

History of Fellowship Practice in the Wisconsin Synod

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The Wisconsin Synod has been called just about every name in the history book. In the eyes of others we are the “Isolated Synod.”ⁱ We are the synod which “represents the extreme right wing of American Lutheranism,”ⁱⁱ or the “ultra-reactionary right wing.”ⁱⁱⁱ Our institutions are thought of as “provincial, ingrown.”^{iv} But the unkindest cut is that we are usually not called anything at all. We merit no mention or only short paragraphs in large volumes of Lutheran history. “The Wisconsin Synod has seldom figured prominently in American Lutheranism.”^v

We are all acutely aware of how others see us. And we are conscious of how they have gained that impression. We have a history of strict confessionalism, based on a historical-grammatical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and a practice of fellowshiping only with those who agree with us on all the teachings of the Bible. For that reason we have been a little defensive at times when trying to dispel the misconceptions others have of us. James Schaefer wrote in 1955, “The Wisconsin Synod says it is not ‘isolationist’; it is aware that there are many fine Christians in other church bodies devoted to the Gospel. But the word is: No union without unity. It is convinced that God’s Word is all of a piece—there is no warrant from God to pass over even one of His jots and tittles.”^{vi} When the synod convention met at St. Lucas, Milwaukee, to celebrate its centennial in the summer of 1949, M. Lehninger summarized our history of fellowship practices and explained why the outside world misinterprets our motives and actions: “Making common cause with men who are either adhering to false doctrine or are indifferent to the truth is itself a denial of the truth, leading into unbelief and ending in destruction. We, therefore, abhor with all our heart all unionism, and avoid those that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned from the Word of God.”^{vii} Twenty-five years later, when we celebrated another anniversary, we were less defensive about our confessional stand but still very much conscious of how we were being seen by others. E.C. Fredrich wrote, “The Wisconsin Anniversary observance is not featuring any synodical image or influence, past or present. Actually, Wisconsin has in its recent history been singularly unsuccessful in winning friends with its image of rugged individualism and rock-ribbed conservatism. As for influencing people, Wisconsin must face the fact that in the one major effort of this century in which it exerted all the influence it could muster, the effort of maintaining the Synodical Conference in its historical positions, Wisconsin lost the battle and, in the process, a good chunk of its membership.”^{viii}

Today we have a whole generation of pastors, teachers and lay people who simply do not understand this whole matter of fellowship. Our 40-year-olds’ had barely passed puberty when the Synodical Conference was dissolved. They have lived in relative isolation from the doctrinal strife and political maneuvering going on in majority Lutheranism. They have been nurtured in an age of comparative peace and unparalleled blessings from God in our church body. A gracious God has allowed us to enjoy an expanding home mission outreach, a vigorous and fruitful world mission effort, an awareness of evangelism and lay ministry, a quality and quantity development of our educational institutions, a responsive sensitivity to the need for good Christian literature, a groundswell growth in auxiliary Christian enterprises, a reevaluation of individual congregational polity with an eye toward parish renewal, and most recently a major capital funds drive which demonstrated in a humanly measurable way the immeasurable presence of the gospel of Christ in the hearts of our people. All of this has, in turn, led us to be a

little less defensive about our confessional posture and has given us a sense of independence and identity as a synod we might not have had when we were fighting our battles under the umbrella of the Synodical Conference.

During these years of peace we have been carefully teaching the new generation what it means to rely entirely upon the Word of God and to practice fellowship only with those who are also so reliant. Our youth have memorized 2 Timothy 3:16 and Romans 16:17 and with childlike faith have followed their fathers in refraining from communion and prayer with the heterodox. Yet their understanding of confessional fellowship practice is incomplete. They lack, not through their own fault, the setting of history and the context of battle experience for a demonstration of the value of these principles and for a healthy fear of the horrible consequences which follow when these principles are not upheld in practice.

Perhaps that is the reason for the assignment of this paper. It is not strictly historical, for no discussion of fellowship practices can avoid the Bible's teaching on the matter. It is not a reflection on the contrast between our humble, wavering beginnings and our present blessings and confidence. No. A history of fellowship practices in our synod must first of all renew our thankfulness for the grace of God, which in spite of all our sins and mistakes has preserved a confessional integrity among us. Then our history can also serve as a setting and context for the present generation's study of the scriptural principles. For history is our future. As surely as the devil prowls like a roaring lion, so surely will we again be fighting the battles we have fought in the past. Only by facing the challenges of the future as God has led us to meet them in the past can we be confident that God will continue to bless us.

Birth and Baptism 1849-1868

The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin was born on December 8, 1849, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Pastors Muehlhaeuser, Wrede and Weinmann passed formal resolutions specifying the name and the officers of the new synod and planned a constituting meeting for May of the following year. The issues of confession and fellowship were present at these earliest meetings, but not in the same sense as we consider them today.

Our founding fathers, as we are, were products of their background and training. They came from Germany, and they were Lutherans. But the Lutherans in Germany since 1817 had been forced to unite with the Reformed churches in every practical way possible. Some fought this "Prussian Union" instituted by Frederick William III and suffered imprisonment or fled to the new lands in America and Australia. A few were successful in establishing "free churches" apart from the forced government union.

But most went along with the tide. They claimed faithfulness to the Lutheran confessions and practice, but they accepted the amalgamation of their politics and institutions of learning with the Reformed. Still they too had their confessional battles. Side by side with the Reformed they fought the rationalism which had crept into the church and the ever-present menace of Roman Catholicism. These "unionizing" Lutherans were looked down on by the "old Lutherans" who refused to join the Reformed. Yet the unionizing Lutherans went about their own struggles against Romanism and rationalism, their own men for the ministry and formed mission societies to send pastoral candidates overseas.^{ix}

One of these mission societies was the Langenberg Mission society which trained most of its pastors at Barmen, Germany. All three of our founding fathers were sent by the Langenberg Society to the United States. Muehlhaeuser and Weinmann were trained at Barmen, and Wrede

was colloquized by the society after graduating from Kreis Magdeburg. All of them knew each other before they met at Milwaukee in 1949.

There were already two synods represented in Milwaukee when the Wisconsin Synod was begun. The Missouri Synod had been founded in Chicago just two years earlier and had congregations in Milwaukee. The Buffalo Synod also had pastors and congregations in the area. But both of these synods had been founded by “old Lutherans” from Germany. They were both strictly confessional and deplored the practices of pastors sent over here by the unionizing mission societies. Our founding fathers did not want to affiliate with these strict churches which were as often doing battle with each other as they were together deploring the unionists.

Yet our founding fathers considered themselves fully Lutheran. Their constitution adopted May 27, 1850, requires of congregations that “everything should be in keeping with the true Word of the Bible and the confessions of our Evangelical-Lutheran church.”^x At his ordination each pastoral candidate was pledged “to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the rest of the Evangelical-Lutheran church’s confessions.”^{xi} In spite of the good wording of the constitution, our earliest pastors felt free to fellowship with and serve both Lutheran and Reformed Christians. There was a loyalty to the Langenberg tradition of peaceful coexistence among conflicting creeds which could not easily be shaken. Muehlhaeuser,^{xii} who was elected president of the new synod,^{xiii} had to contend often with the tensions this created. He had difficulty writing an answer to one of his fellow pastors who had left the Wisconsin Synod to serve the Methodists. The pastor had written Muehlhaeuser to explain the reason for his switch: “Your practice is neither strictly Lutheran nor strictly Evangelical, and yet you aim to be both.”

Right from the beginning, however, we can see the Lord’s love and design for our church body. In spite of the unionistic background of its founders and the majority of its early pastors, in spite of the many instances^{xiv} of improper fellowshiping by these first pastors with protestant and Reformed bodies, God led the Wisconsin Synod to become a truly confessional church in doctrine and practice. And this happened in a remarkably short period of time. By 1868 the Wisconsin Synod had established ties with the Missouri Synod which would lead to the establishment of the conservative Synodical Conference.

The reasons for this abrupt turnaround are many and interwoven. A primary reason no doubt is the firm Lutheran conviction our early pastors held in spite of their fellowship compromises. Their consciences were tested day after day in the new land in ways they had not been tested in Europe. The disorderliness and tensions they experienced in their own congregations moved them to a more consistent confessional practice.

Another reason for the shift to the right was the constant pressure our early pastors felt from the “old Lutherans” of the Buffalo and Missouri synod pastors in the area. But it wasn’t only the local pastors from those synods who put the pressure on our men. “Soon their church papers, Buffalo’s *Informatorium* and Missouri’s *Lutheraner* sounded warnings and leveled accusations.”^{xv} This pressure was certainly a factor in Wisconsin’s eventual move to confessionalism, but it was at the same time a part of the reason why they did not move more quickly to join the other Lutherans. “The almost contemptuous treatment they received at the hands of the Old Lutherans, the haughty condescension with which they met occasionally caused hurt and confusion, and kept them away from the synods already at work in Wisconsin.”^{xvi}

God’s hand in turning our synod is evident especially in the men he sent to us in the 1850’s. John Bading, who came to Wisconsin in 1853, was strictly schooled in confessional Lutheranism in Berlin and Hermannsburg, Germany. When Bading was ordained by President Muehlhaeuser at Calumet, he demanded to be asked for total adherence to all the Lutheran

Confessions. Seven years later Bading was elected president of the synod and provided strong confessional direction in his formal addresses and in his administration.^{xvii} Other strong confessionally minded men were Gottlieb Reim, Philip Koehler and Elias Sauer.^{xviii}

A fourth factor in the turnaround in the early years was our relationship with the Langenberg and Berlin Mission Societies which had provided pastors, money and theological books for our synod's ministry. When President Bading went to Europe in 1863 to request funds for a proposed pastor-training school in Watertown, it was evident that there was tension between us and the sponsoring societies. Although Northwestern was built with monies collected outside of Prussia, those collected in the state churches in Prussia were never released for our use. The mission societies "were concerned that Wisconsin's growing confessionalism might bring it to clash with the Prussian state church."^{xix}

A final influencing factor in our young synod's move toward a more confessional stance was its involvement with Lutheran associations in this country. When in 1866 it was evident that the General Synod was breaking up, Wisconsin in convention formally considered associating with the more conservative Lutheran groups which were leaving that federation. The issues that divided the General Synod and led to the formation of the General Council were issues of confession and fellowship. And the Wisconsin Synod's interest in joining the new body was its growing concern for uniting with those who had more conservative views.^{xx}

All of these various influences came to focus on Wisconsin's convention in 1868. It was time in God's view for Wisconsin's baptism into confessional integrity and consistent fellowship practice. E. C. Fredrich summarizes it this way: "The big issue of the Wisconsin Synod's theological identity came to a head in the 1867 convention and was finally settled a year later. Castigated by the mission societies for being too strict and by the Missouri Synod for being too lax and challenged also by similar conflicts on the larger Lutheran scene in the land that brought about the creation of the General Council, the Wisconsin Synod was led to a show-down on the confessional and fellowship issue."^{xxi}

The 1867 convention condemned the unionistic practices which the Prussian Union had forced upon the sponsoring mission societies, but stopped short of refusing their support of men and money. Between the 1867 and 1868 conventions the mission societies demanded that Wisconsin retract its harder stance of fellowship. Then finally in its 1868 convention Wisconsin stood by its statement of fellowship and terminated its relationship with its sponsoring societies in Europe. The corner had been turned.

During the first period of synodical history many good and bad practices of fellowship occurred. There was in a sense a strict confessionalism, but it was tainted by inconsistent practice. The constitution carefully required a Lutheran confessional standard, but many pastors were ordained without pledging themselves to that standard. Some pastors indiscriminately served Lutheran and protestant denominations of all kinds. Even more conservative pastors had to deal with congregations with large numbers of "Lutherans" who had joined our churches because they did not want to be in more conservative churches like those in the Buffalo and Missouri Synods. The Lord's Supper was knowingly administered to the Reformed who by their public profession denied the Real Presence.^{xxii}

Yet by the grace of God a clear confession of the truths of Holy Scripture and a practice of fellowship on the basis of agreement with those truths emerged. The struggles in the new land refined our fathers' faith. The influx of confessionally trained men tempered their resolve. Although it was at times uncharitable and overbearing, the witness of the "old Lutherans" provoked their consciences. Fellowship with the unionizing mission societies was ended. New

fellowship with pastors and churches that shared their adherence to Scripture were being actively sought out. The birth of our synod and its baptism into the proper doctrine and practice of fellowship had taken place.

The Weaning Years 1868-1903

The positive aspects of confessional fellowship practice were not only recognized and enjoyed by the Wisconsin Synod in its weaning years, but also aggressively pursued. Already in 1866 our synod affiliated with other more conservative synods which had broken from the liberal General Synod in the east to form the General Council. But our association with that federation was short-lived. "Four Points" in which differences existed among the federated church bodies were presented to the General Council for resolution by some of its prospective members. Three of these "Four Points" involved issues of fellowship practice. These were altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship and lodge membership. The fourth point was chiliasm, or millennialism.

When these four points were not resolved to the satisfaction of other church bodies which brought them up, the Wisconsin Synod was the first body to withdraw from the General Council in 1868. The action was consistent with the decisive move to leave behind the mission societies overseas.

Things were moving so fast with regard to the interrelationships among Lutheran groups at that time that the loss of our severance with the General Council was hardly noticed. In the fall of that same year a colloquium was held in Milwaukee with representatives of the Missouri Synod. The written report of that meeting which was given to the next synodical convention was important because it emphasized that discussions had centered on agreement in many areas of scriptural doctrine. "In all these doctrines all those present rejoiced to find such agreement that on its basis the following points were adopted as a token of the doctrinal unity of both synods and as the principles for the future mutual relation in the field of practical work."^{xxiii} This statement is not only the theme for the long and cordial fellowship which Wisconsin enjoyed with Missouri for ninety years; it is also the statement of fellowship practice on which the Wisconsin Synod sadly severed its ties with Missouri in 1961. It is still the basis for our fellowship practices today, the means by which we seek to be united with others in worship and practice.

The Synodical Conference was founded in Milwaukee in 1872. In addition to the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, the Minnesota, Ohio, Norwegian and Illinois Synods were also members. That the fellowship between Missouri and Wisconsin was based on agreement in doctrine, and not on political expediency or geographic or cultural similarities, was borne out in the years to come. An agreement to share seminary training facilities ended in 1878 when Wisconsin opened its own seminary in Milwaukee. A proposal before the Synodical Conference to divide all of the federated congregations into autonomous state synods was also vetoed by Wisconsin. But when strife began in regard to the teaching of Holy Scripture, "the controversy concerning the doctrines of conversion and election found Wisconsin on the side of Missouri fighting shoulder to shoulder against the error."^{xxiv} "The Wisconsin Synod stand in the election controversy goes to show the factor of divine providence."^{xxv}

The Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference in 1881 for doctrinal reasons, and in a tactical move the Norwegian Synod departed in 1883. Dr. Walther of the Missouri Synod had delivered a paper on the doctrine of election. Although differences in regard to this teaching had surfaced before, Walther's essay seemed to be the catalyst for the violent reaction which followed. Walther taught that there were two reasons why God chose some in eternity to come to

faith: the love in his own heart and the work which Christ would do for us. He ruled out the possibility that God chose some because he saw beforehand that they would come to faith. Walther's teaching drew hard criticism from almost all of American Lutheranism. The Ohio and Norwegian Synods withdrew from the Synodical Conference in connection with the issue, and Walther was berated and condemned by the Ohio and Iowa Synods, the General Council and the General Synod.

It is not our purpose here to relate all the doctrinal and historical aspects of this long, drawn out controversy in Lutheranism. But the fellowship practices of the Wisconsin Synod are of special interest in this connection. Wisconsin's stand with Missouri on this issue "was not simply a matter of blind follow-the-leader policy, but a position resulting from careful investigation and personal conviction."^{xxvi} Dr. Adolph Hoenecke, who had chaired the synod convention's committee on the mission society question, and Dr. A. Ernst, president of Northwestern College, had done a significant amount of study, lecture and debate on the doctrine of election before Dr. Walther became involved in controversy in 1877.^{xxvii} They did their study on the basis of Scripture passages and influenced the synodical membership on the basis of their Bible study.

At the beginning of the next century the debate over predestination began to revolve around the issue of "the analogy of faith." Those who opposed Walther's teaching on election demanded that passages speaking of predestination be interpreted in the light of Scripture as a whole. They felt that this doctrine must logically conform with passages which speak of faith as necessary for salvation. Thus God must have elected us in view of our faith even though the Bible does not specifically state that. Again at this point the Wisconsin men determined their allegiance in fellowship on the basis of their own Bible study. "Professor August Pieper of the Wisconsin Synod vigorously condemned this idea as another form of rationalism, an accursed effort to harmonize God's special election of individuals with his general election of all mankind to salvation."^{xxviii} In the first volume of the *Quartalschrift*, 1904, Prof. J.P. Koehler presented a lengthy study of the analogy of faith. He demonstrated that what Scripture teaches about election or any other doctrine must be drawn only from those passages which speak specifically of that doctrine.

The election controversy demonstrates again what must always be the starting point for the practice of fellowship: agreement in doctrine on the basis of Scripture. Our synod's fathers sought that kind of fellowship in the election dispute. When such unity in teaching is demonstrated, fellowship requires us to stand side by side with our brothers. God gave us the strength to do that in the election matter. Finally the practice of fellowship requires a sincere love and concern for those who are in error. History records that this was also the case with our forefathers in the election debate. E. C. Fredrich notes, "Wisconsin did all in its power on the intersynodical level to foster agreement in the Bible doctrine."^{xxix}

We may call these last years of the 19th Century the weaning years on the basis of the process of change that was going on internally in the Wisconsin Synod. There is no doubt that on official levels and in interchurch relations the Wisconsin Synod had turned the corner on confessional fellowship practices. But change comes slowly in the general pastorate and among the members of individual congregations.

It is difficult to document the changes which must have taken place in the fellowship practices in the daily life and affairs of local congregations. There are some hints, however, that these changes did not come quickly or without resistance. J.P. Koehler records a letter from the former president and now pastor, William Streissguth, to President Bading two years after

Wisconsin's dramatic break with the mission societies and doctrinal agreement with Missouri. The pastor writes, "Through your and Meumann's and the synod's mad Lutheran carrying-on Fond du Lac has become a bed of thorns for me... This Lutheranism that you have helped establish will never become my own, though I be made out a worse heretic than I long since have considered... Now you have purged the synod of all unionism and put it on a pure(?) Lutheran basis. What have you improved thereby? Or gained? Nothing, yes, harmed and lost. But I must remember that I have decided to keep quiet and let things take their course; where they are headed, I see clearly enough."^{xxx}

Our general membership also needed to grow in sanctification by being weaned away from the earlier animosity and bitterness with the Missouri Synod. This bitterness was as much in evidence on the congregation level as it was on the synodical level. "The worst trouble spots were Milwaukee, Racine, Watertown and vicinity, Oshkosh and Burlington."^{xxxi} When Wisconsin and Missouri representatives met at the colloquium in Milwaukee in the fall of 1868, they had decided to wipe the slate clean and let bygones be bygones in these local skirmishes. Problems were to be resolved in each place without an attempt to pursue the issues involved or to assign blame.

But a formal declaration of fellowship on paper always requires time for application in the practice of the people involved. A year after the oral agreement between synodical representatives sores were still festering on the local level. A letter drafted by A. Hoenecke for President Bading was sent to Dr. Walther. It indicated that the wounds would be slow to heal. Bading wrote, "Before the colloquy and no less during it, there was the declaration that in case any old differences concerning congregations or individual parishoners might really still have to be threshed out, there was not to be any haggling as to which side was most to blame... We can't say that this has been complied with."^{xxxii}

That there was growth in the practice of fellowship among our people is evident from a number of things. The breakoff in the supply of pastors from overseas meant that we had to train our own.^{xxxiii} There was an emphasis in these years on establishing our own pastor training system. The location of our seminary bounced from Watertown to St. Louis to Milwaukee before a permanent campus was located in Wauwatosa. Yet in the confusion men were regularly trained by men who had learned from experience and doctrinal strife that their work was "penetrating into and unfolding the depth of the Scripture's teaching of salvation in Christ."^{xxxiv} The number of pastors more than tripled in the last quarter of the last century.

The fellowship practices of our synod during this time can be seen from the way in which it began to pull together to do the Lord's work. "Those intersynodical conflicts in the late 1870's and early 1880's helped to unite more firmly a synod that had just passed through its own identity crisis just a few years before."^{xxxv} There was significant growth in communicants and in the number of congregations. Side by side our leaders and congregations fought the Wisconsin Bennet Law^{xxxvi} which limited and regulated private educational institutions. The beginnings of a world mission effort began with our work among the Apache Indians in Arizona. In 1892 the Wisconsin Synod federated with the Minnesota and Michigan Synod and began cooperating with them in worker training.

Wisconsin's federation with Minnesota and Michigan merits some extra attention. The federation was not accomplished until 1892. There had been an earlier contact with Minnesota in the late 60's, but at that time Wisconsin drew back because of its newly acquired confessional consciousness. The Minnesota Synod then still belonged to the General Council, and Wisconsin was in the process of withdrawing from it. The question of membership in secret societies had

not been clarified by Minnesota, and that synod was also wrestling with the problem of its pastors serving Lutherans and Reformed together at the Lord's table.^{xxxvii}

The federation of Wisconsin-Minnesota-Michigan, like that of the Synodical Conference, is a demonstration of the wisdom and love of God. When he demands in his Word that fellowship be based on total agreement on Bible truth, he does so to perpetuate a real harmony which endures in the face of many practical difficulties. Practicalities caused some strife among the three newly federated synods. In 1896 the Michigan Synod withdrew from the federation for fifteen years because of the federation's decision to use its seminary as a prep school. Some Minnesota Synod congregations ceded from that body when it federated with Wisconsin because they preferred an organic union with Missouri. But because there was unanimity in doctrine and practice among them, the federation not only survived, but itself became an organic union in 1917.

The Adolescent Years 1903-1961

The Lord was leading, and there were great blessings for the Wisconsin Synod. It is really impossible to categorize history. You cannot make a clean break between the ending of one era and the beginning of another. The time period shortly after the turn of the century is significant, however, for our consideration of fellowship practices. It marked the end of Dr. Adolph Hoenecke's service at the seminary. The many men he had instructed were now the pastors of the synod. The turn of the century also marks the beginning of the professorships of three men who came to be known as the authors of the "Wauwatosa Theology." Professors Koehler, Pieper and Schaller laid aside dogmatic presuppositions and started fresh from the Scripture in their writings on election, objective justification, the analogy of faith, and church and ministry issues. This time was also marked by the beginning of an awareness in our synod that English was to be the language of outreach in our country.^{xxxviii} The early 1900s were the start of the Lutheran Free Conferences and the beginning of the issue of prayer fellowship.

These were not adolescent years in any sense in reference to the caliber of the men who served their synod. Many of the giants of our history lived and served during this time: Adolph Hoenecke, C. Gausewitz, Frederick Soll, G. E. Bergemann, John Schaller, J. P. Koehler and August Pieper. These were our adolescent years only in the sense that during this time we gradually gained our own independence and footing in expressing our fellowship principles. We dug deeply into Scriptures. We drew together in the bonds of fellowship among our own by forming one synod out of the federated synods. On the basis of Scripture truth we sought to promote real unity among Lutherans in America. On Bible footing we were not afraid to challenge and correct our sister Missouri Synod.

The Wisconsin Synod was especially aggressive in promoting Lutheran unity. In reflection on the events of this time, Prof. Fredrich suggests, "Let those who have in recent years built up a fixed impression of Wisconsin isolationism realize that at least in the first decades of this century it was not that at all, willingly doing everything possible to aid in the reestablishment of unity in the doctrines of conversion and election."^{xxxix} Wisconsin promoted a series of free conferences, held in Beloit, Watertown, Milwaukee, Detroit and Fort Wayne from 1902-1906 and attended by men of the Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio and Buffalo Synods. Professors Hoenecke and Koehler played an important part in the Scripture study of these conferences.

Another issue which arose during these years is that of the doctrine of church and ministry. It is another indication of the growing doctrinal maturity of our relatively young synod

and touches on the matter of fellowship practice in that it shows how we arrived at the biblical truth on which we based our fellowship. Missouri, as well as most other Lutheran synods in America, embraced the concept that the local congregation was the only divinely ordained visible gathering of Christians. Along with that, the pastoral office was supposed to be the office in the church instituted by God in which all other offices were comprehended.

A touchy situation developed when a Missouri Synod congregation in Ohio requested membership in our synod. The questions in that case led our men to look to the Holy Scripture for answers in regard to the doctrine of church and ministry. What they found in the Bible was a surprising absence of support for either proposition. The local congregation is not a unique form of the visible church, nor does the local pastorate encompass other offices of the ministry, such as teacher, administrator, professor and missionary. Professors Koehler and Pieper especially “stressed the self-evident maxim, theoretically acknowledged but so often forgotten in practice, that we Christians must always go to the only fountainhead and source of faith and knowledge, the well of living water, the Bible, as the norm by which all things in the Church, doctrine and life, must be judged.”^{xli}

The church and ministry question was never resolved. There were many in both synods on both sides of the debate. An attempt was made to resolve the issue in the *Thiensville Theses* of 1932, but these lacked the specific wording to put the matter to rest. Fredrich notes, “In 1946 the Synodical Conference appointed a special “Interim Committee” which was to deal with the problem and which served until 1952 without notable success. The church-ministry differences were not yet resolved when the Synodical Conference split over other issues.”^{xli}

There are two things we have to consider in the church and ministry differences which also have a bearing on fellowship. First, why did our synod continue in fellowship with Missouri if a difference about doctrine existed between us? That answer is in the Wisconsin Synod Union Committee’s contribution to the restudy of the fellowship question by the Synodical Conference. This study points out the positive results of the practice of fellowship principles. “Weakness of faith,” this document says, “is in itself not a reason for terminating church fellowship, but rather an inducement for practicing it vigorously to help one another in overcoming our individual weaknesses.”^{xlii}

We were practicing fellowship with Missouri at the time the differences over church and ministry arose. Under those circumstances the Bible encouraged us to determine whether our brothers had become “persistent errorists.” There are two ways of expressing love for brothers when dealing with those who hold views contrary to Scripture. “In the exercise of church fellowship, particularly two Christian principles need to direct us, the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds.”^{xliii}

Another consequence of the church and ministry differences would not become evident until years later. After Wisconsin withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1961 and the Synodical Conference was dissolved, individual congregations of Missouri withdrew from their synod for confessional reasons. Some of these congregations formed alliances in the form of conferences or synods. The differences with Wisconsin regarding church and ministry would prevent most of them from entering our fellowship.^{xliv}

The joint meetings which the Wisconsin Synod sponsored to discuss election and conversion gave rise to a matter which would be of growing concern in the Synodical Conference until its dissolution in the early 1960s. That is prayer fellowship. In the Detroit Free

Conference of 1904^{xlv} there was a lively discussion of who could pray with whom. Some of the participants in these meetings wanted to conduct joint prayer. They felt that prayer under the circumstances of the free conference did not violate fellowship principles of separation from those who are not in agreement in doctrine. The Wisconsin men argued for a “unit concept” of prayer. They said that a prayer is a prayer, an act of worship, an expression of unity in faith, a practice of fellowship, regardless of the circumstances. The Missouri Synod seemed to agree with this concept at the time.^{xlvi}

It became increasingly clear from this point that Missouri was not practicing a unit concept of fellowship. The exceptions were few at first, but the evidence mounted as Missouri found reason after reason for fellowshipping with those with whom it was not in confessional agreement. By the 1930s it became a concern that the Wisconsin Synod felt necessary to address openly in the Synodical Conference. Many new concerns related to the matter of fellowship practices in Missouri were also arising. There were the problems of scouting and lodges, Missouri’s unilateral pursuit of establishing union with the American Lutheran Church, as well as the continuing occurrences of prayer fellowship with erring church bodies, officials and organizations.

In retrospect it is good for us to examine the underlying causes of Missouri’s change in attitude. About motives that arose among them because of their size, their seeking political union at any cost, or because of a false security in their traditions we can only speculate unfairly. But one thing we can judge. Practicing fellowship can be based correctly only on agreement in doctrine. And it was this doctrinal base of Missouri which already then showed outward evidence of erosion. Fredrich comments, “Wisconsin saw the signs that Missouri was undergoing a change... Familiar Bible passages were being given new interpretations and applications.”^{xlviii} It was God who through the Holy Scriptures had brought about peace and fellowship in the Synodical Conference. When Missouri began to tamper with the source and channel of these blessings, the blessings themselves came to an end.

Missouri’s occasional and exceptional practice of selective fellowship in prayer began to extend to other areas. Missouri practiced cooperation with other Lutheran church bodies in efforts which they considered “external” to the work of the church. But these so-called externals^{xlviii} included publishing joint church papers, exchanging instructors in educational institutions, and building and staffing worship centers for military personnel during the Second World War.

There were many in Missouri who spoke clearly and correctly on the issue of prayer fellowship during these years. Prof. William Arndt of their St. Louis seminary wrote, “We must not overlook that rejection of the Triune God and of Christ and persistent adherence to false teaching or to a sinful life form a barrier against joint prayer.”^{xlix} Dr. L. Fuerbringer wrote in a Missouri publication eight years later in 1945, “According to the Scriptures only those should pray together who are of one mind and of one faith.”¹ But these and other faithful voices went unheeded. In 1944 and again in 1953 Missouri conventions formally committed to print what it had been practicing for decades: “Resolved, That Synod declare that it does not consider Joint Prayer at intersynodical meetings unionistic and sinful, ‘provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error.’”^{li}

By the 1950s the early Missouri-Wisconsin confessor-unionist roles were exactly reversed. After numerous efforts on Wisconsin’s part to encourage, warn and urge Missouri to its former faithfulness, its patience with an erring brother was nearing resolve. In 1955 Wisconsin protested against Missouri’s unionistic practices at its convention. It listed many things which

threatened formally and finally to divide the fellowship: “Its (Missouri’s) persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (the Common Confession, joint prayer, scouting, chaplaincy, communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council, cooperation with unorthodox churches in matters clearly not in the field of externals; negotiating with lodges and Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness, under the same plea taking part in unionistic religious programs and in activities of unionistic church federations, negotiating for the purposes of union with a church body whose official position is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine...).^{lii} The protest was followed by a resolution to terminate fellowship, but the passing of that resolution was delayed by further patient and loving efforts toward our long-time brothers until the 1961 convention.

The years of discord in the Synodical Conference also witnessed two major breaches of unity within the Wisconsin Synod itself. The early 1900s had begun on two good notes of harmony. The Michigan Synod had resolved within itself the question of the Saginaw school which first led it to break from the Wisconsin-Minnesota-Michigan federation in the 1890s.^{liii} In 1910 the Michigan Synod rejoined the federation, and by 1917 the three federated synods were fully incorporated into one synod. There was peace for a little while. There was unity in doctrine, cooperation in education and joint work for expansion. The members of the newly incorporated synod stood side by side with Missouri in fighting for the scriptural teaching of election and objective justification.

The internal peace was soon disturbed by the Protestant controversy: “The controversy represents in the history of the Wisconsin Synod one of the major internal events and intramural conflicts that have occurred.” It involved “the turmoil at two synodical schools, the clash between two theological giants, the losses in congregations and called workers.”^{liv}

It is impossible to give an adequate summary of all the events that have occurred as a part of the Protestant controversy. To this day no two people agree what details are necessary fully to understand what happened. But some details must be mentioned which have a bearing on the practice of fellowship.

Although other conditions may have set the stage for the controversy, the spark that touched it off was a disciplinary action involving some of the students at Northwestern College in Watertown in 1924. The faculty’s handling of the matter was called into question by the board, and subsequently synodical and district officials entered the picture. The officials’ handling of this case and related ones that sprang up around it was criticized as heavy-handed legalism in many quarters of the Western Wisconsin District. Fuel was added to the fire by a conference paper by Pastor William Beitz in 1926.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was drawn into the matter when Western Wisconsin District officials asked the seminary faculty, Professors Koehler, Pieper, Henkel and Meyer, for a *Gutachten*, or theological evaluation, of the Beitz conference paper. In the paper Beitz had attacked many aspects of spiritual life in the Wisconsin Synod, including “a miserable failure in congregational life, in preaching, in seminary training, in catechetical endeavors, in just about every aspect of ‘living by faith.’”^{lv} The seminary faculty criticized the paper on two doctrinal points and said that it improperly judged hearts.

Events led Prof. Koehler to withdraw his original signature of endorsement of the faculty evaluation of the Beitz paper. Koehler soon found himself aligned with the Protestants. He was granted a year’s leave of absence and eventually dismissed from the seminary faculty.^{lvi} The Protestants who gathered their forces mostly from the Western Wisconsin District were declared

to be out of fellowship with the synod on the basis of their persisting actions and defense of the Beitz paper.

Many attempts to resolve differences with the Protestant Conference, as it calls itself, were made at that time and more recently. The Minnesota District made an effort, but Beitz's cold reception of their overtures made them ineffective. In 1936 the Minnesota District had to declare three of its own pastors who sympathized with the Protestants to be out of fellowship. In the late 1950s the Western Wisconsin District rescinded the suspensions which brought about the original organization of the Protestant Conference, but for various reasons this did not lead to reconciliation.

In regard to the practice of fellowship I think it can be said that we earnestly seek and pray for reunion with the members of the Protestant Conference. One of our writers makes such an emotional plea: "What would really be wrong with each and every one of us resolving today to do anything and everything possible to heal a break that has existed in Wisconsin Synod history for over half a century? What would be wrong with each and every one of us praying tonight and subsequent nights that the Holy Spirit might do what we have been unable to do?"^{lvii} Whether it is historical events that still separate us, or whether it is indeed a difference in doctrine can be established by sitting down and talking about the one thing necessary for true fellowship, that is, agreement on Scripture. This we are more than willing to do.

A second major disruption in our internal synodical fellowship was precipitated by our extended dealings with Missouri from 1939 to 1961. We need to recount some of our witness to our former Missouri brothers during those years to set the stage for this internal break. It was toward the end of that period that numerous pastors, teachers, individual laymen and whole congregations broke their fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and gathered to form the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Missouri representatives had been meeting with officials from the more liberal American Lutheran Church for some time by the late 1950s. Their efforts were aimed at establishing fellowship between the two bodies. The respective synods each prepared a summary statement of their doctrines which were to be the foundation for union. The Missouri Synod prepared the Brief Statement and the American Synod presented the Declaration. The Missouri Synod convention of 1938 approved the two documents as a doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.^{lviii}

Wisconsin reacted sharply. A special doctrinal committee was appointed. It consisted of the Conference of Presidents and the five men on the Thiensville faculty. An executive committee of this group, now known as the Commission on Interchurch Relations, included Pastor Ed Reim. In the years that followed Reim would become seminary Professor and President Reim, and then leave the seminary to join those who formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

The Wisconsin Committee on Union Matters, as it was called then, prompted the 1939 Wisconsin convention to call upon Missouri to require a single doctrinal statement, instead of two, as the basis for union. It was clear that Missouri and the ALC were interpreting their respective documents according to their own whims. Missouri's 1941 convention acceded to the call for one confessional document, but in the mean time other actions of Missouri were clouding the fellowship practice picture.

There were a number of things which Wisconsin had to contend with at the same time. The differences between us and Missouri were no longer confined to the level of official responses. Divisions occurred which touched at the heart of fellowship practices on the

congregational level. In 1938 Missouri began participation in the national military chaplaincy program. Under government requirements Missouri's military pastors were, required to serve persons not of their, confession, and their own members in the military were served spiritually by chaplains who did not share their beliefs. The Wisconsin Synod convention of 1939 officially declined to participate in the military chaplaincy program.

Another disturbing change followed in quick succession. In 1944 Missouri formally dropped its opposition to Scouting, claiming that participation in scouting did not violate its fellowship principles and leaving the decision on whether to incorporate scouting programs up to the individual congregation. "Serious disturbances in our parishes very soon resulted. In the eyes of many of Wisconsin's lay members this became the key issue in our relations with Missouri."^{lix}

Other fellowship offenses which touched congregational life or which were observed on the lay level were increasing in Missouri. Local Missouri pastors and officials practiced altar and pulpit fellowship with those publicly holding to false doctrines. Joint lay gatherings, cooperation of professors and students of Missouri schools with heterodox bodies, editorial sharing with errorists brought Missouri's problems before our general membership. Forty-four Chicago pastors of the Missouri Synod issued a statement defending such actions.

Meanwhile Missouri also continued to pursue agreement and fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Upon our urging in 1939 the two bodies developed a single statement of teaching called the *Doctrinal Affirmation*. This document was discarded as inadequate by Missouri and the ALC, but they continued their unionizing efforts in a subsequent formula called the *Common Confession*. This too was finally set aside by Missouri in 1956, but not for doctrinal reasons. Missouri's actions were always inconclusive. They had lost their will to make positive doctrinal decisions and to carry on church discipline on the basis of them. Statements and propositions containing error were simply withdrawn from discussion instead of being labeled false doctrine. And unionizing pursuits went on.

The Wisconsin Synod made use of direct confrontation with Missouri and utilized the avenues of brotherly warning available in the Synodical Conference. But things were coming to a head already in the early '50s. A battle of tracts went on between the two synods. The Wisconsin delegation to the Synodical Conference convention in St. Paul declared themselves to be *in statu confessionis* over against Missouri because of its persistence in upholding the *Common Confession* as a basis for fellowship with the ALC. The 1954 Synodical Conference convention was devoted entirely to a discussion of doctrinal and practical differences involving fellowship.

From this late date it is hard to capture the tension, the strife, the confusion, the love and hate, the concentrated effort at preserving union, the bitterness of doctrinal division that permeated the atmosphere during this era. There were sins of lovelessness on both sides. There was heroic dedication to doctrinal purity and sincere, heartfelt anguish over a division that seemed inevitable. It is not possible for a late-comer to distinguish between the emotional and intellectual aspects of the faith demonstrated during those years.

It is in this context that the separation of our former brothers in the Church of the Lutheran Confession took place. A few of our people left us already when our synodical conventions in 1953 did not break fellowship ties with Missouri. Many more left after the '55 convention. At that convention 50 delegates protested our failure to vote a break with Missouri, and Professor Reim of the Church Union Committee offered his resignation from that committee and from his presidency and professorship at the seminary.

During these difficult times one of the principles of the doctrine of fellowship was severely tested. That principle is the debt of love we owe to an erring brother. At what point does an erring brother become a persistent errorist? When dealing on the synodical level with many issues involving many different people, that distinction becomes difficult to make, and is to some extent a matter of Christian judgment. As the 1950s came to a close, others of our brothers left our fellowship because they disagreed with the judgment of the majority in regard to patience over against Missouri, or because they insisted that it is not really a matter of judgment at all.

Most of the pastors and congregations who left us during those years formed their own church body in 1960. The Church of the Lutheran Confession began with some 60 pastors and about 8,000 communicants. The majority of these were from our synod. Most of the rest were from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. They began worker training in Mankato, Minnesota, and eventually established Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

From the beginning those who withdrew from us into the CLC claimed that doctrinal differences and not differences in historical judgment separated them from us. Their resentment of what they considered improper synodical intrusions into congregations they tried to lead out of our fellowship is evident in their 1960 "Theses on the Doctrine of the Church": "When the formal origin of synods as we know them is kept in mind there will be no room for a situation where a synod invades and over-rules a congregation in its exercise of Christian discipline. When a synod goes beyond the functions that have been assigned to it by the constituting congregations, it oversteps its call and becomes a busybody in other men's matters."^{lx}

The CLC still maintains that our synod's actions in these circumstances involves a doctrinal difference with us in regard to the "sanctity of the call." Other differences which they hold to be of a doctrinal nature include "the Scriptural doctrine of Church fellowship, and the doctrine of the Clarity, and Authority of the Scriptures."^{lxi}

The events of this period of our synod's history of fellowship practices demonstrates that the Lord himself was guiding us into adulthood in understanding and practice. He had steered us away from two extremes. On one hand we were led by the Wauwatosa professors to go to the Bible anew in the face of every new question of doctrine. We learned that only full agreement on scriptural teaching could bring about meaningful union with fellow Christians. We learned from Scriptures to be staunch and surefooted in standing our ground in matters in which God himself leads us to be sure, and at the same time, such as in the matter of church and ministry, not to make assertions which can not be supported by biblical evidence.

We gained the godly confidence to stand up to our own brothers in the witness of the truth, and at the same time aggressively to seek peace and unity among all Lutherans. We were taught above all that the practice of scriptural fellowship principles is a bittersweet experience that demands love and patience. We developed an honest introspection as a result of the Protestant controversy. We came to understand as a result of dealing with Missouri that patience toward a weak brother may have to give way in the real sinful world to the loving witness of a severance of fellowship. We learned that refraining from precipitous action toward a weak brother may be misunderstood and misjudged by our own strong brothers.

These are all hard lessons of history and experience. But they are God's gifts to a synod that was forced into adulthood in its practice of fellowship.

Adulthood 1961-1986

Adulthood in fellowship practices came abruptly for the Wisconsin Synod in the early 1960s. In 1961 fellowship with the Missouri Synod was suspended. In 1963 Wisconsin and the

ELS withdrew from the Synodical Conference. The remaining member of the Synodical Conference was the Slovak Synod.^{lxii} Although it had often joined Wisconsin and the ELS in criticism of Missouri's unionizing practices, the Slovak Synod merged with the Missouri Synod, and the most enduring Lutheran fraternity in America was dissolved.

Our synod had been baptized, weaned and tutored in its fellowship practices by the Synodical Conference, but now it stood alone. All of a sudden, small as it was, it was the largest confessional Lutheran church body in America.

With adulthood came major responsibilities. To whom much is given, much is required. The last 25 years have under the gracious hand of God been years of positive and loving practice of fellowship accompanied with many other blessings. We have been spared significant internal strife, and we have reached out our arms in fellowship to embrace all those who share our confidence in all the teachings of Holy Scripture. Already halfway through this period one of our historians was able to remark, "in the 125th year of its history the Wisconsin Synod can also humbly rejoice that dire predictions of a dozen years ago have not become a reality. As Wisconsin withdrew from Missouri and Synodical Conference fellowship, many warned and some feared that anything from the total collapse of church work to an extremely legalistic theological position would be the outcome. Results have been different. Wisconsin has derived many benefits from the sudden necessity of standing on its own feet."^{lxiii}

That strict fellowship practices are not to be equated with isolationism can be proved by the efforts of the Wisconsin Synod in the first years following its suspension of fellowship with Missouri and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference. The early 1960s were marked by efforts at healing old wounds within our synod, firming up fellowship with a sister synod, continuing in our concern for our former brothers, and making aggressive plans to share the truth of the gospel with the whole world.

It has already been mentioned in connection with the Protestant controversy that an attempt was made to become reconciled with those who were still separated from us. The 1959 synod convention asked the Western Wisconsin District to take action to heal the old wounds. In 1960 the district rescinded the resolutions that led to the original withdrawal. But for a number of reasons this action did not bring about healing. The necessity of the suspension of a Wisconsin Synod pastor about that time for Protestant leanings certainly didn't help. It also seemed that the Protestants themselves demanded more. Some wanted full fellowship established immediately. Some wanted all resolutions and actions against Protestants withdrawn and repudiated by the synod. Still others considered the Western Wisconsin action too little too late.

Our second effort at healing old wounds was little more successful. Many of us felt that formal severance of ties with Missouri in 1961 would bring back most of those who organized the Church of the Lutheran Confession. To smooth this return President Naumann led a small committee to meet with representatives of the CLC in November of 1962. In this meeting and a similar one in 1964 "there seemed to be no real difference between the CLC and Wisconsin in principle on the fellowship issue."

Representatives of the CLC, however, felt that there was a difference in doctrine, but that they could not illustrate the difference without discussing the documents and actions of the Wisconsin Synod which led to the break with Missouri. Wisconsin representatives felt that the scriptural principles should be agreed on first and that the actions and writings should be judged on the basis of that agreement.

This disagreement about what should be considered first, an agreement on biblical principles or a consideration of past actions, stood in the way of meaningful discussions with the

CLC until the early 1970s. When representatives of the two synods met again in 1972, the point of issue became the *in statu confessionis*, or the “state of confession” over against Missouri. Our men held that such a state of confession is a proper way to demonstrate patience toward a weak brother when the “weak brother” is a whole church body, since it is difficult to establish the erring character of a church body in its entirety. The CLC men refused to acknowledge that the *in statu confessionis* is a scriptural way of showing love to a weak brother.

The WELS 1973 convention at New Ulm, Minnesota, endorsed the definition of *in statu confessionis* our men gave to the CLC at the 1972 meeting. The definition explained that a state of confession is needed when dealing with a group of Christians for two reasons: “a) In order to offer opportunity for determining what the confessional position of the group for which it must be held responsible really is,” and “b) To offer opportunity to bring Scriptural testimony against the error infecting the group to those brethren who are not themselves advocating and propagandizing the errors—before treating such brethren as responsible partakers of the error or false practice infecting their group.”^{lxiv}

The endorsement of the 1973 WELS convention shows that a difference does exist between us and our former brothers in the CLC. A CLC spokes man defines this difference: “It has become clear and accepted among us that there is no difference in the doctrine and practice of our two church bodies in applying the teachings of Scripture on termination of fellowship to individual errorists. The difference lies in the application of the principle to church bodies.”^{lxv} This difference has spelled the end to attempts at establishing fellowship since that time. There is no mention of contact with the CLC in our synodical proceedings in recent years.

Some overtures from Lutheran bodies outside our fellowship in the early 1960s had to be declined. The Synodical Conference extended a formal invitation to the WELS in 1964 to begin new discussions, but gave no reason to hope that anything had changed in the recent past to make them fruitful. In 1962 we were asked to join in the discussions Missouri was holding with the National Lutheran Council in anticipation of forming LCUSA.^{lxvi} President Naumann wrote a letter declining, citing our stand on fellowship as the reason.

A happy development in the 1960s was the firming of the bond of fellowship with our sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church. By resolution of the respective synod conventions the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum was established in 1965 and 1966, and the first meeting held the following year. This forum over the years has carried out its goal of fostering closer cooperation in the areas of administration, doctrine, missions and education.

Doctrinal discussions with the ELS have included matters relating to church and ministry and the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.^{lxvii} Education cooperation has been evident especially in the Bethany program. In this program the ELS’s Bethany Lutheran College has since 1962 enabled students outside our regular pre-seminary program to gain the necessary training for enrollment at our Mequon seminary.

Another positive result of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum was the welcoming of observers from the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism in 1972. The FAL consisted of a number of congregations which had left the Missouri Synod in the late sixties and early seventies and organized in 1971. Representatives of the Federation found themselves in complete agreement with the doctrine of the WELS and ELS. Subsequently the Federation dissolved and several of their congregations were welcomed into membership in our synod.

The 1960s also marked a time of concern for our fellowship practices with various free churches in Germany, France and Belgium. The relationship we had with these churches was complicated by a confusion of fellowship and confessional agreements among them, the

Missouri Synod and us. We met with representatives of several of those church bodies in the 1960s, offering support advice and encouragement for their difficult decisions.

In 1972 three of these free churches merged into SELK.^{lxviii} Two of the merged bodies were in fellowship with us, one was not. A 1973 meeting with their representatives at our seminary in Mequon indicated that we were in doctrinal agreement with the new merged body. But on their return to Germany SELK representatives found that their doctrinal resolve was not shared by their constituency. Our Commission on Inter-Church Relations had to recommend to our next synodical convention that we would have to withhold declaring fellowship with SELK. In 1977 our synodical convention voted to terminate our fellowship with the ELBK confessional church^{lxix} in Germany because of its merger with SELK. In 1981 we found it necessary to terminate our fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France and Belgium because of its continued fellowship with Missouri and SELK. We continue to maintain communication with representatives of SELK in the hope of strengthening them in their confessional battles with the liberalism that has made its way into the European Lutheran free churches.^{lxx}

In Sweden, however, the WELS has found a confessional friend. In 1974 a small group of Swedish Lutherans formed the Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden. Through numerous contacts, especially by Dr. Becker of our synod, this fellowship has encouraged us and helped the new church in Sweden through some difficult times. In September of 1984 President Mischke was able to join our brothers in celebration of their first ten years under God's grace. Our 1985 convention wholeheartedly endorsed the sentiment that we "appreciate the confessional testimony which the Lutheran Confessional Church (Scandinavia) has been giving during the first ten years of its existence."^{lxxi}

There have been other efforts at establishing unity with Lutherans overseas, notably in Africa and Australia. In Nigeria, where we jointly supported mission work through the Synodical Conference, we eventually lost our ties with our former brothers. In South Africa our efforts at seeking fellowship on the basis of doctrinal agreement continue, although these attempts too are complicated by the fellowship of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa with SELK in West Germany.

There were two Lutheran church bodies in Australia at the time of the breakup of the Synodical Conference. One was aligned with the Missouri Synod and the other with the ALC. These two bodies merged in 1966. At that time the new group broke their former ties and agreed to make new allegiances on the basis of fresh study. Although our Commission on Inter-Church Relations has kept in touch, the internal lack of harmony in the Australian group has made significant progress at doctrinal agreement unlikely at the present.

Nor have our former brothers and sisters in the Missouri Synod been forgotten. Our break with that synod brought agonizing separation not only between officials and committees of the respective synods, but also among congregations, pastors and lay people of the two church bodies. That the termination of fellowship was an act of love which we exercised in opposition to our human emotions and affections was evident in the 1960s. Families and friends were pulled apart. The years since have been a long and difficult lesson for both sides. It has forced us to bring the fruits of our doctrinal studies and discussions into every church, classroom and home.

Our official contact with Missouri has been regular and cordial, but it has never led to the serious discussion of doctrinal matters that divide us. We have sent representatives to each others' conventions. We meet formally at times to see where we stand. We carefully monitor each others' publications and formal doctrinal statements.

But the same old problems and a number of new ones stand in the way of restoring the kind of fellowship we knew for 90 years in the Synodical Conference. Missouri's aberrant fellowship practices continue. Its lack of consistent church discipline of errorists is a matter of record. Its most recent statements on the role of man and woman in the work of the church is inconsistent with its earlier scriptural affirmations. It has wavered in its public teaching on the inspiration and clarity of Holy Scriptures.

In 1981 Missouri's Commission on Theology and Church Relations submitted to that synod the results of their study on fellowship entitled, "The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship." Our review^{lxxii} of this study indicated that weaknesses persist in Missouri's understanding of the "unit concept of fellowship." Altar and pulpit fellowship are discussed without reference to prayer fellowship. Our Commission on Inter-Church Relations in its review of Missouri's document gives the reason why we are not in the midst of doctrinal discussions for the purpose of reinstating fellowship with Missouri: "An avoiding or termination of fellowship which at the same time is accompanied by the seeking of agreement through continued doctrinal discussions is contradictory by its very nature and can only confuse or undermine the clear testimony which God would have us give to the truth of His Holy Word. It is another matter, of course, when changes take place in a situation that originally called for a termination of church fellowship, changes which of themselves might warrant the resumption of doctrinal discussions."^{lxxiii} There have been evidences in Missouri of such changes at times. We hold the hope that such changes can bring about the opportunity for the desired study of the Scriptures.^{lxxiv}

There have been other efforts at contact which directly or indirectly involved Missouri. Wisconsin took the initiative in seeking doctrinal discussions with the LCR in the 1960s. The Lutheran Church of the Reformation included some churches that were and some that were not in fellowship with us before they formed the LCR. The doctrinal meetings with these men, however, encountered a roadblock in the matter of church and ministry. Wisconsin participated in the free conferences of the 60s and early 70s. These conferences were attended mainly by men of Wisconsin, Missouri and Evangelical Lutheran Synods. Many of the matters that historically divided Lutherans were openly discussed, but the free conferences led to no new alignments among Lutheran groups.

In spite of the mixture of humanly measured success and failure in our many endeavors in the area of fellowship since 1961, one conclusion is incontestable. The strict demand for confessional agreement as the basis for church union has not led us to crawl into the corner. In fact the opposite is true. It has led us to the maturity of combining the open Bible with open arms. We are an ecumenical church in every proper sense of the term. "The outreach of a church body generally believed to be isolationist in its tendencies is remarkable, and reaches into all areas of the earth."^{lxxv}

We have also learned during these years among ourselves that the practice of fellowship is not only a matter of interchurch relationships, doctrinal strife, and unhappy separations. Our church body is enjoying right now what our fathers in the past and our church leaders today have fought for. We are reaping the harvests of fellowship they sowed and cultivated. We have from God the peace, the harmony, the unity of purpose and work, the lack of internal discord that is not found anywhere in major American Lutheranism today.

Sometimes we are so close to it that we cannot see it. We too seldom stop to appreciate it or to kneel and give thanks to the Source of it. We practice fellowship when we join our prayers, money, sons and daughters for a constantly blessed and expanding effort of bringing the gospel

to the world. We pool our resources to express our Bible-based faith for worship and witness in writing a new hymnal and catechisms and in publishing educational, devotional and informational Christian literature. We settle our own disputes with Christian discipline coupled with orderliness, brotherly advice and encouragement, whether the issue is antinomianism, the King James translation, government aid to schools, objective justification, the role of man and woman or the principles of Christian stewardship.

There is nothing in our nature that has kept us from legalism or isolationism. It is something in God's nature, his love from eternity, his grace manifested in Jesus Christ, his mercy in drawing us by his Holy Spirit to believe his Word. As long as our practices of fellowship are in line with that Word, we know they stem from God's love, regardless of how unloving, uncharitable and separatistic we may be judged to be by the world.

History must teach us not to allow the blessings of fellowship to become our springboard to complacency. We are a truly ecumenical church, but that must never make us defensive about our defensiveness. Guarding against error is a godly and loving part of ecumenicity in the visible church in a sinful world. Our guarding against error is, in the spirit of the Wauwatosa men, part and parcel of our continual search of the Truth. As God grants us to keep up our guard, so he will bless the practice of fellowship in the WELS.

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ⁱ Leigh D. Jordahl, "Introduction," J. P. Koehler's, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Sentinel Printing Company, Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. 1981. p. ix.

ⁱⁱ Jordahl, p. x.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fred W. Meuser, *Church in Fellowship*, p. 16.

^{iv} Jordahl, p. x.

^v Jordahl, p. ix.

^{vi} *America's Lutherans*, a reprint from the magazine, "One," The Wartburg Press. 1955. p. 37.

^{vii} "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2, April 1950. p. 91.

^{viii} "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History Viewed Especially in the Light of its Fellowship Principles and Practices," *The Lutheran Historical Conference Essays and Reports*, Vol. VI, 1977. p. 78.

^{ix} J. P. Koehler provides a lengthy description of the European background of our synod, including a brief review of the Prussian Union, the "old" and the "new" Lutherans and the founding of the mission societies in Chapter I of *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, pp. 1-36.

^x J. P. Koehler, p. 41.

^{xi} J. P. Koehler, p. 41.

^{xii} See Edwin A. Lehman, "The Pastor Who Possessed an All-Consuming Love—Johannes Muehlhaeuser," *The WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1983.

^{xiii} See Armin Schuetze, "Muehlhaeuser, Founding Father of the Wisconsin Synod," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 3, July 1975.

^{xiv} See E. C. Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod History* (as yet unpublished manuscript), Chapter 3.

^{xv} E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter 8.

^{xvi} M. Lehninger, p. 8.

^{xvii} See E. C. Fredrich, "Bading and the Formative Presidency of the Wisconsin Synod," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 2, April 1975.

^{xviii} See E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter 8, for the contributions of these men.

^{xix} E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter 8.

^{xx} See E. C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's First Federated Memberships," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 4, October 1976, pp. 268ff. for a brief presentation of the issues; also see Abdel Ross Wentz, *Lutheranism in America*, pp. 108-150 for a detailed history.

^{xxi} *History*, Chapter 8.

^{xxii} Troubles in the early congregations, including questionable fellowship practices, are related by J. P. Koehler in his *History*, pp. 64, 65.

^{xxiii} As quoted by J. P. Koehler, *History*, p. 129.

^{xxiv} E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter

^{xxv} J. P. Koehler, *History*, p. 158.

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- ^{xxvi} E. C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's Theological Confessional History," p. 93.
- ^{xxvii} Walther may have written some articles on election in 1872-73 under the assumed name, "Gnadenkind."
- ^{xxviii} Abdel Ross Wentz, *Lutheranism in America*, p. 208.
- ^{xxix} "Wisconsin's Theological Confessional History," p. 93.
- ^{xxx} *History*, p. 152.
- ^{xxxi} E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter 5.
- ^{xxxii} As quoted by J. P. Koehler, *History*, p. 150.
- ^{xxxiii} See Im. P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 3, July 1963.
- ^{xxxiv} J. P. Koehler, *History*, p. 168.
- ^{xxxv} E. C. Fredrich, *History*, Chapter 8.
- ^{xxxvi} The Bennet Law threatened our schools by its insistence on instruction in English.
- ^{xxxvii} See J. P. Koehler, *History*, pp. 174 ff. St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Ulm sought to join the Minnesota Synod in 1867 but was refused because it was serving Reformed Christians as well as Lutherans. Also in 1867 the Minnesota Synod expelled the pastor and the congregation at Red Wing because of its stand on lodges.
- ^{xxxviii} See J. Schaller, "Preface," *Biblical Christology*, pp. iii ff. for an acknowledgement of the need to use English in the training of our pastors.
- ^{xxxix} "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History," p. 94.
- ^{xl} M. Lehninger, "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod," p. 102.
- ^{xli} "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History," p. 95.
- ^{xlii} "Four Statements on Fellowship," *Church in Fellowship*, pp. 70, 71.
- ^{xliii} "Four Statements on Fellowship," p. 71.
- ^{xliv} See Harold Wicke, "Is the Pastorate in the Congregation the Only God-ordained Office in the Church?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 2, April 1971.
- ^{xlv} See Carl Lawrenz, "The 1904 Free Conferences in Detroit," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2, April 1963, p. 146.
- ^{xlvi} See E. C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History," p. 95, where he notes that Missouri's *Lehre und Wehre* supported Wisconsin's unit concept of prayer in an article subsequent to the Detroit free conference.
- ^{xlvii} "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History," p. 102.
- ^{xlviii} See Tract No. 8, "Cooperation in Externals," in the *Continuing in His Word* series.
- ^{xlix} *Fellowship Then and Now*, a tract published by Wisconsin's Commission of Doctrinal Matters in 1960 quotes Arndt's 1937 essay, "Christian Prayer" on p. 20.
- ^l *Fellowship Then and Now* also quotes Fuehrbringer in the *Lutheraner* on p. 21.
- ^{li} R. C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, pp. 128, 429.
- ^{lii} Wolf, p. 169.
- ^{liii} See *Michigan Memories—Things Our Fathers Have Taught Us*, a Festschrift published 1985 by the Michigan District. Two of the essays (by Gerhard Struck and E. C. Fredrich) deal with Michigan's withdrawal from the federation.
- ^{liv} E. C. Fredrich, "The Protestant Controversy," *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 1984. p. 19.
- ^{lv} As quoted by E. C. Fredrich in "The Protestant Controversy."
- ^{lvi} See E. C. Fredrich, "The Parting of Prof. J. P. Koehler and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary," *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1983.

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- ^{lvii} E. C. Fredrich, "The Protestant Controversy," p. 31.
- ^{lviii} See E. C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 2, April 1977, which relates the history of this period from 1938-1961.
- ^{lix} E. C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," p. 161.
- ^{lx} Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, p. 446.
- ^{lxi} John Lau, "One Man's View, or How the WELS Sees Us?" *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 17, No. 4, December 1977. p. 34.
- ^{lxii} The official name is Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.
- ^{lxiii} E. C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's Theological Confessional History," p. 104.
- ^{lxiv} *WELS Proceedings*, 1973, p. 95.
- ^{lxv} John Lau, "One Man's View, Or How the WELS Sees Us?" p. 39.
- ^{lxvi} Lutheran Council in the United States of America was organized in 1966.
- ^{lxvii} See the "Supplementary Report of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations" *WELS Proceedings* 1979, pp. 121-122, and "The Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum" under News and Comments, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, January 1981, pp. 53-56 regarding the agreement on the doctrine of the church. See also "ELS-WELS Consensus Re the Real Presence," News and Comments, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 4, October 1981, pp. 320-322.
- ^{lxviii} *Selbstaendige Evangelish-Lutherische Kirche*, or the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church.
- ^{lxix} *Bekentniskirche*, once considered a mission endeavor of the WELS, formally called the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany.
- ^{lxx} See C. Lawrenz, "WELS Efforts at Confessional Fellowship with the German Lutheran Free Churches," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2, April 1978.
- ^{lxxi} "Report of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations," *WELS Proceedings*, 1985, p. 144.
- ^{lxxii} See "An Evaluation by the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (Wisconsin Synod) of 'The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship,'" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 1, Winter 1983, pp. 61-69.
- ^{lxxiii} "An Evaluation," p. 65.
- ^{lxxiv} The *Proceedings* from our 1985 convention reports the meeting in December 1984 of representatives of the WELS, ELS and LC-MS in Milwaukee. Members of our Commission on Inter-Church Relations were present at the meeting and "expressed a willingness to meet with Missouri Synod representatives if such a meeting is set up for the purpose of discussing the scriptural principles of church fellowship." p. 46.
- ^{lxxv} E. C. Fredrich, Interchurch Relations in Recent Years, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 3, July 1977, p. 249.