

# How the Break with the Missouri Synod Moved the Wisconsin Synod Forward in Christ

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## Outline

Introduction: The Impact of Major Historical Events

### I. Forward in Missions

#### A. Home Missions

1. Mobility of the population meant that many WELS members were moving where there were no WELS church; before the break, transfer were easily granted to other Synodical Conference congregations
2. After the break, the Board for Home Missions endeavored to serve not only displaced WELS members, but also other like-minded Lutherans
3. The move into Florida and California began in the mid-1970's
4. The break with the Missouri Synod got us out of their shadow
5. Two big problems for expansion: shortage of money and manpower
6. After the break, appeals poured in from numerous states
7. Growth was rapid in the 1960's and 1970's with the result that the WELS became a nationwide church body

#### B. World Missions

1. The break had a more indirect affect on world mission efforts, although world mission expansion began to take place during the years of the controversy
2. The discussion with the Missouri Synod caused problems in the new Japan mission
3. The break with the Missouri Synod resulted in the WELS discontinuing support of the work in Nigeria, although work eventually continued with Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria
4. Appeals for help from foreign Lutheran church bodies poured in
  - a. Hong Kong, which was a stepping stone into Taiwan
  - b. Indonesia
  - c. India
  - d. Mexico
  - e. Brazil
  - f. Antigua

g. Support of church bodies in Germany and the Scandinavian countries

5. The break instilled a resolve to train a ministry faithful to the Word in foreign fields

## II. Forward in Education

### A. Elementary and Secondary Education

1. During the 1950's, an increased interest in Lutheran elementary and secondary education was taking place
2. One reason was to combat the modernism which had affected the Missouri Synod's doctrinal stance
3. Due to the break, some large schools were lost while others were gained
4. Two area Lutheran high schools were affected by the break
5. Pioneer programs were started as an answer to the Scouts
6. Campus ministry in Madison was impacted by the break

### B. Ministerial Education

1. Northwestern College was affected by the resignation of two professors
2. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was affected by the resignation of its president
3. The "Bethany program" was started as a result of the break
4. There was an increased resolve to have a quality worker training system to meet the needs of churches, missions and schools and a desire not to take the course of the Missouri Synod worker training system
5. Faculties increased and building programs were carried out in order to handle the larger enrollments.
6. Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College existed from 1960-1969 in order to help alleviate the severe teacher shortage

## III. Forward in Other Areas of Ministry

### A. Doctrinal/Inter-Church Relations

1. Commission on Doctrinal Matters was kept busy dealing with triangular fellowship arrangements
2. Close fellowship ties were established in Germany and Scandinavia
3. Various efforts were made to establish and strengthen ties with like-minded Lutherans in the United States
4. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference was established in 1993

### B. Publications

1. Pamphlets were published during the controversy
2. "This We Believe" was published after the break
3. The break moved publication of a whole variety of doctrinal books forward

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Conclusion: The Impact Continues

## Introduction: The Impact of Major Historical Events

Whenever one studies the history of an organization, a person, or a nation, one quickly realizes that there are certain events that impact subsequent history. One major-historical event can color what gets done and how it gets done. It can have a profound effect on what someone stands for and how that is expressed.

As we look back at the 150 year history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), there are a number of major historical events that impacted subsequent history. The decision in 1863 to start a seminary began a ministerial education system that continues today. The break with the European mission societies in 1868 was the final step away from unionism and into confessional Lutheranism. The Protestant Controversy of the 1920's caused a split that has never entirely healed.

While these are certainly major events in the history of the WELS, one event stands above the rest. This event, because of its length (1938-1963), affected a whole generation of pastors. This event, because of its impact, resulted in a rift in the WELS. This event, because of its final result, has colored what the WELS has done and what the WELS has become over the last 35 years. This event is the break, or termination of fellowship, With the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS).

It is true that there are many perceived negatives associated with the break with the LCMS. A treasured fellowship of 90 years was lost. Families and churches were split. A group of pastors and congregations left the WELS to form the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Other pastors and churches joined the LCMS. For almost 25 years, the controversy with the LCMS over the doctrine of fellowship consumed reams of paper and countless hours on the floor of synod and district conventions, as well as hours of meetings between synod representatives.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Edward Fredrich, in his history book, The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, had this to say about the break with the Missouri Synod.

For those who were Wisconsin Synod members in the middle years of the twentieth century and lived through the long struggle to maintain the Synodical Conference on its historical confessional foundations, the loss of the battles and of the war will always remain the most significant and traumatic episode in their own personal version of their church body's history. The struggle was long, stretching over a quarter century. The losses in cherished fellowships were large, touching personally most pastors, teachers, and lay families of the synod. The results could have been tragic in the extreme, as dire prophecies of the time from without and within loudly and repeatedly proclaimed. That they were not was because the Lord of the 2 church once again did all things well.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ is the Lord of history and the Lord of the church. He is "head over everything for the church" (Eph 1:22). He works all things out for the benefit of his believers (Ro 8:28).<sup>3</sup> So our Lord took this seemingly negative event and used it to move the WELS "forward in Christ." The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the major WELS historical event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has had and continues to have an impact on the work which the Lord is carrying out in this sinful world through our small church body.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these are "perceived negatives." The controversy forced the WELS to go back to Scripture and discover why we believe what we believe. More on this later in the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Fredrich, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> The Old Testament is full of examples of God using what appeared to be negative events in his plan of salvation (i.e., the Flood; Joseph sold into slavery; Babylonian Captivity; etc.) A cursory study of church history will reveal the same. While Satan is hard at work attempting to disrupt God's plan and the church's work, Christ is still the victorious King.

## I. Forward in Missions

Until the break with the Missouri Synod, mission work by the WELS was rather limited. Home mission work consisted of gathering German Lutherans into congregations. Mission work was carried out by the pastors in these congregations. But to go into an area of the United States where there were no German Lutherans was almost unheard of.<sup>4</sup> After all, it wasn't until the 1920's when WELS congregations began using English with any regularity. Foreign mission work consisted of the Apache mission in Arizona which was finally thriving by the 1930's. In addition, support was given to a group of Lutheran pastors in Poland. As members of the Synodical Conference, the WELS also supported the Negro Mission in the South and the mission work in Nigeria. There were voices in the WELS that were alarmed at the lack of mission zeal. Professor August Pieper sounded sharp criticism in his 1919 convention essay.

Our mission work to date has been a miserable, petty bungling, a botchery lacking both fire and force. At every convention we seem to be asking ourselves, do we, or do we not want to do mission work? Half a heart, half an effort, and half a result. We work as in a dream. Mary has become a pokey dreamer, sitting at the Lord's feet. She has developed the habit of only listening; but her hearing has become dull, her heart indifferent, and her hands and feet leaden and lazy. Wake up! Wake up, Mary! Rub the sleep out of your eyes, shake the lethargy from your limbs; it's time to get to work! Don't you see the vast throng of people around your house, crowding around your open door, people who would also hear of the glorious thing which the Lord has poured into your heart?

It is time, high time! The sun is still shining, it is still day, but it is hastening toward evening, and the day is far spent.

One great obstacle lies in the way of your understanding and the carrying out of your work; it is this earth-bound self-concern of every one of us, this preoccupation of personal pride, this smug ease, and this worldly and carnal attitude.<sup>5</sup>

One problem made the expansion of mission work in the 1930's virtually impossible. The WELS was saddled with a \$750,000 debt in the middle of the Great Depression. With the debt hanging over the synod's head, any mention of new mission outreach was met with negativity. In fact, on a yearly basis in the 1930's over half of the seminary graduates could not be placed. Beginning with the 1935 convention, however, a concerted effort to pay down the debt was begun and by 1945, the synod was in the black. The question remained: Would the availability of funding be enough to make this primarily Midwestern church body into a nationwide and worldwide church body?

### A. Home Missions

Following World War I, and especially after World War II, the population of the United States became more mobile. You didn't have people growing up, living and dying in the same five mile radius. This was also true of WELS members. Typically, the places where people were moving - Florida, California, the East Coast - were places where there were no WELS churches. Before World War II, WELS pastors had no problems transferring members to the nearest Missouri Synod church.

After mid-century it was a different matter. It was becoming more and more obvious that the Synodical Conference synod, with the most far-flung borders and wide-spread congregations, was marching to a different drummer and in a different step than the conference had always moved previously.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Exceptions would be the "traveling missionaries" sent to the Pacific Northwest, Colorado and Arizona.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Proceedings, 1961, by Pastor Edgar Hoenecke in his Board for World Missions Report.

<sup>6</sup> Fredrich, p.210

As tensions wore on during the late 1940's and 1950's, the WELS began to realize that it was going to need to have churches beyond the Midwest. One important reason was to serve displaced WELS members. Another was to serve other confessionally minded Lutherans. This was especially true after the break actually occurred in 1961. At that convention, a resolution was passed that stated:

WHEREAS, The Domestic Missions may soon pass out of the administration of the Lutheran Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference, and WHEREAS, some pastors, teachers, and congregations in the South may be sympathetic to our position in doctrinal matters; therefore, be it *Resolved, That* we invite those who share our position to join us of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>7</sup>

The need to serve like-minded Lutherans was already expressed by Pastor Karl Gurgel, the General Chairman of the Board of Home, Foreign and Inner Mission, in 1954. "Even though loyalty to the Savior and His unadulterated Word has brought our Synod some rather harsh evaluations, still by the grace of God many absolutely new home mission fields seek our help because simple, Word-loving Christians appreciate our stand."<sup>8</sup> Response to the cries for the pure Word moved the WELS to begin missions in California and Florida in the mid-1950's. It should be noted that the expansion of work into Florida was met with some resistance because of its distance from "WELS country."<sup>9</sup> At the 1953 convention, a resolution was passed "that the General Board for Home Missions shall be required to obtain specific authority from Joint Synod whenever it desires to establish missions in areas... which lie outside of the general area served by the Joint Synod."<sup>10</sup> This was to prevent "leapfrogging" into other states. The Michigan District mission board, however, began work in St. Petersburg, Florida, with the help of \$15,000 collected from the congregations of the Michigan District. Within a few years, three other congregations had formed. For the most part, this was real mission work, not just the gathering of displaced Midwesterners.

The general reluctance to spread too far from the Midwest demonstrates the mindset of the WELS until the break. The WELS was viewed by itself and others as Missouri's "country cousin."<sup>11</sup> It was easy to let Missouri do mission work throughout the country. But the doctrinal controversies forced the WELS to stand on its own two feet and to get out of the shadow of the LCMS. Looking back, Pastor Norman Berg commented,

It perhaps also could be that the very necessary and intense concentration during the last 40's and 50's on the intersynodical doctrinal struggles with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod engaged our primary efforts and strength. From this struggle, however, arose a very strong sense of confessional identity which is essential both to a sound, but also a vigorously lay-supported mission program.<sup>12</sup>

Two big problems stood in the way of a vigorous home mission program: a lack of financial resources and a shortage of manpower. Time and again, the reports from the Board for Home Missions lamented the lack of fund to purchase land and build chapels. Time and again, pleas were heard to recruit more young people for full time work in the ministry. This latter problem was more severe than the former. Synodical leadership, however, pointed to the power of God's Word in its truth and purity, for which the WELS was in the midst of battle, as the solution to these problems.

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<sup>7</sup> Proceedings, 1961, p.62

<sup>8</sup> Report to the Nine Districts, 1954, p.3

<sup>9</sup> California was an exception because of its proximity to Arizona and the Apache Mission.

<sup>10</sup> Proceedings, 1953, p.50-51

<sup>11</sup> This was Pastor Norman Berg's term. He also said that the LC-MS was referred to as "big sister MO."

<sup>12</sup> Berg, p.262

If parents are to encourage their sons and daughters to dedicate their talents to work in the Lord's kingdom, nothing will move them more than God's Word of peace in all its truth and purity. If our members are to bring bountiful gifts of silver and gold to carry on mission work, nothing will move them more than God's Word of peace in all its truth and purity. If our mission work is to be a success, nothing else can accomplish this but the Spirit-filled Word of the Savior. Since God's Word moves us to do mission work and since God's Word gives us every bit of success in our mission endeavors, may our Church pray, "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word."<sup>13</sup>

Because of the break with the Missouri Synod, appeals poured in for help to this small, Midwestern, confessional Lutheran church body. In 1963, Pastor Ray Wiechmann, chairman of the Board for Home Missions, reported, "We have requests for the Means of Grace from the states of Virginia, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Texas, Kansas, Alaska, and from Canada."<sup>14</sup> The stand on God's Word that the WELS took produced the blessings of offering countless mission opportunities. As will be seen later, the Word produced the result of providing manpower to fill these mission requests.

The vast number of appeals coming into the Home Mission office greatly affected the mode of mission work in the 1960's and 1970's. First, the fact that most WELS members moved to major metropolitan areas meant that most mission work was going to center on cities. Second, since most of these members tended to live in the suburban areas which were rapidly growing, most mission churches would be found in the suburbs of these major cities. Pastor Berg commented, "The mode of operation indicated was to establish regional outposts in metropolitan areas with good potential for winning the unchurched in these densely populated areas not served by us before. The next step would be to "ring" such metropolitan areas with several missions to more effectively serve the area."<sup>15</sup> Examples of this mode of operation can be seen in the areas of Tampa/St. Petersburg, Atlanta, Chicago, Phoenix, and Houston. The goal was "eventually to establish a network of Wisconsin Synod mission congregations in the key cities of our nation from coast to coast."<sup>16</sup> A quick glance at the Synod Yearbook would indicate that this goal has, for the most part, been met.

The statistics clearly demonstrate the mission zeal that seized the WELS in the years following the break. In 1960, the WELS had 637 pastors serving 829 congregations in 16 states.<sup>17</sup> By 1965, these totals had grown to 703 pastors, 885 congregations in 22 states and one province of Canada.<sup>18</sup> Texas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Missouri, and Kansas now had WELS congregations. The appeals were heard and answered. The next fifteen years saw phenomenal growth in home mission expansion. "Every State by '78" became the battle cry and the goal was nearly met. In 1980, the WELS was represented in 47 states and 3 Canadian provinces. 983 pastors were serving 1,146 congregations totaling 407,987 baptized members.<sup>19</sup> The final three states were added within the next 4 years. Because of this mission work, 3 new districts were formed: South Atlantic (1973), North Atlantic (1983), South Central (1983). The WELS had become a national church body intent on sharing the truth it has so courageously defended.

There can be little doubt that the battle over the truth of God's Word made the WELS dedicated to spreading that truth. The break with the Missouri Synod moved the WELS farthest forward in the area of Home Missions. But the WELS went forward trusting in the power of Christ's Word to produce results. The WELS at the turn of the millenium also needs to be reminded that we have a treasure beyond compare to share with those around us.

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<sup>13</sup> Proceedings, 1961, p.26

<sup>14</sup> Proceedings, 1963, p.146

<sup>15</sup> Berg, p.264

<sup>16</sup> Proceedings, 1965, p.180

<sup>17</sup> Statistical Report of the WE WELS for 1960

<sup>18</sup> Statistical Report of the WELS for 1965

<sup>19</sup> Statistical Report of the WELS for 1980

In a world of relativism, we need to cling to the truth for our own salvation and as the tool for mission work. Most of us don't remember the baffles fought for the truth. But we are the heirs of this truth and it is up to us to continue making the most of the opportunities the Lord of the Church presents to us.

## B. World Missions

While the break with the Missouri Synod had the most profound and obvious effect on Home Missions, it did have a more indirect effect on World Missions. What is interesting to note is that at the same time the WELS was asserting its faithfulness to the Word, it was also struggling to assert its faithfulness to the Great Commission.<sup>20</sup> The 1945 Synod convention saw black in the financial books and World War II coming to an end. The time for entrance into foreign, heathen mission work was ripe. After much discussion, the resolution was passed to form a committee to gather information regarding foreign mission work. After much debate in the committee and at the 1947 Synod convention, the decision was made to make some thorough investigations of possible fields for mission work. One choice, China, was quickly eliminated due to a change in the political climate. The other choice, Africa, was explored by Pastors Arthur Wacker and Edgar Hoenecke.<sup>21</sup> The Mission Board recommended to the 1951 convention to send two men to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and two men to Japan. The convention agreed with the Africa proposal, but the Japan work was limited to one man whose work would include serving the military families in Japan and investigating mission opportunities. Since the impetus to move forward in world mission work did not come from the break with Missouri, the question needs to be asked: Did the break with Missouri have any effect on the world mission work of the WELS? The answer would have to be "Yes."

There were some adverse effects of the doctrinal discussions with the LCMS on the Japan mission. Pastor Fred Tiefel was the man who accepted the call to Japan. When he arrived in Japan in 1951, he quickly encountered fellowship problems with other Synodical Conference missionaries. When the WELS did not break fellowship with the LCMS in 1956, Pastor Tiefel broke fellowship with the WELS in February, 1957. The Japanese Christians who had been brought to faith through Pastor Tiefel's work remained loyal to him. This small church also retained the property. Eventually, Pastor Tiefel's Japan work was supported by the CLC. The WELS "started over" by assigning Pastor Richard Seeger, who arrived in 1957, and calling Pastor Richard Poetter in 1958, who brought with him experience in Japan as a missionary of the LCMS. This whole episode certainly affected the resolution passed at the 1959 convention "that the Synod avoid sending missionaries singly to foreign fields."<sup>22</sup>

Another less than happy result stemming from the break with Missouri was the ending of WELS work in Nigeria. When the WELS pulled out of the Synodical Conference in 1963, financial and missionary support ended. In 1964, President Oscar Naumann and Professors Cad Lawrenz and Oscar Siegler met with leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nigeria (ELCN) to determine whether they wanted to join the scriptural stand of the WELS. The offer was made to take over complete support of the Nigerian mission field. The Nigerians, for the most part, chose to remain with the LCMS, despite the influence exerted by Dr. William Schweppe and Pastor Norbert Reim, two long-time WELS missionaries to Nigeria.

A couple of positive notes came out of this episode. First, the Nigerian mission was very impressive in the eyes of the world, complete with a hospital, numerous schools and American style churches. All of this was expensive to maintain. If the WELS had taken over the Nigerian mission, it would have been limited financially

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<sup>20</sup> This is a paraphrase of Pastor Edgar Hoenecke's words in a telephone interview.

<sup>21</sup> The story of their trip is recounted by Pastor Hoenecke in "The WELS Forty-niners" in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 3:1.

<sup>22</sup> Proceedings, 1959, p.23

to enter other fields.<sup>23</sup> Second, there was a small group that broke off from the ELCN for doctrinal reasons. Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria appealed for help from the WELS in a desire to "receive the Bread of Life in its truth and purity."<sup>24</sup> Limited support was given initially from special restricted funds. Later assistance took the form of worker training, where experienced missionaries and Seminary professors would conduct two-week seminars. For several years in the early 1990's, Missionary Larry Schlomer and Professor Harold Johnne spent two years as seminary instructors. A similar situation developed at the same time in the neighboring country of Cameroon where the Lutheran Church of Cameroon also requested spiritual guidance and financial assistance from the WELS. The same sort of support as Nigeria has taken place in Cameroon. In the mid-1990's, Pastors Raymond Cox and Norbert Meier served as seminary professors. Currently, Pastor Delmar Kannenberg is still there.

One of the more positive effects of the break with the Missouri Synod on the world mission work of the WELS was the flood of appeals from small Lutheran church bodies for support from a larger confessional Lutheran church. While in some instances the fellowship we enjoyed with these smaller foreign churches didn't last, their initial appeals got us in the door. Hong Kong was entered at the invitation of Pastor Peter Chang. From difficult beginnings, a completely self-supporting Lutheran church body, Southeast Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) has emerged. Today, one WELS missionary and one WELS teacher continue to serve in Hong Kong.

Within two years of the appeal to help in Hong Kong, assistance was being given to mission work in Taiwan. It took until 1977, however, before three missionaries were approved for Taiwan. Taiwan continues to be served by three WELS missionaries.

An appeal for "fellowship... based... on his deep concern for the preservation of sound Lutheran confessionalism in Indonesia "<sup>25</sup> was received from Pastor Martinus Adam in 1968. Again, it took until 1977 before three WELS missionaries were authorized for Indonesia. and not until 1980 when all three arrived there. Today, only one missionary remains, although his primary task is to supervise the continued instruction of the seven recently ordained pastors, as well as teach the new class of five seminarians.

The 1969 Synod convention heard the report that an appeal for help also came from Mr. T. Paul Mitra, a lay evangelist in India. Initial help came in the form of special financial gifts and training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for Mr. Mitra. For over 20 years, the contact with India was minimal. The biggest obstacle was the prohibition of expatriate missionaries. The mid-1990's saw an Indian Lutheran pastor, Rao Dasari, attend Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and, through colloquy, become a WELS missionary to India. In addition, recent developments in India have opened the doors for the WELS to have two American missionaries serve in one of the most populous nations in the world.

In 1964, Rev. David Orea Luna, a pastor and seminary professor in the Mexican Lutheran Church, which was in fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) wrote President Naumann that he had "learned about the firm standing of the WELS in such matter like the unionism and its adhesion to the right doctrines of the Lutheranism."<sup>26</sup> He requested information about the doctrine and practice of the WELS. Nothing more was heard from him until 1967. By this time, he and another pastor had withdrawn from the Mexican Lutheran Church. They requested an interview and in 1968 were declared to be in fellowship with the WELS. This proved to be the open door into Mexico. For much of the history of the WELS mission in Mexico visitation by

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<sup>23</sup> This point was expressed by Pastor Edgar Hoenecke in a telephone interview.

<sup>24</sup> Sauer, p.129

<sup>25</sup> Reports and Memorials, 1969, p.75

<sup>26</sup> Sauer, p.232

expatriate missionaries were limited. The base of operations was set up in El Paso. But today, five missionaries and one translator serve in either El Paso or Mexico itself.

In the mid-1970's, an appeal was received from a Brazilian layman who had left the LCMS-sponsored mission church for confessional reasons. His desire to remain true to the Word led him to start his own church and search for another church body which held to God's Word in its truth and purity. His search ended in Milwaukee. It wasn't until 1985, however, that three missionaries were approved for Brazil. Today, four missionaries carry out Gospel outreach in Brazil.

One last mission endeavor that resulted from the break with the Missouri Synod would be the mission in Antigua. While this is actually under the jurisdiction of the Board for Home Missions, it is still in a foreign country. This mission was inherited when the Federation of Authentic Lutherans, a small group of former LCMS churches, dissolved itself in 1975.

As can be seen from these various examples, the break with the Missouri Synod moved the WELS forward in world missions because it provided opportunities to enter countries which might not otherwise have been entered. The firm stand taken by the WELS in the middle of the century has borne fruit in mission opportunities which are still being met as the next century is entered. In addition, the confessionalism of the WELS has also resulted in its support of small Lutheran church bodies in Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

One final way that the break with the Missouri Synod impacted WELS foreign mission work was that it instilled a resolve to remain faithful to the Word, regardless of where the Word was preached. To that end, an important aspect of world mission work has been the establishment of seminaries in foreign fields to train a ministry that also remains faithful to the Word. Evidence of this can be seen in the likes of Pastor Salimo Hachibamba of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa.<sup>27</sup> The use of present and former Seminary professors, such as Professors Ernst H. Wendland, John Brug, Harold Johnne, and Armin Schuetze, can only prove beneficial in the training of national pastors to be confessional Lutheran pastors.

## **II. Forward in Education**

For the most part, the fact that the break with the Missouri Synod affected the education work of the WELS hinged on the impact the break had on home mission work. Since the need for pastors increased, the worker training system of the WELS had to be further mobilized. Since a number of missions began schools, more teachers were also needed. The effect of the break with the Missouri Synod on education may not have had as great an impact as it did on mission work, the impact was there, nevertheless, to move the WELS forward in Christ.

### **A. Elementary and Secondary Education**

At the same time that the intersynodical struggles were taking place, an increased interest in Lutheran elementary and secondary education was taking place in the WELS. Enrollment was increasing due to the Baby Boomer generation reaching grade school age. The number of classrooms were increasing due to the realization that 80 students to a classroom was no longer feasible for quality education. The number of schools was on the rise, increasing from 191 in 1953 to 241 in 1969. The reasons for this increase included the start of mission schools in mission congregations.

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<sup>27</sup> These statements reflect remarks of Pastor Theodore Sauer in a telephone interview.

Perhaps one other reason was the modernism that was pervading the public education system. This humanistic philosophy almost certainly contributed to the move of the LCMS away from the historical position of the Synodical Conference. The desire for Christian education to combat modernism led to an increase in area Lutheran high schools in the 1950's. Before this, there were only three area Lutheran high schools in the WELS: Winnebago Lutheran Academy, founded in 1925; Wisconsin Lutheran High School (WLHS), founded in 1903; and Racine Lutheran High School (RLHS), begun in 1944. Two of them, WLHS and RLHS, were joint ventures with the LCMS. During the 1950's, five high schools opened their doors: Fox Valley Lutheran High School (1953) in Appleton; Manitowoc Lutheran High School (1956); Luther High School (1957) in Onalaska; Lakeside Lutheran High School (1958) in Lake Mills; and St. Croix Lutheran High School (1958) in St. Paul. This boom in secondary Lutheran education also contributed to the increased need for more teachers.

There were some direct results from the break with the Missouri Synod. Some schools were lost, while others were gained. Two large schools, St. Martin in Winona and St. John in West Bend, were lost to the LCMS, although over half of their faculties remained with the WELS.<sup>28</sup> Because of their departures, Good Shepherd in West Bend and St. Matthew in Winona grew substantially. On the flip side, several large congregations and schools joined the WELS. Among them were St. John in Libertyville, Illinois, St. John in Watertown and St. Andrew in Chicago. Many other churches and schools were affected in a variety of ways. St. Peter in Fond du Lac split, with some members forming a CLC church. Similar situations could be found in the Dakota-Montana and Nebraska Districts.

The two joint area Lutheran high schools were both affected differently by the break. In Milwaukee, the break was seen as imminent already in the early 1950's. In 1955, two high schools were formed, one supported by each synod. The Racine high school situation took longer to settle. WELS - LCMS relations in the Racine and Kenosha area were very amicable. In fact, the Racine Lutheran High School Association memorialized the 1959 convention that "given more time and effort, and much prayer being made to the Holy Spirit, our present difficulties in the Synodical Conference can be healed in a God-pleasing manner."<sup>29</sup> It wasn't until 1971 that the WELS portion of Racine Lutheran broke off and formed Shoreland Lutheran High School.

Two other matters could be considered under this heading, although technically they fall under other areas of ministry. One is the establishment of the Lutheran Pioneer and Lutheran Girl Pioneer programs. The start of these two programs in the 1950's was a direct response to the Missouri Synod's change of attitude toward the Scouting programs. They are mentioned here because, as the Lutheran Pioneer Handbook states, its purpose is

... to provide youth of the WELS, or of Lutheran Churches in doctrinal fellowship with that synod, a program in keeping with the purpose of the Church. Said program to include Scripture-based teaching and application under direction of pastor and congregation of skills and crafts interesting to the adolescent youth, and to keep said youth within the companionship of their own Lutheran youth from an early age.<sup>30</sup>

The second matter has to do with serving the young people of our synod after college. The WELS had long been involved with campus ministry work. The work in Madison was directly affected by the break with the Missouri Synod. Prior to the break, the Synodical Conference ran Calvary Student Mission. In its heyday of the 1950's, average attendance was around 900 per weekend. With the breakup of the Synodical Conference came the decision to sell the WELS share of Calvary to the LCMS. In the summer of 1964, the Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and Student Center was founded.

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<sup>28</sup> Proceedings, 1963, p.116-117

<sup>29</sup> Proceedings, 1959, p.194

<sup>30</sup> A Boy's Handbook: A Field Manual for Lutheran Pioneers, p.7

Overall, the break with the Missouri Synod may not have had a huge impact on our parish education system. Yet, the desire to have children learn the truths of God's Word did increase during this time period. The historical concern of the WELS for the education of youth did not wane during the difficult doctrinal struggles. Rather, it became clear that if the WELS was going to stand on the Bible in all its truth and purity, its members would have to know the Bible from an early age.

## **B. Ministerial Education**

With all that was changing in the WELS during the period leading up to the break and immediately after, it is understandable that the worker training system of the WELS would not go unscathed. Several events on the campuses of the pastor training schools were direct results of the break with the Missouri Synod.

One event involved two professors at Northwestern College (NWC), Professors Gehrke and Jungkuntz. These two men were gifted and popular with the students. Unfortunately, they shared the viewpoint of Scripture that was being taught at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.<sup>31</sup> While they were not directly espousing the historical-critical method of interpretation, they were influencing students in a direction away from viewing Scripture as inspired and inerrant. Already in the late 1950's, students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) were questioning the inerrancy of Scripture in classes. As long as the WELS remained in fellowship with the LCMS, these two professors felt they could exert influence in the direction the Missouri Synod was going.<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1961, before the break became official, they accepted calls into the Missouri Synod, one to Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois, and the other to Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. Because of their disagreement with the Biblical principles of church fellowship which the WELS was defending, the two men were not granted peaceful releases by the NWC Board of Control.<sup>33</sup> The timing of the break was again controlled by God. If fellowship with the LCMS had continued, a gradual acceptance of the historical-critical method may have developed in the WELS worker training system, just as it had in the Missouri Synod. Instead, the break contributed to more unified student bodies and faculties at all of the worker training schools. The resolve of the WELS to have pastors and teachers well-trained in doctrine only increased.

One sad event occurred on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. When the tensions rose in the Synodical Conference, the WELS formed the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union, made up of the Conference of Presidents and the Seminary faculty. Professor Edmund Reim was the secretary. When the WELS refused to break fellowship at its special 1956 convention, Professor Reim tendered his resignation as Seminary president and professor and as committee secretary. The convention voted unanimously that he continue serving in all capacities. In 1957, when the convention again rejected the proposal to break fellowship, Professor Reim broke fellowship with the WELS.<sup>34</sup> Eventually, he was among those who joined the CLC. A gifted and conscientious man was lost to the WELS

There was a third direct result from the break with the Missouri Synod that proved to have many blessings for the WELS ministerial education system. Prior to the break, students who desired to become pastors but had attended college somewhere other than NWC or were older, married men attended Concordia Seminary in Springfield. Concordia had a program in place to give these men the necessary language skills and doctrinal education they would need, while also incorporating them into the seminary program. Neither NWC nor WLS had the program in place to meet these needs. With the break, however, came a necessary change. One proposal

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<sup>31</sup> The historical-critical method treats the Bible like any other piece of literature. Its very use calls into question the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures.

<sup>32</sup> These statements reflect remarks made by Professor Armin Schuetze in an interview.

<sup>33</sup> Kowalke, p.270

<sup>34</sup> Proceedings, 1957, p.144-145

on the table was to establish a "practical seminary" which would meet these needs. The route that was taken served the WELS for 25 years and cemented the bond of fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Second career students and older men who were married attended Bethany College in Mankato. There they received the education necessary to prepare them to enter Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. On average, three to five men would enter the Seminary via the Bethany program. It wasn't until the late 1980's that NWC developed a program to meet this need and the Bethany program was discontinued.

The entire ministerial education system of the WELS was affected because of the increased emphasis on mission work and the increased enrollment in the elementary schools and high schools. As was mentioned earlier, appeals were heard at almost every convention for more workers. Vacancies in pulpits and classrooms abounded. Mission appeals went unmet. Synodical manpower and recruitment committees were formed. All of this meant that even during the doctrinal controversies, the education of called workers received a great deal of attention. Long were the discussions and many were the proposals to completely revamp the system. Requests for prep schools and junior colleges in every district were heard. Even the elimination of prep schools was proposed. What came out of all of this was the resolve to have a working, viable ministerial education system. While the theology of the LCMS was weakening, their vaunted worker training system was being dismantled. Seeing what happened to the LCMS worker training system increased the resolve of the WELS not to take the same course.

But the question of providing enough pastors and teachers still remained. Recruitment efforts began to provide more students. In order to accommodate them, building projects took place on every campus in the 1950's and 1960's. In order to educate the influx of students, faculties were increased. From 1961 to 1971, the Seminary faculty doubled. While the number of graduating pastors was still too few to fill all the needs, the recruitment efforts had paid off that from the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's, the graduating classes almost doubled from about 30 to nearly 60.

The question of providing enough teachers was dealt with in a different manner. The 1957 Report of Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) mentions that 63 candidates would be presented for assignment. Of that number, however, only 23 had received four years of college education. The remainder had received three years or less, although these students typically attended several summer sessions.<sup>35</sup> Even with this less than desirable amount of education, insufficient numbers were still being produced. Part of the problem was that if sufficient teacher candidates were to be graduated, bigger facilities were needed in New Ulm. With the presence of the high school department, the building at DMLC were stretched to their limits. In order to provide immediate assistance, the 1959 convention resolved to build a music hall, gym/student union, and women's dormitory on the New Ulm campus and to open Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College (MLTC) in Milwaukee as a junior college to train teachers. Men would complete their final two years at DMLC. Women could either take two summer sessions and start teaching or finish their education at DMLC.<sup>36</sup> The college was opened using part of the Wisconsin Lutheran High School building. Eventually, the WELS funded a building expansion at WLHS. Land was purchased and plans were developed to build a new campus. But before construction began, DMLC's campus was ready to receive more students. Despite impassioned pleas from President Robert Voss and many Milwaukee area congregations, MLTC was closed after the 1969 school year. In its relatively short history, MLTC helped to alleviate the critical shortage of teachers. Its enrollment peaked at over 200.

All of this demonstrated the determination of the ministerial education system to go forward in Christ after the break with the Missouri Synod. The need for pastors and teacher well-schooled in the doctrine and practice of biblical Lutheranism was great. Flexibility was shown by opening a new college. Concern for adequate

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<sup>35</sup> Proceedings, 1957, p.75

<sup>36</sup> Proceedings, 1959, p.104-105.

facilities and faculties was shown by the building projects and added professors. A glance at the WELS ministerial education system today also indicates a determination to continue going forward in Christ by providing the best training possible for the future educators, preachers and missionaries.

### **III. Forward in Other Areas of Ministry**

There is a potpourri of other areas of ministry that have been moved forward by the break with the Missouri Synod.

#### **A. Doctrinal Matters/Inter-Church Relations**

Throughout the years of controversy, the report that garnered the most attention at conventions and took up the most time was the report from the Standing Committee on Church Union Matters.<sup>37</sup> When the break finally occurred, the work of this committee was far from over. Fellowship ties with many other church bodies had to be clarified. Most of these bodies were still in fellowship with both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. These triangular relationships could not continue.

Over the next twenty years, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters had to deal with the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Slovak Synod) in the United States,<sup>38</sup> as well as various church bodies in Australia, South Africa, Germany, France, Belgium, and Finland. Almost without exception, fellowship ties eventually had to be broken with the majority of these groups.

Close fellowship ties, however, were established and strengthened with a couple of small overseas church bodies. One such church body was the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK) in Germany, a small group that did not join the merger of the other German free churches in the late 1970's.<sup>39</sup> Professors Wilbert Gawrisch and Armin Schuetze were among those who spent considerable time and energy solidifying the doctrinal unity with the ELFK. Another was the Lutheran Confessional Church of Scandinavia (LCCS), founded in the mid-1970's. Professor Siegbert Becker was very instrumental in cultivating a relationship with this primarily Swedish church body. After his death, Professor John Brug became the contact man. Recently, Pastor John Vogt was installed as Friendly Counselor to this church body.

The Commission also endeavored to reach out to like-minded Lutherans in the United States. Attempts were made to heal the breach in the Synod caused by the formation of the CLC. Talks broke off because the CLC representatives wanted to begin by discussing the history of the 1950's. Even as recently as the late 1980's and early 1990's, attempts at establishing fellowship with the CLC fell short because of the CLC's insistence on using the interpretation of history as a basis for fellowship. Discussions also ensued with the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, a group of former Missouri Synod congregations, but differences remained. Throughout the 1960's, a series of free conferences were conducted with the purpose of strengthening and encouraging confessional Lutheran in whatever church body they might be found. In addition, the fellowship with the ELS was strengthened by regular doctrinal meetings held between representatives of the two synods.

The result of this activity of clarifying and strengthening these fellowship ties was the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference in 1993 as the successor to the Synodical Conference. The

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<sup>37</sup> The name was later changed to Commission on Doctrinal Matters, and eventually the Commission on Inter-Church Relations.

<sup>38</sup> Fellowship was terminated in 1967. See Proceedings, 1967, p.297.

<sup>39</sup> In the early 1990's, a student from their Leipzig Seminary attended Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for a year as part of an exchange program.

CELC consists of the WELS and ELS, the various church bodies associated with their world mission work or begun as a result of their world mission work, as well as the ELFK, and LCCS, and the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Finland). One beneficial by-product of controversy is that it stimulates the study of Scripture. Churches are forced to go back to the Bible and rediscover and relearn why they believe what they believe. A lack of controversy can produce the effect of taking for granted what one has and running the risk of losing it. God willing, the CELC will continue to strengthen fellowship ties among confessional Lutherans around the world, as well as encourage continued in-depth study of the teaching of confessional Lutheranism.<sup>40</sup>

## **B. Publications**

One final area where the break with the Missouri Synod moved the WELS forward in Christ is the area of publications. Until the doctrinal controversy ensued, Northwestern Publishing House's primary work was producing periodicals and educational material for youth. The WELS was dependent on the LCMS for the publication of doctrinal materials. During the break, however, the Wisconsin Synod published a series of pamphlets dealing with the issues at hand. This was only the tip of the iceberg that would come after the break.

One of the more important publications was the little pamphlet, "This We Believe."<sup>41</sup> The 1955 convention had instructed the Doctrinal Commission to write "for our mutual, spiritual growth and understanding, and as a testimony before the world, a single, concise confession of our doctrine and practice in theses and antitheses pertinent to present day controversies."<sup>42</sup> "This We Believe" has been serving the WELS as a brief explanation of biblical Lutheranism since its first printing in 1967.

The move forward in publications is also seen by the ample material that has come from NPH in the decades since the break. Exegetical commentaries and collections of essays dot the shelves of most WELS pastors. Pastor Werner Franzmann's Bible History Commentary has proved useful to many Sunday school and Lutheran elementary school teachers. The People's Bible commentaries and the People's Bible Teachings series have found a place in the homes of many lay people. In addition, numerous devotional books, prayer books, books on important doctrinal issues, and countless Bible studies have been published by NPH

## **C. Board for Parish Services**

The need to develop our own mindset and materials grew out of the break with the Missouri Synod. The Commission on Evangelism was formed already in the late 1950's to provide WELS members and churches with training and tools to share the truth of the Gospel with others. The various other commissions that followed and, over the years, were renamed and reorganized, all have served to meet the needs of a church body that has desired to hang on to its doctrinal roots, grow in its conviction of that doctrine, and worship and serve the Lord whose grace had showered this church body with his truth.

## **Conclusion: The Impact Continues**

When the break with the Missouri Synod seemed imminent, many inside and outside of the WELS thought the impact would be completely negative. The WELS would remain a little, insignificant, Midwestern synod who was "against" everything: Scouting, military chaplaincy, joint prayer, etc. Pastor Norm Berg expresses this sentiment well when he writes about the history of Home Mission work.

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<sup>40</sup> These last statements reflect remarks made by Professor Armin Schuetze in an interview.

<sup>41</sup> A revised version was recently completed.

<sup>42</sup> Proceedings, 1955, p.86

The suspension of fellowship With the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was destined to have a tremendous impact on the Home Mission program of the WELS. The early predictions as to its effect by those outside our Synod was that the position we had taken on the fellowship issue with all its practical implications as to joint public prayer, Scouting, military chaplaincy, and "cooperation in externals" would project an image to our pluralistic religious citizenry which would stymie all growth form the outside. There were also "Elijahs" and "Jonahs" in our own midst ready to bewail our loneliness and the futility of mission expansion dreams.<sup>43</sup>

Subsequent history has shown how the Lord has used the little WELS to accomplish great things. Home mission work continues to expand with a concentration on reaching people of other cultures. World mission work has taken the WELS to 19 different foreign countries to proclaim the truth of the Gospel, not to mention the church bodies in other foreign lands who receive encouragement and support. A viable ministerial education system continues to produce qualified and well-trained ministers of the Gospel to serve preach and teach the saving truths of God's Word in the churches, schools and missions of the WELS. A desire to better understand and communicate the confessional identity established by the break with the Missouri Synod seems to be growing.

The impact of this historical event continues. More importantly, the impact of the greatest historical event, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, continues. That historical event motivated the WELS to stand up for the truth almost 40 years ago. God willing and by his grace, that event will continue to motivate the WELS to stand up for and proclaim the truth into the next millenium and until the Lord Jesus appears in glory.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>43</sup> Berg, p.263

## Appendix: Timeline History of WELS - LCMS Relations

- 1847 Founding of Missouri Synod
- 1850 Founding of Wisconsin Synod
- 1869 Wisconsin and Missouri Synods formally declare fellowship; worker training agreement - Wisconsin Synod seminary students would go to St. Louis; Missouri Synod college students would attend Northwestern; Wisconsin Synod would supply a professor for seminary and Missouri Synod would send a professor to Northwestern
- 1872 Synodical Conference is founded with Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Norwegian Synods as charter members; Ohio Synod withdrew in 1881 and Norwegian Synod in 1883 (election controversy); Michigan Synod joined in 1892, Slovak Synod in 1908, Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in 1920
- 1900-1930's Ongoing church and ministry debate
- 1938-1939 LCMS and ALC (merger of Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo Synods) make overtures toward fellowship on the basis of Missouri's *Brief Statement* and the ALC's *Declaration*; WELS protests that one statement dealing with contested doctrines theically and antithetically is needed as basis for fellowship
- 1940's-1950's Scouting, military chaplaincy, "cooperation in externals" and prayer fellowship become issues at Synodical Conference conventions; WELS protests in Synodical Conference against LCMS' "numerous instances of an anticipation of a union not yet existing;" "Common Confession" became the new joint doctrinal statement issued by LCMS and ALC representatives
- early 1950's "Pamphlet War" ensued regarding the "Common Confession"
- 1952 Synodical Conference convention reveals a house divided (LCMS & Slovaks vs. WELS & ELS); WELS delegates declare our synod to be "in statu confessionis" (protesting fellowship) over against LCMS
- 1951 WELS convention recesses from August to October, recommendation from Synod secretary Winfred Schaller to declare fellowship ended is rejected; request is made that all sessions of the next Synodical Conference convention be devoted to a discussion of the issues causing division
- 1954 Synodical Conference convention recesses from August to November in order to devote itself to doctrinal issues; 3 presentations on the "Common Confession," 2 on scouting and the military chaplaincy and 2 on remaining issues; WELS essayists include President E. E. Kowalke of NWC and two young pastors from the Michigan District (Ernst Wendland & Edward Fredrich); the presentations make it clear that the Synodical Conference was still divided
- 1955 WELS Convention decides to "hold in abeyance" a final vote on termination of fellowship with LCMS; the problem was that the LCMS had not met in convention to officially respond to the admonitions given in 1953; 50 delegates protest, including President Reim of the Seminary; the convention resolved to issue a single, concise confession ("This We Believe"); ELS, led by Jacob and Robert Preus, breaks fellowship with the LCMS
- 1956 Special WELS Convention sees a "ray of hope;" LCMS had declared that the "Common Confession" was off the table as a union document; they also had gratefully acknowledged WELS concerns and admonitions; WELS resolves to continue to "hold in abeyance" a final vote and endorses participation in "conclave of theologians" with overseas brethren
- 1957 WELS Convention floor committee brings recommendation to terminate fellowship by a four-to-one margin; resolution is defeated, 61 - 77; convention resolves to continue vigorously protesting fellowship and urges a continuation of efforts to restore full unity; President Reim resigns and is replaced by Professor Lawrenz
- 1957-1960 "Conference of Theologians" meets twice; Joint Union Committee of the Synodical Conference attempts to draw up a common doctrinal statement — excellent statement on Scripture, but an

- 1961 impasse on fellowship; congregations and pastors begin to leave the WELS; the CLC is formed in 1960 with 34 congregations, 67 pastors and professors, 21 teachers and 6 seminary students  
Recessed Synodical Conference convention is not able to find a solution to impasse on fellowship; WELS convention votes to terminate fellowship with the LCMS by a vote of 124 - 49
- 1963 WELS and ELS withdraw from Synodical Conference

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