent out by the Langenberger Society, came to America, specifically for a congregation on Kilbourn Road, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Brother Weinmann was ordained by Pastor F. Schmied in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on his way to the west. Pastor Weinmann served the congregation on Kilbourn Road, and preached to the German settlers in Caledonia Center, Greenfield and New Berlin.

On October 4, 1837, this writer, Johannes Muehlhaeuser, from Notzingen in the kingdom of Wuerttemberg, came to America. He studied at the Barmen Missionhouse and was the first one to be sent out to America by "the Langenberger Society for the protestant Germans in America." He came together with the apostate Oertel, at that time a candidate of the Lutheran church of Bavaria. Oertel had been ordained in Erlangen before his trip to America.

After a delay of 7 months in New York (where I did mission work among the Germans and where Oertel preached in the vicinity of Houston Street in the upper part of the city) I was [verb missing] by the Ev. Lutheran Ministerium of the New York Synod, received a license from Pres. Dr. Wackerhaegen, and was sent as missionary to Rochester where I arrived on May 12, 1838. The fall of that same year I was ordained at the Synod convention.

I served the Ev. Lutheran congregation in Rochester for 10 years. Since the congregation was well organized and in a position to support a pastor properly, and since I still felt healthy and strong, indeed, especially encouraged by Pastor Weinmann, I decided to move with my family to Wisconsin in order to carry on mission work for a few more years.

On June 27, 1848, I arrived in Milwaukee where I soon began to found a new congregation. At this time there were in Milwaukee Pastor Keil of the Missouri Synod, Pastor Mueller of the Buffalo Synod and Pastor L. Dulitz who was also sent out by the Langenberger Society. Pastor Dulitz was serving a united congregation from which he resigned, and in the same year founded the Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation in Milwaukee.

In the year 1849 Pastor W. Wrede, a theologian from Saxony, who had already served as preacher in the state of New York for several years, came to Milwaukee and was called by the Ev. Lutheran and Reformed congregation in Granville as its preacher.

Pastor Weinmann and Wrede recognized with me the need of a joint effort to spread the kingdom of God for the Lutheran church in Wisconsin, and we met for this purpose on December 8, 1849 in Milwaukee, at which time the founding of an Ev. Lutheran Synod was agreed upon and resolved.

Just as the kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, so also was the very small beginning of our Synod.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser was elected president, Pastor Wrede treasurer, and Pastor Weinmann secretary. The first named was asked to draw up a synod-constitution by the time of the next convention which was to take place in Granville on May 26.

During the time up to the first convention three candidates for the preaching ministry arrived on the scene.

F. Beckel was preparing himself for the preaching ministry under the guidance of Pastor Keil. Beckel separated himself from Pastor Keil under the pretext that Keil was too strict and narrow Lutheran. After mature deliberation and examination we arrived at the resolution to accept Beckel into our small circle, because we were in dire need of workers. Beckel received a license and was sent to Schlesingerville as preacher. In the course of the first half year Beckel married a young girl who came from an old-Lutheran family, with the result that Beckel, as he personally felt, returned to the old-Lutheran church, but was not able to become a member of the Missouri or Buffalo Synods, and as a result he is up to this day an independent, preaching and administering the sacraments according to his own conscience. Beckel is still carrying on this ill-practice in Town Hermann on the basis of our license which was invalid on the day when he left us.

A young man by the name of Paulus Meiss, recommended by Pastor Schmidt of Albany, came to Milwaukee in 1848. For a while Meiss had been a student at a poorly endowed teachers seminary in Germany. He had learned shoe making earlier. Meiss was to study under Pastor Dulitz and at the same time earn his board, which he did for a while. All of a sudden Meiss disappeared and made himself a pastor in the congregation at Granville. Meiss had gifts for public speaking, and this brought about a revival in Granville. Quite a few older persons among the former residents of Pennsylvania were baptized. Finally the council of the congregation and Meiss himself came and confessed their error, and asked that we accept them, and that Meiss be authorized to administer the sacraments. Finally the following took place. Meiss was sent as Beckel's successor to Schlesingerville where he soon was married, and lived a very ill-fated married life. Through his life-style Meiss brought shame upon the preaching ministry, to the effect that we had to release him. Meiss joined the Reformed Church, which also had to release him at a later date. He had two wives, both still living, and separated from both, he for a while spent a life roving from place to place. Corrupted physically and spiritually he died in the south in 1859 from yellow fever.

The third candidate was Casper Pluess, a dismissed Basel student, whom we gave a license after a scheduled examination, and whom we sent to a congregation in Sheboygan. Pluess was in the synod for better than two years. After he was ordained, indeed he left us in a disgraceful manner without a word, and joined the Reformed Church.

These three miserable subjects made our beginning very difficult, and gave us much sorrow, shame, anxiety and distress.

#### First Synod Convention

On May 26, 1850, we met in Granville, Pastor Wrede was the preacher of the congregation.

The three office holders were also the entire ministerium. The two candidates, Pluess and Meiss were present. The synodical constitution proposed by the president was presented, discussed and with necessary changes was adopted.

The first congregation was accepted into the synod. Resolved: that the Ev. Lutheran congregation in Milwaukee (now Grace congregation) served by Pastor Muehlhaeuser be accepted into synod membership.

Resolved that a synodical seal be procured.

Mr. Jacob Conrad of Rochester N.Y., working for the American Tract Association, presented himself as a candidate for the preaching ministry.

Resolved that J. Conrad should study privately with Pastor Wrede in Granville and prepare himself for the preaching ministry.

According to the parochial reports there were

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Children baptized | 90  |
| Confirmed         | 55  |
| Communicants      | 671 |
| Buried            | 15  |

## II

### Synod Convention 1851

The second synod convention took place on June 21, 1851, in the church auditorium of the Ev. Lutheran congregation of Pastor Muehlhaeuser, corner of Chestnut and West Water Street.

On October 18, 1850, Brother Goldammer of Ursprung in the kingdom of Saxony, who studied at Barmen and was sent out by the Langenberger Society, came to Wisconsin and took charge of a working area in Manitowoc County, with Manitowoc Village as his preaching station.

Candidate C. Pluess and Goldammer were examined and ordained.

Candidate Conrad who studied with Wrede was examined and found qualified to be given a license; he took charge of an area in Town Hermann.

## III

### Synod Convention

On June 6, 1852, we met in the Ev. Lutheran congregation in Racine, Pastor Weinmann was preacher of the congregation.

Election of officers: Pastor Muehlhaeuser was elected president, Pastor Goldammer secretary and Pastor Wrede treasurer.

Candidate Koester was introduced by Pastor Weinmann. Candidate Koester came from Buchholz, District of Stolzenau in Hanover, and had been a student at Barmen.

The congregation in Racine and the congregation in Granville were accepted into synod membership.

Candidate Koester was ordained and became Pastor Weinmann's successor at Kilbourn Road, Greenfield and Caledonia Center.

Pastor Weinmann built the Lutheran church in Racine for which he had collected about \$2000 from Lutheran churches in the east.

Wilhelm Buehren, formerly a Methodist preacher, was introduced. He presented himself for acceptance into the synod. After lengthy discussion and examination he was given a license, and assigned to an area in New Berlin.

|                    |              |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Baptized           | 180 children |
| In total Confirmed | 28 children  |
| Communicants       | 649 persons  |
| Buried             | 27           |
| Parochial Schools  | 1            |
| Heathen Missions   | \$11.34      |
| Synod Treasury     | \$2          |

#### IV

##### Synod Convention 1853

On May 22 the synod met in the united Grace congregation in Town Hermann, Pastor Conrad was preacher of the congregation.

St. John congregation of Greenfield and Grace congregation of Town Hermann were accepted into synod membership.

Candidate J. Conrad and W Buehren were ordained.

##### Synod Convention in Granville June 11, 1854

During the course of the past year Pastor Weinmann accepted a call from the Ev. Lutheran Trinity congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, which he served until 1858. In that year Pastor Weinmann made a trip to Europe where he visited with his elderly mother in Bernhausen. On his return trip his death came in the water with the burning of the steamship Austria. He leaves a mourning widow, born Strongmann, and a six-year-old daughter.

Brother J. Bading from Rixdorf near Berlin, who was a student in Pastor Harm's Hermansburg Missionschool and who was sent out by the Langenberger Society, came to Milwaukee in July 1853. He took charge of a congregation in Calumet, where he was ordained and installed by the president.

Candidate J. E. Sauer presented himself to the president for acceptance into the synod. He had a license and was assigned Schlesingerville as his work place.

Pastor G. Weitbrecht, a theologian from Wuerttemberg, came from the Western Church Society and desired a place in our synod. The president assigned him a work place in Sheboygan. While there he unfortunately joined the Methodist Church. After a year he returned repentant, acknowledging his error, and asked for admittance into the synod. The synod forgave him his error, and assigned him a place in Port Washington, from which he was called to a congregation in Bridgeport, Michigan. Weitbrecht was not the man for our American situation, and therefore went back to his former fatherland.

Election of officers took place.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser was elected president, Pastor Goldammer secretary, and Pastor Buehren treasurer.

Pastor Wrede became Pastor Weinmann's successor in Racine, and Pastor Buehren became Wrede's successor in Granville.

Pastor W. Streissguth was introduced by Pastor Wrede, and was accepted as advisory delegate.

Pastor Conrad presented to synod Pastor D. Huber, a Catholic cleric from the Canton of St. Gall, who declared that according to his convictions he could no longer serve the Roman church, because he had, by the grace of God, recognized its errors. After considerable discussion and examination, Pastor D. Huber was recognized as a member and servant of the Lutheran church.

Before his departure from the Roman church Pastor Huber served a Catholic congregation in Kenosha, and according to his request, was sent to Kenosha as preacher of the Lutheran church, in order to serve the Lutheran congregation there.

Candidate E. Sauer's license was renewed.

The Ev. Lutheran Immanuel congregation in Town Hermann served by Pastor Conrad, and the Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation in Newtonberg served by Pastor Goldammer were accepted into synod membership.

## VI

### Synod Convention 1855

The synod met on June 3, 1855, in the Ev. Lutheran Grace church in Milwaukee, Pastor Muehlhaeuser is preacher of the congregation.

The church building of Grace congregation was built in 1851 with the help of Pastor Muehlhaeuser. For it he collected more than \$3000 in New England and in Lutheran churches in the east, and about \$500 from various English congregations in Milwaukee.

Pastor Streissguth, from Baden, came to the convention with the intention of giving up his congregation in New Glarus, and of accepting a place in our synod. Newtonburg was recommended for him, which he visited, and they called him as preacher, to which place he moved in the fall of this past year. Pastor Goldammer moved to Manitowoc to serve the Lutheran congregation there as a main congregation, which had been a branch congregation up till then.

Candidate Philip Koehler, from Neuwied, Prussia, who had been a Barmen student and who was sent out from Langenberg, came during the past year, in May, and took over the congregations in Wayne and Barton and Addison.

Candidates Ph. Koehler and J. E. Sauer were ordained.

In the past synodical year there were

|                             |              |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Baptized                    | 417 children |
| Confirmed                   | 121 children |
| Attending the Lord's Supper | 1513 souls   |
| Married                     | 40 couples   |
| Funerals                    | 167          |
| Synod treasury              | \$14         |
| Entire balance on hand      | \$32         |
| For heathen missions        | \$64         |

## VII

### Synod Convention

On May 16, 1856, the synod met in the Ev. Lutheran congregation in Manitowoc. Pastor Goldammer is preacher of the congregation.

At this occasion the new church which was built with Pastor Goldammer's help, was dedicated. He had collected several hundred (about \$400 or so) in the east.

Election of officers.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser was elected president, Pastor Bading secretary and Buehren treasurer.

During the course of the past year Pastor G. Reim, from Ober-Tuerkheim, kingdom of Wuerttemberg, arrived and served a Reformed congregation in Ashford, and assembled two other Lutheran congregations in the area. He had been a student at Basel, and was ordained in the established church of Wuerttemberg.

Pastor Streissguth and Pastor Reim were received into synod membership. Pastor Wrede had gone to Germany in the fall of 1855. Pastor Conrad was his successor in Racine, and Pastor Sauer was Conrad's successor in Town Hermann.

Candidates Christian Stark, from Ehrfurt, Saxony, who had spent some time at the Basel Mission Institute, came from Indiana and sought a place in our synod. The president pointed out a place in Port Washington. Candidate Ch. Stark was ordained.

Candidate Hennicke, recommended by Pastor Dumser, wished to be ordained. He was told to study further under Pastor Dumser's guidance.

Pastors Koehler, Bading, Reim and Sauer were appointed as a committee to draw up a plan for a church order for about-to-be founded congregations, and to present it to the next synod convention.

The Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation in Town Addison and the Ev. Lutheran St Paul congregation in Wayne, Pastor Koehler is preacher for both congregations, were accepted into synod membership, also the Friedens congregation in Port Washington whose preacher was Pastor Stark.

|                                     |      |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| In this year children were baptized | 371  |
| Confirmed                           | 140  |
| Communicants                        | 1583 |
| Married, couples                    | 122  |
| Funerals                            | 50   |
| Inner Missions                      | \$10 |
| Heathen Missions                    | \$50 |
| Synod treasury                      | \$13 |
| Day Schools                         | 5    |
| Sunday Schools                      | 5    |

## VIII

### Synod Convention 1857

The synod met on June 5, 1857, on Kilbourn Road in the Ev. Lutheran congregation, Pastor Koester's.

During the course of the past year Pastor W. Streissguth was called to Milwaukee to the Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation in place of Pastor Dulitz, who was removed.

Candidate Philip Sprengling from Weinnnsheim, Hessen, who was a student at Barmen and who was sent out by the Langenberger Society, came to America and after an agreed-upon delay at Pastor Koehler's, was ordained by the Northwest Conference, and was Pastor Streissguth's successor in the congregation at Newtonburg.

Candidate Hennicke was ordained.

The Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation of Milwaukee was accepted into synod membership.

The Ev. Lutheran church on Kilbourn Road was dedicated and the congregation was accepted into synod membership.

The Ev. Lutheran church in Caledonia was dedicated at the close of the convention, and the congregation was accepted into synod membership.

Pastor Diehlmann was accepted into synod membership. Diehlmann came from the Missouri Synod. He served several congregations in and around Princeton, Marquette County.

Candidate Hennicke served a congregation near Niles, Ill.

In this session the license system was done away with by a majority vote of synod members as being not Lutheran.

A committee was appointed to revise the constitution of the synod.

Pastor Buehren left the synod and Pastor Streissguth became treasurer in his place.

Parochial report—three preachers did not hand in a report.

Baptized 1596

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Confirmed                  | 118     |
| Communicants               | 1612    |
| Buried                     | 97      |
| Heathen Missions           | \$112   |
| Church building collection | \$15    |
| Synod treasury             | \$18.18 |
| Education                  | \$7.60  |
| Tract Society              | \$1     |
| Day Schools                | 5       |
| Sunday Schools             | 5       |

## IX 1858

The Ev. Lutheran Synod met on May 24, 1858, in the Ev. Lutheran St. John congregation in Milwaukee, Pastor Streissguth is preacher of the congregation.

Election of officers.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser president, Pastor Streissguth secretary, Pastor Conrad treasurer.

During the course of the past year Pastor Heinrich Roell came from New York state. The president referred him to several congregations in Washington County, West Bend and surrounding area. Pastor Roell came from Hasbergen, Prussia. Pastor H. Roell brought an honorable release from Dr. Pohlmann, the president of the New York Synod, and was accepted into synod membership.

Pastor G. Fachtmann from Hanover brought a recommendation to the president from Pastor Wall, the president of the Association of Churches in the West, and was accepted into synod membership.

Pastor Adalbert Rueter, a member of the Ohio Synod, sought a position in Wisconsin. The president in conjunction with Pastors Bading and Streissguth referred him to Columbus as a working area. Rueter was told to come to the synod convention and bring along an honorable release from the Ohio Synod. Hindered by circumstances, Rueter asked to be excused. Rueter came the following year to the synod convention in Racine, where it turned out that he could not get an honorable release.

Rueter affirmed his innocence, and he was accepted only conditionally. The president was to try to get such [a release] from Ohio. Rueter understood the art of deception, and for that reason one did not hesitate to give him a better working area. He was recommended for the congregation in Maple Grove by the president, and Pastor Koehler proposed him to the congregation, where he was then selected.

Rueter moved with his family to Maple Grove in the month of July, where Pastor Koehler installed him.

Soon after his departure from Columbus, the congregation there desired an investigation into several matters lying before them. The president felt that under the circumstances their petition should be heard. Pastor Streissguth went to Colum where a congregation meeting was held. Through this investigation it turned out that Rueter was a man unworthy of the office [of pastor].

Rueter let himself be used by a speculator, in that he caused about 10 to 12 families in the congregation to buy from the speculator land that was some distance away. For his Judas-payment Rueter received 40 acres of land. Aside from this there were many other complaints

against him in respect to money matters. The president urged Rueter to go to Columbus and defend himself against the accusations against him. Rueter refused to go and so the president went to Maple Grove, where together with Pastor Koehler he recalled his request. Since Rueter in agreement with his wife steadfastly refused, the president was forced to suspend him from his preaching office.

In the course of the previous year Pastor Reim received a call from the Ev. Lutheran congregation in Helenville, which he accepted.

The Ev. Lutheran St. Paul congregation of Lomira and the Ev. Lutheran Emmanuel congregation of Theresa served by Pastor Bading were accepted into synod membership.

Heinrich Sieker, from Newtonburg, a promising young man, was presented to the synod for the purpose of preparing him for the preaching ministry. The president was authorized to see if he could possibly study with Dr. Schaeffer in Gettysburg. For the intervening time Pastor Reim had the goodness of heart to take him along to Helenville in order to give him further necessary instruction. Goldammer himself had done this earlier.

According to the parochial reports

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Children baptized | 804     |
| Confirmed         | 176     |
| Communicants      | 2327    |
| Buried            | 112     |
| Heathen missions  | \$105   |
| Inner missions    | \$59    |
| Synod treasury    | \$21.13 |
| Parochial schools | 16      |
| Sunday Schools    | 7       |

Pastor Muehlhaeuser's congregation bought a new organ which cost \$900, of which \$700 has been paid.

## X

The Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin met on June 18, 1859 in Racine, Pastor Conrad's congregation.

During the course of the past synodical year the Lord again sent us new workers for his vineyard.

Candidate C. Braun from Coadjuthen in Prussian Lithuania, a student from the Berlin Missionhouse, came to Wisconsin, recommended by Inspector Wallmann.

Since Brother Goldammer accepted the call from the congregation in Burlington, and Brother Koehler became his successor in Manitowoc, Brother Braun was therefore ordained by the Northwest Conference and took over the former territory of Pastor Koehler.

Pastor Fachtmann was a circuit pastor for four months and founded a new Ev. Lutheran congregation in Fond du Lac.

About this time Candidate J. Hoffmann from Tomaskow Russian Posten, a student from the Berlin Missionhouse also recommended by Inspector Wallmann, arrived. Candidate Hoffmann was ordained by the Southern Conference and was Pastor Fachtmann's successor in his two congregations in Town of Polk and Richfield.

Brother Wald (through Pastor Streissguth who had this year made a trip to Germany) who was a circuit pastor in Alsace, prevailed upon, came to America and was ordained by the



Northwest Conference in Fond du Lac, and was called to be the preacher by the congregation in Menasha and Neenah.

Candidate Duborg from Holstein was ordained and was called as preacher by the congregation in Columbus to succeed Rueter.

Heinrich Sieker was sent to Gettysburg by the president to study with Dr. Schaeffer. The synod promised to contribute \$50 a year for him.

Candidate L. Needmann from Hardeggen, Hanover presented himself to be ordained. Needmann was referred to the Southern Conference and to the president for supervision and for further advancement.

L. Needmann in the meantime should teach school in the congregation in Greenfield, should read the sermons, and should further educate himself through study. His sermons, which he himself writes, should be given to the president for review.

The Pastors Braun, Hoffmann and Waldt were accepted as members of the synod. A. Rueter was conditionally accepted, if he receives an honorable testimony.

Congregations were accepted into the synod.

Friedens congregation in Kenosha—Pastor Stark

St. Peter congregation in Town Addison

Emmanuel congregation in Town Trenton—Pastor Roell

St John congregation in West Bend

St. John congregation in Burlington Pastor—Goldammer

The Ev. Lutheran congregation in Helenville—Pastor Reim

St. Jacobi congregation in Theresa—Pastor Bading

St. Matthew congregation in Town Lebanon

A committee of 5 preachers was appointed to draw up a letter of request to the friendly societies in Germany, relating to:

I a synodical library

II ways and means to establish a circuit pastor

III the further sending of workers for Wisconsin

Caused by the request of Dr. Reynolds that our synod possibly attach itself to the State University in Springfield, Ill., a committee of 5 preachers was appointed to pursue the matter further. The president was authorized to visit the Hon. Synod of Illinois, which holds its session in Chicago, in order to gather better information, namely in respect to the confessional position and also about the relationship under which conditions we could unite ourselves with the seminary.

More congregations were accepted into membership:

The Ev. Lutheran congregation in Fond du Lac—Pastor Fachtmann

St. John and St. James. congregation in Maple Grove without a preacher

The Ev. Lutheran congregation in LaCrosse without a preacher

Ev. Lutheran Emmanuel congregation in Caledonia

The Ev. Lutheran congregation in Burr Oak without a pastor

Parochial reports.

|                 |          |
|-----------------|----------|
| Baptized        | 1179     |
| Confirmed       | 287      |
| Communicants    | 4709     |
| All-day schools | 17       |
| Sunday Schools  | 16       |
| Inner missions  | \$85.82  |
| Outer missions  | \$125.40 |
| Synod treasury  | \$45.47  |

This history was rediscovered in the Northwestern College archives by Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann, who transcribed it into Latin script and translated the same. The original is in Pastor Muehlhaeuser's hand script.