

NOV 10 1960

THE BLESSINGS OF OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

by

JOHN RAABE



T H E B L E S S I N G S O F O U R C H U R C H F E L L O W S H I P

- I. WHAT IS OUR COMMON FAITH?
- II. HOW DOES OUR COMMON FAITH EXPRESS ITSELF?
- III. WITH WHOM MAY WE PRACTICE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?
- IV. WITH WHOM HAS THE WISCONSIN SYNOD PRACTICED CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?
- V. WHAT THREATENS THE CONTINUANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?
- VI. WHEN DOES SCRIPTURE CALL FOR A TERMINATION OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?
- VII. WHAT HAS THREATENED THE CONTINUANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IN THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE?
- VIII. WHAT ARE THE ABOUNDING BLESSINGS OF OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

Minnesota District Convention
June 13-16, 1960
John Raabe, Pastor
St. Paul's Ev. Luth. Church
Litchfield, Minnesota

ABBREVIATIONS

SC	Small Catechism (Revised by Wisconsin Synod)
Qu	Quartalschrift (Wisconsin Synod Quarterly)
CF	Church Fellowship, confer Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Convention, Page 205
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
SCD	Summary of Christian Doctrine, Koehler
Trig.	Triglott
Apol.	Apology

Additional copies may be ordered from

Martin Albrecht
43 Waldheim Drive
New Ulm, Minnesota

Price: 25¢ plus postage

THE BLESSINGS OF OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

I. WHAT IS OUR COMMON FAITH?

1. What is faith? It is trust and confidence in Christ. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11: 1; also Eph. 3: 12)
2. Who alone can work this faith in our hearts? "I believe that the Holy Ghost has called me." (Third Article)
3. What means does the Holy Ghost use to begin and sustain faith? "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth." (1 John 3: 1) The means of grace, the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacraments.
4. What does faith embrace? It actually receives the merits of Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." (John 1: 12; also Col. 2: 5-7; Gal. 3: 26.27)
5. What do we mean with "our common faith"? That in like manner as the Holy Ghost has called, enlightened, sanctified, and kept me with Jesus Christ in the true faith, He also calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. (Based on SC 236: John 10: 16; Acts 2: 38, 39, 41)
6. Why do we call it our common faith? Because as it unites us with our God and Savior, so it also unites us in an intimate bond with all other believers. (John 17: 20.21: "That they also may be one with us." Also 1 John 1: 3; Eph. 4: 4-6)
7. Who therefore belongs to this group? "Wherefore we hold, according to the Scriptures that the Church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints of those, here and there in the world, who truly believe the Gospel of Christ and have the Holy Ghost." (Apol. VII; Trig. 237)
8. How intimate is the bond of common faith? "All Christians are in Christ, have the same Heavenly Father, were begotten with the same Word of Truth, have undergone a second birth, and are thus distinctly separated from the rest of the world, and will by God's grace enter eternal life." (Qu 1948)
9. What figurative names for the Church indicate the intimacy of this union? "Body of Christ" (Eph. 1: 22.23); "Bride of Christ" (John 3: 29); "Temple of God" (1 Tim. 3: 5; 1 Peter 2: 5); "The fold" (John 10: 16); "God's people" (2 Cor. 6: 16; 1 Peter 2: 9. 10).

10. What comfort does the intimacy of this union offer us? That the true invisible church is one in spite of outward differences, color, race, age, time, denomination. "One fold and one shepherd" (John 10: 16; Eph. 4: 3-6; Gal. 3: 28)
11. What name do we usually employ for this group? The Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.
12. Why does the Lord call His church holy? Because of the sanctification of all members. "Even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word." (Eph. 5: 25-26; 1 Peter 2: 9-10)
13. How is this possible, since we all sin daily? "In which Christian church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers." (Third Article)
14. Where do we find the Church? Wherever and only where the Gospel of Christ is in use may we expect to find the Church.
15. What means does the Holy Ghost use to join these to God and to one another? "The kingdom of Christ exists only with the Word and Sacraments." (Apol. IX, 52; 1 John 3: 1)
16. What means does He not use? Not the law. "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom. 6: 14). "The law is not made for righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners." (1 Tim. 1: 9)
17. When does a person become a member of the Holy Christian Church? The moment the Holy Ghost brings him to faith. "And believers were the more added to the Lord." (Acts 5: 14; Gal. 3: 26-29)
18. When does a person lose his membership in the holy Christian Church? The moment his faith dies.
19. What does the Lord therefore expect of all who have this common faith? That they retain God's Word and Sacraments in their purity, use them diligently, and fight error in every form.
20. Why? Because the pure Gospel alone can begin and nourish faith, while error threatens to destroy faith.
21. Do members of churches which teach false doctrine and have false practice also belong to the Holy Christian Church? Yes, provided that Christ is still confessed there to be the Son of God, the Savior. (SC 249)
22. How strong is the faith of these who belong to the Holy Christian Church?

- a) Even the most advanced members are still imperfect. (1 Cor. 13: 9-12)
 - b) Members will be tinged with erroneous conceptions, which may be due to lack of information and/or weakness of faith. (Acts 1: 6; Rom. 14: 1-3; 1 Cor. 8: 7)
 - c) Only those members who have entered heaven, and the holy angels, have attained perfection. *Have the angels "attained" perfection?*
23. What blessings are ours in this common faith? Not only are we children of God, and heirs of eternal life, but we also are joined with many others, who have the same faith, the same Lord, the same complete salvation. (Eph. 4: 4-6)
- II. HOW DOES OUR COMMON FAITH EXPRESS ITSELF?
1. How does my faith express itself? It produces good works. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2: 10)
 2. What are good works? "Good works are everything that a believing child of God does in the fear and love of God." (SC 232; Col. 3: 1-17; Gal. 5: 16-24; John 15:5)
 3. What are such good works?
 - a) Confession of mouth. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10; Acts 4: 20; 2 Cor. 4: 13)
 - b) A godly life. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (1 Pet. 2: 9; Gal. 5: 6)
 - c) Use of the means of grace. "He that is of God heareth God's words." (John 8: 47)
 - d) Prayer and praise. (Gal. 4: 6; Eph. 4: 11-14; Gal. 2: 9)
 4. Does the Christian have to be admonished to bring forth fruit? No; where there is faith, works will result. "Faith without works is dead." (James 2: 20) "A good tree bringeth forth good fruit." (Matth. 7: 17)
 5. What encouragement however is necessary? That we grow in good works, and in bringing forth much fruit. "Walk in the spirit." (Gal. 5:16) "Do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10: 31)
 6. How do we judge whether a person has faith or not? The only way this is possible for us is by observing his confession and life. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matth. 7:16; 1 John 4:1-3)

7. What degree of fruit does our Lord expect of us? He wants us to bring forth much fruit, but this will vary greatly in individuals and will vary in each of us from time to time.
- a) "Dorcas was full of good works and alms deeds which she did." (Acts 9: 36)
- b) Joseph of Arimathea: "being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews." (John 19: 38)
8. Are there not also hypocrites in the visible church? Yes, Jesus informs us that this will happen. "Tares among the wheat." (Matth. 13) "Supposing that gain is godliness." (1 Tim. 6: 5) Some will join the church for outward reasons. (Ananias and Sapphira)
9. How shall we treat such hypocrites? A hypocrite can be recognized only by God. However when his hypocrisy becomes open, he must be dealt with according to God's instructions. If he does not repent, he must be put out of the fellowship. (Matth. 18: 17) "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (1 Cor. 5: 13; also Titus 3: 10)
10. With whom is the believer united? First with God, then also with all other believers.
11. What do we call this? Our common faith.
12. How does our common faith express itself? By joint words, worship, and work.
13. What is the basis of such joint expression? Our common faith in Christ our Savior. (John 17: 20-23) "The members of the church as they are by their faith united with the Head, who is Christ, are by the same faith united with one another in Christ's mystical body, the Church." (Qu, Oct. 1949)
14. How does Scripture picture this joint expression? It compares it with the members of our body, which show not only individual activity--hand, eye, foot--but joint activity in the body. (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12)
15. Who causes us to express our common faith? "It is God the Holy Ghost who leads us to express and manifest in activity the faith which He works and sustains in our hearts through the Gospel." (CF; Gal. 4:6; John 15: 26-27; John 7: 38-39; Acts 1: 8; Eph. 2: 10)
16. What causes us to give such joint expression of our faith? "The Holy Spirit who creates Christians, does not create them as isolated

individuals with an inborn tendency to keep aloof from others. He creates them as brothers and sisters who do not have to be commanded to join together into a family, they are members by birth, and by their very nature are compelled to give expression to that fact. (Qu, Oct. 1949)

17. How does Scripture refer to such joint expression? "It is enjoined upon us in a hundred ways in God's Word by Apostolic example, injunction, and exhortation. We are not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together." (Heb. 10: 25) For our brethren and companions' sake we shall say to Jerusalem, "Peace be within thee." (Ps. 122) We are to admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. (Col. 3: 16; Qu, April 1948, p. 90)
18. What are the blessings of such joint expression of faith? "The apostles delight in the charity extended by Christians one to another, in the prayers which they offer for one another, and with one another, in the manner in which they edify one another in their most holy faith." (Qu, April 1948, p. 90)
19. What do we call this joint expression of our common faith? It is commonly called church fellowship.
20. What examples of such joint expression does Scripture offer?
- a) Fellowship with smaller or larger groups:
- "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren, the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty." (Acts 1: 14-15)
- "And the same day there were added unto them about 3000 souls"...
- "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." (Acts 2: 41, 47)
- "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." (Gal. 2: 9)
- b) Congregations with other congregations:
- "They determined that Paul and Barnabas...should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question...and the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter." (Acts 15)
- "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in Macedonia." (1 Cor. 8: 1-2; 18-19; 2 Cor. 9:2)

"I have given order to the churches in Galatia." (1 Cor. 16: 1)
Timothy is said to be "well reported by the brethren in Lystra,
Derbe, and Iconium." (Acts 16: 1)

21. Does the Bible command the formation of such groups? No, this is the fruit of our common faith. "By the birth of two or more Christians in the same locality a local congregation was born. The several Christians did not wait for orders to found a local congregation. The Holy Ghost united them." (Qu, Oct. 1949)
22. Did God command the form that such groups must take? No, although the Holy Ghost founded congregations and synods, the outward form takes shape as circumstances may suggest.
23. Why did not God command the formation and the form of such groups? "God does not do His work in the Church by law and command. Christ is the end of the law. If God still worked results in the Church by means of the law, then Christ would have died in vain--and only dead works would result, because there is no law given that can produce life. The letter killeth." ("Continuing in His Word," p. 70)
24. How may these joint expressions of faith be classified? "According to the particular realm of activity in which they occur." (CF)
25. What are such forms of church fellowship? "Pulpit, altar, prayer fellowship; fellowship in worship, work, missions, Christian education, and charity." (CF)
26. What common designation covers all these expressions? Church fellowship.
27. How should church fellowship therefore be treated? As a unit which covers every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith.
28. What also is included in Scripture references to church fellowship?
 - a) Giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2: 9); by a handshake their fellowship was demonstrated.
 - b) The fraternal kiss (Rom. 16: 16), which was jointly understood to be an expression of fellowship.
 - c) Withholding of church fellowship may be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them godspeed. (2 John 10:11; 3 John 5-8)
 - d) Rom. 16: 17 with its general admonition "avoid them," telling us that fellowship is to cease.

III. WITH WHOM MAY WE PRACTICE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

1. On what basis can we recognize individuals or groups for church fellowship? This can be done only on the basis of their confession. "To introduce the question of personal faith into the general question of fellowship is inadmissible." (CTM, Aug. 1931) "The Lord knoweth them that are His." (2 Tim. 2: 19) "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10: 10) "Hereby know ye the spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come into the flesh is of God." (1 John 4: 1-3) "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. 16: 17)
2. In what practical manner do we determine church fellowship? By selecting individuals or groups with whom we practice joint words, worship, and work.
3. In what practical way may we recognize a man's confession? By his membership in a congregation or synod--or by his lack of membership.
4. How can we know what a congregation or synod teaches? "The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications." (Brief Statement: "The Church")
5. To what extent must our confession be based on God's Word? "A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God." (CF) "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed." (John 8: 31) "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God".."that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (Matth. 5: 19; 1 Pet. 4: 11; Jer. 23: 28,31; Deut. 4: 2; Rev. 22: 18-19) "No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines, to matters of faith, or of practice, to historical items or matters subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters." (C. Walther) (Also 2 John: 10; 1 Tim 6: 3; Rom. 16:17) "We recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept His entire Word." (CF)

6. Why is this necessary? Because the Holy Ghost uses the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments, to start and sustain faith, and the "denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief." (CF) (John 1: 31)
 "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." (Matth. 5: 19)
 "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.." (Rev. 22: 19)
7. What should be our attitude to those questions which are not answered in the Bible? "Questions which are not answered in the Word of God may be called open in the sense that agreement in answering them is not required for the unity of faith and doctrine which is demanded in the Word of God, nor does it belong to the conditions required for church fellowship, for the association of brethren or colleagues.." (Walther)
8. How may we define open questions? "Open questions or theological problems are questions which the Holy Scriptures has^{ve} left open, or unanswered, or has not answered clearly." (Mueller, Dogmatics)
9. What examples of such open questions present themselves? How long were Adam and Eve in Paradise? On what day were the angels created?
10. May any doctrines be classed as open questions? No, not even such which we label as non-fundamental. "Not to be included in the number of open questions are the following: the doctrine of the Church and ministry, of Sunday, of Chiliasm, and of the Antichrist, these doctrines being clearly defined in Scripture." (Brief Statement)
11. What opinions do we reject on the basis of Scripture in regard to open questions?
- a) "That Christian doctrines are formed gradually and that any doctrine which has not completed such a process must be considered an open question;" (Walther, Thesis XI)
- b) "that doctrines which have not yet been fixed in our Lutheran confessions must be counted as open questions, because these were never intended to present a complete doctrinal system while they indeed acknowledge the entire content of the Scriptures as the object of the faith held by the Church;" (Walther, Thesis XII)

- c) "that such doctrines in which even recognized orthodox teachers have erred must be admitted as open questions;" (Walther, Thesis XIII)
- d) "the assumption that there are Christian doctrines of faith contained in the Scriptures which nevertheless are not presented in them clearly, distinctly, and unmistakably, and henceforth must be counted as open questions." (Walther, Thesis XIV)
12. What is the duty of the Church therefore in regard to Scripture? "The church militant must indeed aim at and strive for absolute unity of faith and doctrine." (Walther)
13. How does Scripture express God's desire for oneness in faith and doctrine? "That ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1: 10) "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there is one body and one spirit..." (Eph. 4: 3-5; Acts 2: 42)
14. With whom only are we to maintain church fellowship? Only with those who continue steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine. (Acts 2: 42; 1 John 4: 1)
15. What therefore is a true orthodox church? "One which in all its doctrines and practice adheres strictly to the Word of God." (Koehler, Summary of Christian Doctrine)
16. What is a false church? "One which in one or more points departs from the teachings of the Word of God. In so designating a church a false church we do not pass judgment on the personal faith of its individual members." (Koehler, SCD)
17. How do we determine whether a church is true or false? "This may not be determined on the basis of the sincerity of the members but on the basis of its public doctrine." (Koehler, SCD)
18. How do we know whether those belonging to a congregation or Synod agree with its confession? We must assume that they do, unless we have definite information to the contrary.

There is always the possibility of lack of information. Many members may never have read the Augsburg Confession. In Ephesus Paul met brethren who had not heard that there was a Holy Ghost, but he recognized this as a lack of information and remedied the situation.

We must also consider whether a member, a congregation, or a synod is agreeing with, or protesting against, doctrine and practice in its midst. (Wisconsin Synod--vigorous protesting fellowship; Ev. Lutheran Synod suspending relations with Missouri)

19. What must we do when there is a clash between the confession of the mouth and deeds? Then we must accept deeds, for actions speak louder than words. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Some churches officially reject the lodge religion but admit lodge members.)
20. How do we usually classify the religions and denominations in the world?
- Christian and non-Christian
 - The Christian churches--Protestant and Catholic (We prefer three: Lutheran, Protestant, and Catholic)
 - The Protestants--Lutheran and Reformed
 - Lutherans--liberal and conservative (Wisconsin Synod--Synodical Conference)
21. Why is the church on earth divided into so many bodies? "This is due to man's sin against the Word of God..by deviating from His Word, by omitting something, changing something, adding something." (NW Luth. 9-26-48, Prof. Meyer; 1 Tim. 1: 10; 2 Tim. 4: 3; Titus 1: 9) "There is a double source of danger, from without and within." (Acts 20: 17-35)
22. How do the words of the Lord refer to such divisions? They say that such divisions are an offence to Him, because they reveal man's indifference to the whole truth of God.
23. What does our Lord expect of His children in the midst of such divisions? That we study His Word, testify against all error (John 8), practice fellowship with those one in faith with us, and separate from those who persistently teach falsely. (Rom. 16)
24. What comfort is ours even in these divisions? "We know that the real Church, which is invisible to the human eye, the spiritual communion of saints, is not divided." (NW Lutheran, 9-26-48, P. 313)
25. With whom may we worship, work, and speak words of confession? "Only with those who are one in faith with us, that is, one in confession to the entire Word of God." (Koehler)
26. Why only these? Because God forbids worshipping, praying, and working with anyone who teaches contrary to God's Word persistently, and those who join in such joint activity in any form make themselves guilty of the same offence. (Rom. 16: 17-18)
27. Does it make any difference whether this is done regularly or only occasionally? No, the Lord condemns it whether it is done regularly or only occasionally. (Rom. 16: 17-18)
28. May we cooperate with other church bodies in external matters. Yes, if these are externals only, and if church fellowship is not involved.

29. What are such externals?
- We have employed the assistance of the Lutheran World Federation in sending gifts to Europe.
 - If our government would pass legislation robbing us of our religious freedom, we might work with other church bodies to try to regain that freedom.
 - All churches of the same city may belong to a baseball or softball league.
30. What degree of unity may we expect here on earth?
- "The faith of Christians and its manifestations are marked by many imperfections, either in the grasp and understanding of these truths, or in the matter of turning these truths to full account in their lives. We are all weak in one way or another." (CF)
- "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." (Phil. 3:12)
- "We become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat." (Eph. 4:14; Eph. 3:16-18; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2)
- "The church militant never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one." (Walther, Thesis V)
31. What privilege is ours in the exercise of church fellowship? That in the midst of these divisions, and in spite of our own imperfections, our Lord has granted us the use of His Gospel and Sacraments, permits us to cooperate with those who have the same confession, and has honored us with the privilege of having a part in proclaiming His Gospel to the ends of the earth.
- IV. WITH WHOM HAS THE WISCONSIN SYNOD PRACTICED CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?
- When was our Wisconsin Synod founded? In 1850.
 - What was the background of the founders of the Wisconsin Synod? Most of the founders originated from Germany, were members of various mission societies which were affiliated with the State Church of Germany.
 - What was the confession of the mission societies and the State Church? It was a mixture of Lutheran, Reformed, and United (or Evangelical).
 - What does the early history of the Wisconsin Synod congregations reveal about their confession? We hear of a spirit of unionism, of a conflict between Lutheran and Reformed doctrines and practice.
 - What do later reports reveal? Already in the second decade, about 1860, the small Synod showed an increasing concern for the strictly Scrip-

tural and Lutheran confession.

6. How was this brought about? It was the work of the Lord, who created a deeper love for the purity of God's Word in the early pastors and members. This was furthered by the confession of pastors of other synods, particularly of the Missouri Synod.
7. What examples of such increased love for the truth showed themselves?
 - a) The Wisconsin Synod pastors entered into a state of confession over against the Mother Church, the State Church of Germany, without at once leaving its fellowship because of the matter of church fellowship. Later it severed its connection entirely.
 - b) It also protested against the matter of "Open Questions" as taught in the Iowa Synod...and maintained, "While we must be patient with weak brethren, yet no church can grant equal right to error without becoming unfaithful to the Word of God."
 - c) It protested against the doctrine of the Church as taught in the Buffalo Synod.
8. How did this affect the relationship with the mission societies in Germany, who had sent these pastors to America? It brought charges of ingratitude from them, and they wrote: "Under the circumstances we can send no more workers," and they withdrew their financial support of these churches.
9. Where did the small Synod now turn for church fellowship? It joined the newly-formed General Council in 1867.
10. Why did it not remain in the General Council? It resigned the next year, 1868, because the General Council had failed to take a definite stand regarding the question of altar and pulpit fellowship with the heterodox and also did not have a firm stand in regard to secret societies.
11. Where did the Wisconsin Synod find church fellowship after leaving the General Council? In 1872 it became a member of the Synodical Conference, which also consisted of the Minnesota Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Ohio Synod, and the Norwegian Synod.
12. Do all these synods still belong to the Synodical Conference? No, the Ohio Synod left in 1881 because of the Predestination Controversy, and the Norwegian Synod resigned in 1883 for the same reason.
13. What further union followed?
 - a) In 1892 the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods formed "the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other States", which was joined later by the Ev. Lutheran Dis-

trict Synod of Nebraska.

- b) In 1917 these Synods reorganized to become a closely knit body, an amalgamation.
 - c) In 1959 they adopted the new name "The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod."
14. What synods are now affiliated with the Synodical Conference? The Wisconsin Synod, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (formerly the Norwegian Synod, which left the larger Norwegian Synod) and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, (formerly called the Slovak Synod).
Other groups throughout the world which are affiliated with the Synodical Conference are in Nigeria, Australia; besides these there are the free churches in Germany, France, Estonia, Finland, South Africa, and the Bleckmar Mission in Natal and Transvaal.
 15. What privilege has God granted us through the fellowship in our Synod and in the Synodical Conference? We have jointly confessed the whole truth of God's Word, have fought error in every form, have worshipped together, worked together in the fields of missions, education, and charity.
 16. How may the confession of the Synodical Conference be defined? It is a confession to the whole truth of God, which has shown it to be the most conservative of all Lutheran church bodies, especially in regard to the matter of church fellowship, namely that God permits joint worship, work, and words only with those one in faith and confession with us. At its founding in 1872 the Synodical Conference thus expressed its purpose: "To promote and preserve, over against all disturbances, the unity in doctrine and practice."
 17. What degree of unity has existed in the Synodical Conference?
 - a) Although we have thanked the Lord many times for the unity that did exist, there have been many evidences of pride, envy, and lovelessness. There have been repeated instances of stressing Synodical loyalty rather than love for the work of the Lord, opposition congregations have been founded, and the like. For whatever share we have in such actions, and we too are guilty, we ask our gracious Lord to forgive us.
 - b) Throughout the years there has been no complete agreement in regard to the Church and the Ministry. This is usually defined as not being a difference in doctrine as such, but in the application of the doctrine. There is some hope that this difference has, at least

officially, been settled.

c) During the past twenty-five years the unity of the Synodical Conference has been threatened by differences in regard to Church fellowship: negotiations by Missouri Synod with Synods not in fellowship with us, the adoption of agreements in regard to doctrine with such synods, cooperation with such bodies, chaplaincy agreements, Scoutism, lack of discipline, etc.

18. What problems have arisen within our Wisconsin Synod?

a) In the late twenties the Protestant Controversy resulted in the loss of various pastors, professors, and congregations and parts of congregations.

b) During the past two or three years about 45 pastors, 20 congregations, 3,000 souls, also professors, teachers, and parts of congregations have resigned from our Synod, in protest against our continued vigorously protesting fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

19. What does our Lord expect of us in the midst of controversy?

That we humbly confess all our sins, continue to study His Word, pray to Him that He through His Holy Word and Holy Spirit will, if it be His will, heal this breach in our fellowship to the glory of His Name.

V. WHAT THREATENS THE CONTINUANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

1. What threat to church fellowship constantly shows itself? Sin.

2. Why does sin threaten church fellowship? Because sin is transgression of God's Holy Word.

3. What therefore threatens the continuance of church fellowship? "The denial, adulteration, or suppression, of the Word of God." (SC) In other words--false doctrine and/or practice.

4. Does it make any difference whether this is in regard to a fundamental or a non-fundamental article of faith? No, God asks us to believe and confess to the entire Word of God. "No point of doctrine is by its nature non-divisive of church fellowship." (Qu, April 1950, P. 33)

5. How can we explain the fact that differences in doctrine and practice appear in members, pastors, congregations, and Synod? "It is the Word of God alone, through the Holy Spirit, who creates and maintains life in the Christian heart. However, because of our sins and weaknesses, this life may occur in different stages of development, it may show different degrees of strength, it may at times be found at such low ebb that it is hardly perceptible. It may also vary in the same

individual at different periods." (Prof. J. Meyer)

6. What is our duty as Christians when such differences appear? To testify against all error in doctrine and practice, to deal in fervent love with weak brethren, and to avoid those who persistently adhere to false doctrine and practice.

7. Why should we not compromise in order to keep outward peace? Then error would be granted equal right of existence with truth, and this would make us partakers of the evil deeds of others.

8. What sins are involved when we tolerate error?

- a) Sins against the Lord for toleration of error reveals indifference to His truth;
- b) Sins against the Church, threatening the unity of the Church;
- c) Sins against the false teachers who need our testimony;
- d) Sins against our own souls as a result of not doing our duty.

9. What must we remember when false doctrine and/or practice occur in our midst? "That the faith of Christians, and its manifestations, are marked by many imperfections, either in the grasp and understanding of these truths, or in the matter of turning these truths to full account in their lives. We are all weak in one way or another." (CF; Phil. 3:12; Eph. 4:14; Eph. 3:16-18; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2)

10. How does Scripture classify sins which threaten church fellowship?

- a) Unbecoming Christian life (Gal. 6:1-3; Eph. 4; Matth. 18:1; 1 Cor. 5)
- b) Lack of trust in God (Matth. 6: 25-34)
- c) Weakness with regard to doctrine (Acts 1:6; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4; 2 Thess. 3: 6.14.15; Acts 15: 5.6.22.25)

11. Do sins and weakness in regard to our Christian life break the unity of church fellowship? "No, a brother does not forfeit his membership in the church of Christ by falling into a sin. Else there would be no Church. All sins have been washed away in the blood of Jesus, the Son of God." (Qu, April 1950, p. 126)

12. How should we deal with those who have fallen into sin? "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." (Matth. 18:15) Also witnesses and before congregation. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself,

lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1; Luke 17:3; 2 Tim. 4:2)

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."
(2 Tim. 2:24.25; 1 Tim. 5:1.2; 1 Thess. 5:14; Tit. 3:10)

13. What must move us in helping weak brethren? Love for the Lord, for His Word, and for our brethren. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matth.18:11.12) Lost coin (Luke 15:8); "Come unto me all ye that labor..."(Matth. 11: 28-30)

14. Does weakness in regard to trust in God disrupt the fellowship? "No, it does not. Jesus dealt with His weak disciples, at the appearance of such weakness rebuked them, but also patiently and tenderly instructed them how to overcome their weakness." (Qu, April 1950)

a) In Matth. 6:30; Luke 12:38 "Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, oh, ye of little faith?" He encourages them with "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (Qu, 1950, P. 35)

b) In Matth. 8:24-26 when the disciples cried out, "Lord, save us, we perish," He answered them, "Why are ye fearful, oh, ye of little faith?" Also Matth. 14:31: "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

"In all these cases the persons involved were ready to submit to the instruction of Jesus. Jesus was dealing with bruised reeds and smoking flaxes, whom He would not break or quench but lovingly tried to restore to a healthy vigor." (Qu, April 1950)

15. Does weakness in reference to adiaphora disrupt the fellowship?

(Adiaphora, or indifferent things, are things which God neither forbids nor commands, such as what we may eat, drink, forms of entertainment, etc.)

"No, Paul warns the Romans and the Corinthians that both the strong and the weak were in danger of harming the unity of the congregation, but he still deals with them patiently and calls them brethren."
(Qu, Jan. 1950) (It must in such cases be clearly determined what are such indifferent things and which are not; also who are weak and who are strong.) (Romans 14; 1 Cor. 6:10)

"Paul warns the weak not to judge his brother, otherwise he would cease to be a weak brother and would be on the way to becoming a schismatic and a heretic." (Qu, Jan. 1950)

"To the strong he writes, 'Receive him (the weak brother) and do not despise him.' He needs tender nursing so that he may overcome his

weakness. In Romans 15:1 and Gal. 6:2 Paul uses the figure of placing one's self under the other man's burden." (Qu, Jan. 1950)

16. Do doctrinal weaknesses call for a termination of fellowship?

a) "No, Paul did not sever connections with the churches in Galatia, who were invaded by Judaizers and were affected by their false doctrine. He did denounce their seducers, but still treated the Galatians as brethren, as weak brethren to be sure, but nevertheless as brethren." (Qu, Jan. 1950, P. 43)

b) In Colosse, where the error was part Jewish, part Gnostic, Paul addresses them as "saints and faithful brethren in Christ."

c) In Thessalonica many were not clear concerning Christ's return for judgment. The error threatened the well-being of the congregation. Paul strengthened them through the Word and calls them "brethren."

d) So also in Corinth regarding the errors in regard to the resurrection, he still calls them "Brethren." (1 Cor. 15: 1.50.58)

e) Walther Thesis II: "The error of an individual member of the Church even against a clear Word of God does not involve immediately his actual forfeiture of church fellowship, nor of the association of brethren and colleagues."

Thesis III: "Even if an open error against the Word of God has infected a whole church body, this does not in itself make that church body a false church, a body with which an orthodox Christian or the orthodox church would abruptly have to sever relations."

Thesis IV: "A Christian may be so weak in understanding that he cannot grasp, even in a case of a fundamental article of the second order, that an error which he holds is contrary to Scriptures. Because of his ignorance he may also continue in his error, without thereby making it necessary for the orthodox church to exclude him."

Thesis VIII: "The Church must take steps against any deviation from the doctrine of the Word of God, whether this be done by teachers or by so-called laymen, by individuals, or by entire church bodies."

17. What privilege does the Lord accord His children at the appearance of these weaknesses? To testify to the truth, to help those who are weak, to show almost limitless patience and love, so that the weak faith will not die out.

18. What scripture passages reveal our duty of love to the weak?

Lev. 19:17: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother, in thine heart; Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him."
Matth. 18:15: "Go and tell him his fault...."

Gal. 6:1: "Restore such a one in the spirit of meekness..."

Luke 17:3: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him."

2 Tim. 4:2: "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

2 Tim. 2:24,25: "In meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

1 Thess. 5:14: "Support the weak, be patient to all men."

Titus 3:10: "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition reject."

19. What form of admonition does Scripture prescribe? "Scripture does not prescribe the form that admonition must take. God has given us His gifts (John 20:20) but no detailed instructions how to use these means." (Prof. Meyer, Dogmatics Notes; Gal. 6:10; Gal. 4:4-10; 1 Cor. 10: 19-23; 2 Cor. 4:13; Phil. 1:18; Matth. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; Roman 13:8)
20. What must be said about those who are not concerned about the weak? "They are puffed up in ignorance and sinful pride, sinning not only against the weak brethren, but against the Savior Himself, who shed His blood for all, and who lovingly embraces the weak brother in preference to the other who exalts himself." (Qu, Jan. 1950, P. 45) (Refer also to 1 Cor. 8:1 where Paul speaks about knowledge without love: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.")
21. How long should we deal with those who are weak? The Bible does not set a time limit. Jesus told Peter we should forgive a brother who trespasses against him seventy times seven. This will vary according to circumstances.
- "We should not deal with him in a convenient way to get rid of an unwelcome member, not in an impatient hurry to have an unpleasant matter over with: 'One, two, three, out.' If anything is clear from the instructions of Jesus, it is this, that He wants us to exercise almost unlimited patience and to spare no effort to gain the brother."
- (Prof. J. Meyer, NW Luth. 4/24/60)
- "So long as we have reason to assume that they are ready to receive instruction and correction." (Prof. C. Lawrenz)
22. How has our Lord equipped us for the blessed task? He has not only redeemed us, but has charged us with His Gospel and Sacraments, has promised to be with us, and has given us His gifts. (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4: 7-13)
23. How will we know when such a weak brother has been strengthened.

We cannot look into the heart, but we can hear his confession and behold his fruits of repentance.

24. What fruits of repentance will we expect? Our Lord alone can bring to repentance, and alone can bring forth such fruits. We dare not prescribe the number or degree of such fruits. We always pray for and hope for much fruit.
25. What privilege is ours at the appearance of such weaknesses? The great labor of love our Lord has granted us in helping the weak. The full blessings of these labors will not become apparent until we appear in heaven. And whenever we are weak, as we all are at times, we pray that those who are strong will at once come to our aid.

VI. WHEN DOES SCRIPTURE CALL FOR A TERMINATION OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

1. What two principles must guide us when dealing with error? "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 all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds." (CF)
2. When is termination of fellowship called for? When impenitence or persistent adherence to false doctrine or practice shows itself.
3. What practical considerations affect our action in dealing with those in error?
- a) That not all cases are alike, and circumstances will vary;
 - b) That cases will involve individuals or larger groups;
 - c) That cases will involve those in fellowship with us and those out of fellowship.
4. What should we remember in dealing with cases with varying circumstances?
- "That conscientious recognition of both principles (love to the weak and termination also flowing out of love) will lead to an evangelical practice in facing many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry." (CF)
5. Why must we consider whether we are dealing with an individual or a group?
- Because in an individual it can more easily be recognized whether he is heeding the admonition or not. (Titus 3:10)
6. Why must we consider whether we are dealing with those in fellowship with us, or those out of fellowship? Because we owe a special debt of love to those with whom we are in fellowship, and therefore will need to admonish with great patience and love.
- In regard to those outside of the fellowship, such admonition is not necessary. We label all churches which are not Christian churches as

would they were even cut off which trouble you.' He pronounces a curse on them because they were perverting the Gospel. He does not worship or pray with those whom he curses." (Meyer, Qu)

c) To the Philippians Paul writes: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." (schism) (3:2)

d) Matth. 7:15-19; Jesus rejected the Pharisees, who trusted in their works and denied Christ and His Gospel. The Lord in no uncertain terms speaks of the Sadducees and warns against them, because they refused to believe Scripture, the resurrection, angels, etc. Thus, beware of such false prophets. Beware means the same as "avoid."

d) On his mission journeys on three occasions Paul separated his followers from the Jewish synagogues: Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:45ff), in Corinth (Acts 18:6ff), and in Ephesus (Acts 19:9).

19. What Scripture passages refer to termination of church fellowship?

a) Gal. 1:8-9; "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Here Paul is referring to the Judaizers, who perverted the gospel of Christ. He pronounces a curse on them. The Galatians should separate themselves from them.

b) Matth. 7:15-19: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits." In this general warning, the Lord asks us to beware of all false prophets. This will take constant watchfulness. You can recognize them however by their fruits: their false teachings and false confession.

c) Gal. 5:9: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Paul again refers to the Judaizers, who pervert the gospel, and warns of the danger of permitting this to infiltrate into the congregation. By not avoiding them, the Galatians may lose the gospel entirely.

d) Matth. 16:6: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Here Jesus names the false teachers--Pharisees and Sadducees--who denied Christ and His gospel. They were to be avoided.

e) 2 Tim. 2: 17-19: "And their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some." This false doctrine in regard to the resurrection is likened unto a cancer or gangrene. Those guilty of it were excommunicated. Paul warns Timothy and others to avoid their profane and vain babbling, which threatens to affect them also.

f) 2 John: 9-11: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him godspeed, for he that biddeth him godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds." John refers to a special class of errorists, followers of Cerinthus, who denied Christ's incarnation and therefore also rejected Christ as the Son of God and Savior. They should be avoided. Every expression of church fellowship should end, also welcoming them into their home and bidding them godspeed, which might be understood as an expression of fellowship.

g) Romans 16:17-18: "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good works and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Paul here gives a general exhortation to mark and avoid those who are persistent errorists. He does not name any specific error nor any specific false teachers, but purposely makes it very general. By persistently teaching error they are dishonoring God, causing divisions and offences, and must be avoided lest they deceive others.

h) Titus 3:9.10: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject." Here Paul speaks about such matters as have no direct bearing on our faith. He calls them "foolish questions." However, whether important or of less importance, such a one who teaches them must be admonished and warned about his sin, once, perhaps twice. If he refuses to heed the warning, then he disturbs the peace, draws attention away from the blessed truth of the Gospel. When it becomes evident, after one or two admonitions, that he refuses to listen, then reject him--separate from the heretic.

i) 2 Thess. 3:14.15: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother." Here Paul tells us that fellowship may at times have to be suspended, without a complete rupture. The man, who erred with reference to the second coming of Christ, and in regard to the doctrine of the Antichrist, not only held these opinions but also acted on their false assumptions. This man should still be treated as a brother; the treatment should be

adapted to the situation, but outward relations should be suspended to make man ashamed. During the suspension fellowship should cease.

20. What conclusions should we draw from these Scripture passages?

- a) God's concern for the full truth of His Word
- b) Our duty as Christians to testify against all error
- c) These refer to both major and minor errors
- d) These refer to both individuals and groups
- e) That the action taken will vary according to circumstances
- f) God's exhortation to avoid those within the fellowship or without who are persistent errorists
- g) That when termination of fellowship is called for, we should act in the complete assurance that we are doing God's will

21. What laws should govern us in such cases? God has given us only one law--the law of love. He is dealing with us as adults in the New Covenant. He provides general principles, gives some specific examples of cases, and asks us to follow His example of love. (1 Cor. 13)

VII. WHAT HAS THREATENED THE CONTINUANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IN THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE?

1. When did the present controversy begin? It may be traced back about twenty-five years, when the American Lutheran Church invited the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod to enter upon negotiations for church fellowship. Our Synod did not receive such an invitation.
2. What was the result of such negotiations between the ALC and Missouri?
 - a) The Missouri Synod presented the Brief Statement as its confession. (Our Wisconsin Synod has also expressed full agreement with this confession.)
 - b) The ALC was not ready for unconditional subscription to the Brief Statement, but drew up a document called "A Doctrinal Declaration" and announced that it adopted the Brief Statement "in the light of" that Declaration.
 - c) In 1938 the Missouri Synod passed a resolution by which it declared that the Brief Statement, together with the Declaration and a set of further resolutions were to be a basis for future fellowship with the ALC. The Missouri Synod also asserted that disagreement on certain non-fundamental doctrines need not be divisive.
 - d) Another document, called the "Doctrinal Affirmation," was drawn up by joint committees of the ALC and the Missouri Synod, but this document and its revisions were not satisfactory to the ALC.

e) The ALC definitely stated it would not give up its fellowship with the other bodies of the American Lutheran Conference, and also asserted in the so-called "Friendly Invitation" that there was "an area of wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God."

f) In 1950 the ALC and the Missouri Synod drew up the "Common Confession" and accepted it as a settlement of the past differences which had existed between the ALC and the Missouri Synod.

3. How did our Synod respond to these negotiations?

a) In 1939 our Synod declared that the three documents did not serve a satisfactory basis for establishing doctrinal unity with the ALC, and we asked the Missouri Synod to cease the negotiations until a proper basis would be established.

b) The Wisconsin Synod in 1951 unanimously declared "that we find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted,...and that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation, since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which in fact are not settled."

c) In the Synodical Conference meeting of 1952 nothing was done to resolve the issues caused by the adoption of the Common Confession, and our delegates announced their protest in the form of a declaration of a state of confession over against the Missouri Synod.

4. Why did our Synod protest against such negotiations? This did not mean that we were opposed to the discussion of differences with other church bodies, for this would be the position of a separatist, but our protest concerned the fact that by word and deed the ALC has made it clear that it has negotiated with the Missouri Synod on the basis that full doctrinal unity is not necessary for establishing church fellowship.

5. How did historical developments prove the truth of our protests? The ALC joined with the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) and other synods in forming "The American Lutheran Church" (TALC), which came into being in April, 1960.

6. What other issues have disturbed the unity in the Synodical Conference?

a) In 1944 the Missouri Synod officially made a distinction between prayer fellowship and an occasional joint prayer, a distinction for which we can find no Scriptural support.

b) In 1944 the Missouri Synod passed this resolution on Scouting: "That the matter of Scouting should be left to the individual congre-

gation to decide and that under the circumstances Synod may consider her interest sufficiently protected." This was reaffirmed against our protest in 1950, and again in 1959 by the Missouri Synod.

c) Other unionistic tendencies have appeared: chaplaincy, communion agreement in the matter of the chaplaincy, lack of discipline of pastors and professors who teach falsely, cooperation with other church bodies not in fellowship with us.

7. What does our Lord expect of His children at the appearance of errors in doctrine and/or practice? He expects us to admonish those who commit such errors.
8. Has our Wisconsin Synod done this? Yes, for many years we have protested against these unionistic tendencies.
9. How have we admonished the Missouri Synod? In our official synodical resolutions, our church papers, through our union committee, and in other ways.

In 1953 we declared: "That the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod."

In 1955 we asserted that "a church body which creates divisions and offences by its official resolution, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18, ...that a specific charge of false doctrine is not a Biblical prerequisite for separation from a church body."

In 1955 the resolution was presented to the convention for final action in a recessed session the following year, 1956: "That whereas the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18 terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod."

In 1956, acting upon this resolution, our Synod decided not to terminate fellowship, but to continue a vigorously protesting fellowship.

In 1957 and 1959 this vigorously protesting fellowship has continued.

10. What is the function of our vigorously protesting fellowship? Our vigorously protesting fellowship has the important function of officially being on record against these offenses which still continue in the

Missouri Synod." (Prof. C. Lawrenz)

11. Do errors in doctrine and practice call for a termination of fellowship?

No. Walther, Thesis II: "The error of an individual member of the church even against a clear word of God does not involve immediately his actual forfeiture of church fellowship, nor of the association of brethren and colleagues."

Thesis III: "Even if an open error against the Word of God has infected a whole church body, this does not in itself make that church body a false church, a body with which an orthodox Christian or the orthodox church would abruptly have to sever relations."

12. Why did not our Synod terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1955?

- a) "Because this resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences."
b) "This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention."

It was felt that since the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod had not met in convention since our Synod in 1953 charged it with "persistent adherence to its unionistic practices" a final opportunity to express itself in a synod convention should be granted to the Missouri Synod.

Our Synod wanted to be absolutely sure whether the added testimony which had been brought on our part during a period of three years had made an impact on the Missouri Synod.

13. Why did we not terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1956?

The majority of the members of our Union Committee who attended these sessions, recommended to our Synod "not to close the door to further discussions at this time," because of Missouri Synod resolutions pertaining to membership in the Lutheran World Federation, to the Common Confession, and to intersynodical relations."

It was also noted, however, that in the practical issue which involved a unionistic trend there had not yet been a change evident in the Missouri Synod's stand. We were, however, heartened by the Missouri Synod's earnest plea to discuss these matters anew.

14. Why did we not terminate relations with the Missouri Synod in 1957 and 1959?

The Synodical Conference established a forum of the doctrinal union committees of the four constituent synods, and the Missouri Synod also expressed a willingness to come to grips with all the controversial issues without equivocation or evasion.

In 1957 and 1959 the actual discussion of the controversial issues

had not yet progressed far enough to permit conclusive judgment as to whether they would be successful. The presentations on Scripture, Revelation, Inspiration, Antichrist, to the extent that they had been discussed, seemed to hold out some promise of agreement.

During the past year the commission on doctrinal matters has thoroughly discussed Church Fellowship, which is the basis of our differences.

15. Why is this matter so difficult? Although Scripture speaks very clearly on the subject of church fellowship and of termination, yet Scripture gives us general principles only, also specific examples of individual cases. When we apply these to a given situation, many other things will have to be considered. (Examples: General principles of church and state, of divorce--these seem to be very clear and can at times be applied easily, but at other times they pose many practical problems.)

This is especially true when we deal with a large church body which may have different trends within it, and when we ourselves as a church body have such trends also.

16. How have our officials explained our failure to terminate fellowship?
"Although we have noted repeatedly and spoken against the unionistic tendencies which have threatened our fellowship, we have felt as a Synod that our complete debt of love has not been paid, and that we still have a piece of admonitory testimony to finish." (Prof. C. Lawrenz)

17. Why have we not terminated relations with the Missouri Synod in the face of the unionistic practices?

"We have not broken with the Missouri Synod, in spite of the offences caused by the divisive issues, such as unionistic practices, chaplaincy, scoutism, etc., because all these involved church fellowship, and we wanted the opportunity to present and discuss the Scriptural doctrine of Church Fellowship with them." (President O. J. Naumann)

18. Does our failure to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod involve disobedience to Scripture? No, in my opinion, and in the opinion of the majority of the members of Synod, we are obeying Scripture by our vigorously protesting fellowship, are speaking out very clearly against all error, but at the same time are obeying Scripture by still exercising our full debt of love.

Whether we have always used the best judgment has been questioned, and whether we have always spoken as clearly as we might have, is also doubtful. (Note: Report of Floor Committee 23, Proceedings, P. 211: "There can be an honest difference of opinion concerning the history

and import of the 1955 Saginaw resolutions.")

But whatever has been done, has been done in love for the Lord and His Word.

19. When would we be guilty of disobedience to Scripture?
a) If we refused to testify against error.
b) If we refused to pay the full debt of love to an erring brother.
c) If we refused to terminate fellowship when Scripture clearly calls for termination.
20. What action have other members of the Synodical Conference taken? The Evangelical Lutheran Synod has suspended relations with the Missouri Synod but still is a member of the Synodical Conference.
21. What is our Synod doing to resolve the differences between the Synods?
Our Commission on Doctrinal Matters has met with the other Union Committees of the Synodical Conference, has presented our theses on Church Fellowship, which are the basis of the matters at issue between us.
22. How important is the matter of church fellowship?
"If we cannot agree on the Scriptural doctrine of church fellowship, then there is little hope of getting together with the Missouri Synod." (Prof. C. Lawrenz)
23. How long will these meetings continue? The report of Floor Committee No. 2 was adopted at the 1959 convention: "That we instruct our Church Union Committee to continue its efforts in the Joint Union Committees, until agreement on doctrine and practice has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about." (P. 195)
Also: "That our people be kept informed as to the results of the meetings as soon as these results can be evaluated by our Church Union Committee."
24. What are the reports of these meetings?
a) In October, 1959, and in January, 1960, our Commission was disappointed at the failure of the Missouri Synod Committee to present a clear Scriptural thesis on Church Fellowship. This brought about the announcement by our committee "that we do not feel free to participate in further discussions until the Missouri Synod bring us the full presentation of the doctrine of Church Fellowship."
b) On May 17-19, 1960, the Missouri Synod Committee presented its fellowship document to the Joint Union Committees of the Synodical Conference. In this document the Missouri Synod Committee held "that ordinarily Christians unite to exercise, extend, and guard the fellowship which the grace of God has bestowed upon them, on the basis of a

confession which expresses a common, total submission of faith to the whole revealed counsel of God. It was, however, contended that we also have a responsibility and an obligation to express 'the growing edge' of fellowship in a limited way toward those who are outside our confessional-organizational grouping. Hence, in reaching out to those not yet in confessional fellowship with us there is the possibility of the beginning of the practice of fellowship." (Report to the Nine Districts, P. 32, 33, May, 1960)

c) "The Missouri Synod Committee maintained that when we have the practical opportunity to witness before those not in confessional fellowship with us we cannot simply in principle exclude joint prayer, but that the propriety or impropriety of joint prayer must in each case be decided on the basis of a conscientious evaluation of the situation and of the character, purpose, and effect of the joint prayer. It was also contended that the justifiability of public prayer at civic functions must be determined on the same basis." (Report to the Nine Districts, May, 1960, P. 33)

d) "According to the Scriptural principles of fellowship as we (Wisconsin Synod) hold them, such joint devotions with people with whom confessional fellowship has not been established would simply be ruled out as unionistic." (Report, P. 33)

e) Our Wisconsin Synod Commission on Doctrinal Matters therefore reported the following to the Joint Committees on Doctrinal Unity of the Synodical Conference:

"Our Commission on Doctrinal Matters must regretfully express the conviction that in our efforts to resolve our differences with respect to the Scriptural principles of church fellowship--differences which we hold to be divisive--an impasse has been reached. Pursuant to the instructions given to our Commission, we shall need to report this to the constituents of our Synod. We feel that this our conviction ought also be brought to the attention of the Synodical Conference Convention."

f) Since the Missouri Synod has not yet put its viewpoint down in the finished form of a printed document that can be examined and evaluated by everyone, but is in the process of doing so in keeping with its Synodical resolutions, we advise awaiting its appearance." (Report, P. 34)

25. What have we a right to expect from the Missouri Synod and all members of the Synodical Conference? That they voice their full agreement with the Scriptural presentation of the principles of Church Fellowship, and that the practice will correspond with these principles.

26. What degree of repentance in regard to these offences do we expect?

We dare not prescribe the fruits of repentance, their number or degree, but we do have the right to expect fruits of repentance.

27. What action is called for when it becomes clear that we are not agreed in regard to the Scriptural principles of church fellowship?

Then in obedience to the clear Word of God, and out of love to God, to our Synod, and to the erring brethren, we must terminate or suspend church fellowship relations regardless of the outward consequences.

28. What shall we do in the meanwhile?

- a) We shall continue our vigorously protesting fellowship,
- b) Continue to pray that the Lord will still heal the breach in our Synodical Conference,
- c) Be represented at the Conference of Theologians at Thiensville,
- d) Attend the Synodical Conference Convention this summer,
- e) Await the printed document of the Missouri Synod and compare it, with our church fellowship principles, *rather with Scripture ✓*
- f) In our Wisconsin Synod convention decide our course of action.

29. What effect has this controversy had upon our own Synod?

Various pastors, congregations, parts of congregations, teachers, and professors have resigned from our Synod.

30. What charges have they made against our Synod?

- a) That we are guilty of disobedience to Romans 16:17-18 and other passages in not terminating relations with the Missouri Synod;
- b) That we elevate Christian judgment above Scripture.

31. How have our officials explained this disagreement? That we are agreed in regard to the Scriptural principles of fellowship and of termination of fellowship. Throughout our history this agreement has been evident, but disagreement has appeared in the application of these principles to this case, namely in regard to the Missouri Synod.

32. What therefore seems to be the difference? It is a difference in regard to our judgment, when termination is called for, and when the debt of love through admonition must continue. "What Scripture teaches concerning the boundary between the patience which requires a continuance of fellowship and the command of Scripture which calls for an avoidance or termination of fellowship." (Committee No. 23)

33. What should these controversies call to mind? "Although we must often stress the limitations and restrictions which God has placed upon the exercise of church fellowship, we should daily thank God for the blessings of exercising church fellowship, for giving and receiving la-

bors of love to the weak, and worshipping, working, and confessing together with others to the glory of God's holy name." (Prof.C.Lawrenz)

VIII. THE ABOUNDING BLESSINGS OF OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

1. What privilege do we personally have as children of God?

a) By the grace of God I am a child of God, an heir of God and joint heir with Christ, and have the assurance of eternal life. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." (1 John 3:1)

b) By God's grace I can thank the Lord by my words, work, and worship. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness unto his marvellous light." (1 Pet. 2:9)

2. What privilege is ours in the common faith? Through my faith in Christ I am not only one with Him, but also am joined with all other Christians, those on earth, those who already are in heaven, those who still will be born, and with the holy angels of God, in one holy family.

3. What privilege is ours in the exercise of church fellowship?

- a) To rejoice in the means of grace which the Lord has granted us;
- b) To practice joint words, work, and worship with others one in faith with us;
- c) To show our full debt of love to those who are weak;
- d) To testify against errors held by those out of the fellowship.

4. What blessings do we enjoy as members of a Christian congregation?

"If I were not a member of a Christian congregation--

How long would I remain a Christian?

Could I get along without public worship?

Who would baptize my children?

Where would I receive Holy Communion?

Who would help me keep my children with Christ?

Would I have a Christian home?

Who would help me to grow in spiritual knowledge?

Would my children have a happy marriage?

How could I give support to Christ's cause?

Where would I find Christian fellowship?

How could I serve Christ well?

Would my children grow up as Christians?

Who would comfort me when sick or in trouble?

Could I expect a Christian burial?"

(You, Your Congregation, Your Synod, P. 9)

5. What blessings do we have in our Synod?

- a) To testify to the truth of God, and against all error;
- b) To establish and maintain home and foreign missions, and thus have a part in going and preaching the Gospel throughout the world;
- c) To establish and maintain schools to feed Christ's lambs, and to provide pastors and teachers (Christian day schools, Sunday schools, vacation Bible schools, confirmation class, released time classes, high schools, normal schools, colleges, seminary, and area Lutheran high schools);
- d) To provide for our servicemen and women and the young people attending college through our Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission;
- e) To do works of charity (home for the aged, hospitals, orphanages);
- f) To further Christian stewardship and evangelism as individuals, congregation, and Synod;
- g) To provide Lutheran periodicals, books, material for our schools; hymnals;
- h) To provide for the support of retired pastors, teachers, and professors;
- i) To give of the money which God has granted me to do the work of the Lord;
- j) To meet in conventions to discuss the work which the Lord has given us to do.

6. What blessings have we been granted in the Synodical Conference?

- a) We gratefully remember the testimony of the founders of the early Synods in encouraging to love for the purity of doctrine and practice,--Walther, Pieper, Hoenecke, and others;
- b) We cherish the fact that the Synodical Conference has been a bulwark against all error for so many years--and a confession to the full truth of Scripture;
- c) The work of missions among the negroes, here, in Africa (Nigeria, Ghana);
- d) Cooperation in other endeavors--hymnals, order of service;
- e) Privilege to support charity--Bethesda, Wheatridge, Deaf, etc.

7. What blessings should we remember even in the midst of controversy?

- a) That the true church, the invisible church, is one before God;
- b) That our Lord still permits us to work and preach, in spite of our many shortcomings;
- c) That we may exercise the full debt of love to those who are weak;
- d) That these controversies have reminded us of the need of studying God's Word;

e) That when and if termination is called for, we can rest assured that we are doing God's will, and still find comfort in the unity of the invisible church.

8. What can we do in the present crisis?

- a) Continue to pray to our Heavenly Father in Jesus' name, to keep us in His Word, to guide us aright, and if it be His will to heal the breach in our Synod and in the Synodical Conference;
- b) To provide more workers for the church, especially pastors and teachers;
- c) To support our Synod as never before; to thank God for the increased privilege of all of us of providing buildings, and the full support of our Synod program;
- d) To preserve the unity of our Synod by remaining in and rejoicing in the fellowship;
- e) To exercise patience in this crisis, remembering that we are in the last days, and that the Lord alone can solve our problems;
- f) To make the preaching of the Gospel our chief endeavor and not permit this controversy to hinder this great privilege.

9. What comfort has God given us in the Church Militant, as we manifest our common faith through our synodical affiliation?

Built on a Rock the Church doth stand,
Even when steeples are falling;
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land,
Bells still are chiming and calling,
Calling the young and old to rest,
But above all the soul distrust,
Longing for rest everlasting.

Surely in temples made with hands,
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;
High above earth His temple stands,
All earthly temples excelling.
Yet He whom heav'ns cannot contain
Chose to abide on earth with men,
Built in our bodies His temple.

Grant, then, O God, where'er men roam,
That, when the church-bells are ringing,
Many in saving faith may come
Where Christ His message is bringing:
"I know Mine own, Mine own know Me;
Ye, not the world, My face shall see,
My peace I leave with you." Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, No. 467:1.2.7)