

# Grace Abounds – A History of the Minnesota District

June 12, 2018

*Minnesota District Convention*

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This paper cannot cover every detail of the history of the Minnesota District. Every story about the formation of congregations and schools is well worth researching, telling, and passing along to the next generation. But the scope of this paper is to focus on some of the specific things our district has done well, and areas in which we need to improve. Which are the most important stories, the ones that affect everyone in our fellowship? This was the question the presenter asked of several veteran pastors and teachers in our district over the last few months. The five events almost unanimously recognized, are these:

1. The original formation of the Minnesota District from the Minnesota Synod
2. The first challenge: the English language question
3. Minnesota's role in the Protes'tant Controversy
4. The dissolution of the Synodical Conference (and the CLC withdrawals)
5. The doctrine of the roles of man and woman in God's kingdom

Certain other topics, almost all touching on Christian Education (the formation and closure of various schools, amalgamation, and the growing autism crisis) have been given some attention as time and space have permitted.

## **Our Minnesota District Presidents**

Our Minnesota District leadership has been a special blessing in the kingdom of God. A history like this one could not be considered complete without a record of God's representatives over us.

### Minnesota Synod Presidents (1860-1918)

Pastor John C.F. Heyer (1860-1868)  
Pastor Friedrich W. Hoffmann (1868-1869)  
Pastor John H. Sieker (1869-1876)  
Pastor Albert Kuhm, Sr. (1876-1883)  
Pastor Christian Joh. Albrecht (1883-1894)  
Pastor Carl F.W. Gausewitz (1894-1906)  
Pastor Andrew Schroedel (1906-1909)  
Pastor August F. Zich (1909-1910)  
Pastor E.A. Pankow (1910-1912)  
Pastor Justus H. Naumann (1912-1917)

### Minnesota District Presidents (1918-2018)

Pastor J. R. Baumann (1917-1920)  
Pastor Immanuel F. Albrecht (1920-1936)  
Pastor Adolf Ackermann (1936-1948)  
Pastor Oscar J. Naumann (1948-1953)  
Pastor George A. Barthels (1953-1954)  
Pastor Manfred J. Lenz (1954-1972)  
Pastor Gerhard Horn (1972-1978)  
Pastor Gerhard Birkholz (1978-1992)  
Pastor Larry Cross (1992-2008)  
Pastor Charles Degner (2008-2018)

## **1855-1918: A New Synod Becomes a New District**

Our Minnesota district was born, or at least was renamed, on June 13, 1918, fully-formed. When the combined former synods of Wisconsin, Michigan, Nebraska and Minnesota joined together in

1918, it was relatively easy for the leadership outside of Wisconsin simply to adopt new titles. Where there had previously been a Minnesota Synod with its own president in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, now there would be a Minnesota District with its own president within the Wisconsin Synod.

Where did we come from? Most of the original called workers—pastors and missionaries—who began the work of our church in Minnesota came from roots in New York and Pennsylvania. A small group organized by Missionary Wier met for the first Lutheran service in Minnesota on July 22, 1855.<sup>1</sup> That group organized Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul. Two years later, Father Heyer arrived. Pastor John C.F. Heyer, a missionary of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, had worked in the Midwest before, and also in India. His energy, often described in WELS history courses as indefatigable, quickly brought a group of six missionaries and pastors together to form the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Minnesota and Other States in 1860.<sup>2</sup> Since Father Heyer had been sent to Minnesota by the General Synod, it was not surprising that the new Minnesota group voted to join the General Synod in 1864, although Heyer himself had retired from ministry the year before.<sup>3</sup> By 1866, concerns over doctrine had caused our Minnesota group to leave the General Synod and to join the more conservative and “more confessional” General Council.

An important step in the movement of Minnesota toward the confessional Lutheran stand we treasure today was a question over fellowship with errorists. Minnesota’s concerns with the other member churches in the General Council

were first shunted aside on parliamentary grounds, then tabled to a subsequent convention because of lack of time, and finally answered in such a way as to permit the establishment of fellowship with errorists, if the erring was a matter of weakness and not of persistence. (*Golden Jubilee* p. 18).

Finding this answer “utterly unsatisfactory,” Minnesota withdrew from the General Council in 1871. Communication with the nearby Wisconsin Synod had been going on for about ten years. The Wisconsin Synod recognized “with great joy” the orthodoxy of the Minnesota Synod in its June 1871 convention. In July 1872, Minnesota became a charter member of the newly formed Synodical Conference with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Time does not permit a full report of the ups and downs between the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods during the decade that followed the formation of the Synodical Conference, but another

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<sup>1</sup> Missionary Wier “inclined to the theology of the Buffalo (New York) Synod” (*Minnesota District Golden Jubilee History*, hereafter *Golden Jubilee*, p. 17).

<sup>2</sup> The six pastors were Blumer, Brandt, Heyer, Mallison, Thompson and Wier. Two of the men withdrew from the group because they knew no German, and Wier left over differences in doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> The General Synod, actually an umbrella for a number of Lutheran synods across the northeastern and midwestern U.S., did not subscribe to all the articles of the Augsburg Confession, and according to the CPH *Christian Cyclopaedia*, did not subscribe to baptismal regeneration or the real presence in the Lord’s Supper. By the time the General Synod merged with other groups to become the ULCA (United Lutheran Church in America) in 1918, it reported about 400,000 baptized souls—about the same size as the WELS today.

doctrinal challenge, the Election Controversy, brought our two synods together. United by our understanding of the Holy Scriptures, the two groups met at a joint Minnesota-Wisconsin convention in LaCrosse in 1882. C.F.W. Walther's Biblical and confessional position on election was that election is caused only by the mercy of God and the merits of Christ, and not at all by "foreseen faith." This was maintained by the joint group over against the understanding of the Ohio and portions of the Norwegian Synod. Although three Minnesota pastors left the Synod, along with the Springfield congregation and part of the Stillwater congregation, all the rest of the Minnesota Synod's congregations and pastors were in agreement.

By 1892, Minnesota, Wisconsin and the newly formed Michigan Synods formed the Joint Synod (of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States). Improvements in communication and travel made a larger, unified body a possibility and also a potential benefit to everyone involved, and by 1916-1917 the desire to merge into a large single synod with geographical districts was on its way to being realized. Some legal issues needed to be resolved over the transfer of Northwestern College to the unified body, but these were overcome and on June 13, 1918, the Minnesota Synod became the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod with 87 member congregations, 57 additional congregations that had not yet joined the synod (but later did), and 31 preaching stations including 18 in the Dakotas.

#### **The Early District:**

1855	St. John's, Stillwater	1875	St. John's, Goodhue
1858	St. John's, Red Wing		St. John's, Minneola Twp.
1863	Salem, Woodbury	1876	St. John's, Sleepy Eye
1864	Friedens, New Prague	1879	Emmanuel, Fairfax
	Immanuel, Hutchinson		Immanuel, Tyler
1865	Salem, Loretto		Trinity, Buffalo
	St. Paul's, New Ulm	1881	Immanuel, Lake City
	Zion, Osceola	1882	Salem, Stillwater
1866	St. John's, Frontenac		St. John, Rural Boyd
1867	St. John's, Minneapolis		Trinity, Johnson
	St. Paul's, Jordan	1883	Trinity, Lake City
	St. Peter's, St. Peter	1884	St. Peter's, Balatan
1868	Petra, Sauk Rapids	1885	Immanuel, Gibbon
1869	St. John's, Glencoe		St. John's, Wood Lake
	St. John's, St. Claire	1886	Immanuel, Woodville
	Trinity, Nicollet		St. John's, Renville
1870	Grace, Goodhue		St. Paul's, Saint James
	Zion, Sanborn	1887	Christ, North St. Paul
1871	St. John's, Hastings		Zion, Olivia
1872	Immanuel, LaCrescent	1888	Christ, Marshall
	St. Matthew's, Renville (Flora)		St. John's, Lake City
	St. Paul's, Arlington		St. John's, Marzeppa (Chester Twp.)
	Zion, Hokah	1889	St. Paul's, Litchfield
1874	St. Paul's, Prescott		St. Peter's, Darwin

	Zion, Morton		Zion, Winthrop
1890	Immanuel, Buffalo	1900	St. John's, Hancock
	St. John's, Fairfax		St. John's, Vesta
	Trinity, Belle Plaine	1901	Zion, Almena
1891	St. John's, Lake Benton	1904	St. Matthew's, Danube
1892	Trinity, Janesville	1905	St. Paul's, Morris
	Zion, Russell	1906	Cross, Rockford
1894	St. John's, Centuria	1907	St. John's, Darfur
1895	St. John's, Caledonia	1909	St. Paul's, Montrose
	Zion, Hutchinson	1910	St. John's, Janesville
1896	Christ, Zumbrota	1911	St. Peter's, Monticello
	Grace, Nelson	1912	Mt. Olive, Delano
	Peace, Echo		St. Peter's, Goodhue
1898	St. John's, Redwood Falls	1913	Grace, Osceola
1899	Zion, New Ulm (Brighton Twp.)	1917	St. John's, Marzeppa

### The Twenties and Thirties

The first difference we would notice were we to find ourselves in attendance at the first Minnesota District Convention would undoubtedly be the German language. There had been a desire to do mission work in Minnesota in English from the very beginning. When Father Heyer was sent to St. Paul by the Pennsylvania Lutherans, the express purpose was to found an English congregation there. Professor E.C. Fredrich summed up the results: "By the nature of the situation that aspect of the work soon faded into the background more and more, was soon forgotten, and remained so for half a century."<sup>4</sup> By the time the Minnesota Synod had become the Minnesota District there was an urgent need for English in the pulpit, in the classroom, and by the bedside. The District's *Proceedings* themselves were translated into English beginning in 1924.<sup>5</sup> This happened by necessity and without fanfare, and although bi-lingual preaching today is done in mission settings by some of our most gifted men, it had to be done from the 1920s through the 1940s by nearly every pastor in our district as congregations made the change from a German-speaking church body to an English-speaking church body where German would fade as the language of public worship, finally disappearing in the 1960s, when the last regular German services were held.<sup>6</sup> Professor Fredrich wrote:

This put a heavy burden on the pastors and teachers of that time. Lay people could hear and read and speak the word in the language of their choice; (but) the pastor and teacher had to be adept in both languages. By and large, they met the challenge successfully. To be sure, there were difficulties within certain congregations about time schedules and

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<sup>4</sup> Fredrich, Proc. Edward C., *The Minnesota District's First Fifty Years*, July 29, 1968, p. 14. Hereafter this paper will be cited as *Fredrich* with page numbers from the copy online at the WLS Essay File.

<sup>5</sup> Minnesota District Proceedings, 1924 cover page.

<sup>6</sup> Private interview with Mr. H.W. of New Ulm (Dec. 23, 2017), who was called as head organist at St. Paul's but never played for a German service because they were discontinued between the day he was called and the day he began his service.

number of services. In some instances, a pastor could not carry out bilingual duties; the 1928 Proceedings lists a resignation “due to the language question.” What could have been a very troubled era for our church body, ran fairly smoothly in this respect.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible translation of the Minnesota Synod from the beginning had been Martin Luther’s German, and continued to be until the transition to English between the wars. Eventually, nearly every church in the district adopted the King James Version which had served the Anglican Church in England and the Episcopal Church in America since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. This timeline of Bible translation use at St. Paul’s in New Ulm (just about the last German holdout) was as follows:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Theology</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1860-1968	Luther’s German	Lutheran	108 years
1968-1982	King James Version	Anglican	14 years
1982-present	NIV (1978, 1984, 2011) <sup>8</sup>	ecumenical	36 years

A sampling of twenty other district churches presents a history which is probably more representative of the District as a whole:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Theology</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1860-1950	Luther’s German	Lutheran	90 years
1950-1982	King James Version <sup>9</sup>	Anglican	32 years
1982-present	NIV (1978, 1984, 2011) <sup>10</sup>	ecumenical	36 years

The transition from German to English, using the King James Version, was necessary for the word of God to be understood in this country by our people. It was a necessary choice and, at the time, a good one. The recent debate about the preference for the NIV, the ESV (English Standard Version),<sup>11</sup> CSB (Christian Standard Bible) and whether or not to publish the EHV (Evangelical Heritage Version) demonstrates, as did the adoption of the NIV in the 1970s, that English alone is not the only question. There are valid points on every side of this discussion. Our sister Synod, the

<sup>7</sup> Fredrich, Prof. E.C., *The Minnesota District’s First Fifty Years*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the WELS, the publishing of Luther’s Small Catechism using the NIV for Scripture references by NPH marked the switch from the KJV to the NIV, although some churches had been using the NIV as early as 1973 when the New Testament and a sample edition of Isaiah were published.

<sup>9</sup> The WELS Statistical Report for 1938-1939, Minnesota reported that 95% of its work in mission settings was being done in English (the second highest percentage after the Pacific Northwest, where no mission work was done in German at all). 1924 was the last year the statistical report for the Synod was printed only in German. Important essays such as E.C. Reim’s “Church Fellowship and Its Implications” (1934) were printed in English. By the 1950s, most WELS news was published in English. The trend toward English from German was well on its way in 1950 and the King James Version was fast becoming standard. The presenter’s grandmother, born before the Great War, did not speak any German and never worshiped in German at her Wisconsin Synod church. Her oldest and most treasured possession was her confirmation Bible, a well-worn and much-underlined King James Version still receiving everyday use by her now 80-year old son.

<sup>10</sup> The essayist’s childhood congregation in Arlington, Wisconsin, transitioned into the NIV New Testament and Psalms edition of 1973 in the year it was published, five years before the completed Old Testament publication at Easter time in 1978.

<sup>11</sup> The ESV is the official translation used by the ELS and the LCMS.

ELS, has chosen to adopt the ESV.<sup>12</sup> The WELS in convention has chosen not to adopt any one translation as our official translation, but to use an eclectic approach in publishing (the newest edition of the Catechism is available in both the NIV and ESV). Individual congregations are free to choose for themselves which translation they will prefer in worship and Bible study. For the Synod and for our District, the result of this stance has been a continuing argument, hotter in some places than in others, over what is to be preferred, and even over the way a new translation is presented for evaluation. Fortunately, the peace of our fellowship has not yet been disrupted by this question, and we pray that the Holy Spirit would guide us to a well-balanced position that permits both edifying worship and useful scholarship in the decades to come. The authors of the New Testament sometimes translated Old Testament quotations directly into Greek, and at other times, they used the existing Greek translation known as the Septuagint. God blessed both choices. Perhaps this model is something we should remember and emulate among ourselves.

### **The Protes'tants**

Across the River in Wisconsin, trouble began to simmer and then came to a boil in an era when most of America was caught up in anti-establishmentarianism.<sup>13</sup> Two dozen students from the Watertown campus were caught stealing from local businesses in 1924 and the subject of their punishment (in some cases, expulsion) by the faculty was argued, contradicted and even overturned by the school board. In 1926, two women teachers at Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, accused their pastor of being a “false prophet” for acting with patience and tact with certain individuals in the congregation. A meeting in Beaver Dam suspended the two teachers, but seventeen members of the Western Wisconsin District protested in writing, and the appellation “protest’tants” was born. Later that year, a young pastor named William Beitz read a conference paper which veered the opposite direction of the subject assigned (Justification by Faith as preached in Galatians) and condemned the Wisconsin synod for its deadness in sanctified living.<sup>14</sup> Reaction and counter-reaction exploded like cannon fire, with heavily weighted German names like *Gutachten*, *Ertrag*, *Beleuchtung*, und *Antwort*. Among these were papers and judgments from the Wauwatosa seminary faculty. Then in 1930, the Minnesota District attempted to hold out an olive branch, critical of the Western Wisconsin District’s handling of the cases, especially the Beitz paper. “Peace can only be restored” said a report from Minnesota, “if the misunderstandings involved in the Beitz paper and the (Seminary’s) *Gutachten* are clarified.”<sup>15</sup>

A response from Beitz himself in 1932 suggested that Minnesota should be more diligent in its homework on the issue. It became painfully clear that the Protes’tants simply did not want to be

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps, at least in part, because of the NIV-11’s handling of Luke 10:42, the motto of Bethany Lutheran College.

<sup>13</sup> “The decade provided a mood and a mindset. It was an era of rivalry on the national and world scene between the revolutionary and the reactionary. It proved to be that also on the synodical scene. Board and officials at district and synodical levels were challenged by the Protes’tants.” Fredrich, E.C., *The Protest’ant Controversy*, May 1984 p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> As one seminary essayist said, “Upon reading the paper several times, one gets the impression that Beitz sat down and wrote his paper without carefully planning what he would say and how he would say it, or that he simply wanted to get something off his chest.” C.F.D., *The Parting of the Ways* p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota District Proceedings, 1930, 32-35.

in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod anymore. In the subsequent loss of pastors and congregations to the Protestants in the years that followed, Minnesota lost fewer than other districts, but everyone in the Wisconsin Synod was affected and hurt by the break in fellowship and the break in many other ties, including those of family.

Ironically, in a pattern similar to that of another splinter group, the Protestants later seemed to become guilty of precisely the thing for which they originally condemned the Wisconsin Synod. Beitz spoke of a dead faith in the jackdaw meanderings of his paper. “We can’t preach any more of Christ than is in us.” he had written. “We can preach about Christ, but absolutely no more Christ...and thus no life is imparted because no Christ is imparted. Only life can beget life. A corpse cannot beget life, no matter how fair it is dressed up. The contention that God works through the Word irrespective and independent of the person uttering it is only a half truth. It is only trying to justify our weakness of faith.”<sup>16</sup> The Protestants today have only a handful of pastors—about six—and under a thousand members. The size of the denomination is no indication of their level of sanctification (cp. Philippians 4:15-16). Yet their average annual giving, the percentage of children enrolled in Sunday School, and total contributions (all indications of sanctified living) are the poorest per congregation and per person of any Lutheran church body today.

#### **New to the District 1919-1939:**

<p>1921 Courtland, Courtland Grace, St. Paul Park Mt. Olive, St. Paul Trinity, Osceola</p>	<p>1923 Pilgrim, Minneapolis 1924 Grace, Clear Lake 1925 Mt. Olive, Graceville 1939 Our Redeemer, Wabasha</p>
<p>1922 St. Paul’s, North Mankato</p>	

### **The Forties, Fifties, and Sixties: Dissolution of the Synodical Conference**

#### Part 1: A Local Picture (The Mankato War)

With every passing decade, the differences between the former members of the Synodical Conference (LCMS, WELS, ELS and Slovak Synod) do not become easier to explain to our people. The breakup is approaching its sixtieth anniversary. That means that most of our members were born during or after that time. They have grown up in a world where the Missouri Synod is not often described as our former sister synod anymore, but a church completely outside our association, confessionally somewhere to the right of the ELCA and the Methodists but still far away from the WELS and our sister church bodies in the USA and around the world. The events here in Minnesota of the late forties and early fifties may help to illustrate one way these differences surfaced and also show how WELS and ELS ties—always cordial before this time—became a bond of confident brotherhood and deep trust.

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<sup>16</sup> Beitz, William F., *God’s Meaning to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith* (Printed in Faith-Life, Vol. 33, No. 5, May, 1960). Paragraph 35.

The story of “The Mankato War” is thoroughly told in the WELS Historical Journal, Volume 29, Number 2 (2011).<sup>17</sup> It is briefly summarized here. When in 1949 four men asked for release from Immanuel Lutheran (WELS) in Mankato, Pastor Fischer and Minnesota District President Oscar Naumann were suspicious of their motives. The four men wanted to begin “a Missouri Mission” in Mankato to better serve the LCMS students attending Bethany Lutheran College, but it was clear from the history of the individuals concerned that they wanted to begin an “opposition church” which would allow a Boy Scout troop and support the Missouri position on the military chaplaincy.<sup>18</sup>

After meeting with the LCMS Mission Board President for (their) Minnesota District and the LCMS District President, the WELS representatives reluctantly agreed to release the four men. The mission called Pastor Alvin Fehner of Trinity First Lutheran in Minneapolis. Fehner had a reputation of being liberal regarding fellowship, and he had invited Dr. Malmin of the ELC (Evangelical Lutheran Church) as a guest preacher several times. (Note: The ELC, one of the parent churches of the ELCA, was the largely Norwegian Lutheran group from which the ELS had removed itself for doctrinal reasons early in the Twentieth Century).<sup>19</sup>

An unchristian spirit was shown in December of 1950—including booing, hissing, shaking of fists and physical threats reminiscent of Acts 7—when Pastor Fischer (of Immanuel) conducted a service without knowing about the death that very morning of Adolph Ackermann, the church’s senior pastor and former president of the District. Pastor Fischer did not mention the death in his announcements or prayers, and many sympathizers to the Missouri position used the event to justify leaving the congregation without any transfer of membership. A “second front” of this war opened up when it was revealed that the Missouri Synod was not treating Bethany (or, as it turned out, any of the WELS prep schools) as being in their fellowship, but secretly appointed nearby pastors, including Pastor Fehner in Mankato, as chaplains to the LCMS students. Without explaining why, Fehner wrote obstinate letters demanding that “all Missouri Synod students (of Bethany Lutheran College) be directed to Our Savior’s for his ministrations” (*Mankato War* p. 6). The problem grew steadily worse. Fehner accepted more and more members without release from their congregations and even conducted funerals of those who had not been released from their

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<sup>17</sup> By Paul S. Meitner. The article is 17 pages in length, and the presenter apologizes for condensing it so tightly into a handful of paragraphs. It is available online and is well worth the read, particularly to a small group Bible Class studying Romans 16:17, both for the application of the Biblical principal and for the many references to that passage in the proceedings. “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.” (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> Two of the four men had resigned as Sunday School teachers over the Boy Scout issue. For those unfamiliar with this issue, Boy Scouts of America takes an ecumenical stand as to the First Commandment. Joint prayer is encouraged and even insisted on in the official charter (whether every troop complies is not documented) and there is a definite stand opposing anyone who insists that any one God (for example, the Triune God) has any precedence over any other god or with anyone who rejects Christ. This places boys involved in a position of praying together with unbelievers, a direct violation of 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (ESV).

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Preus’ evaluation of Malmin pulled no punches: “There is no one in the ELC who is so completely alien in spirit to the stand of the Synodical Conference as Malmin” (public comment from Preus to Pastor Fehner).

churches. Appeals were made to the Missouri Synod's District President, but meeting after meeting was postponed. A notice appeared in the *Northwestern Lutheran* in 1952 that "Our Savior's Lutheran Church of Mankato...has severed the bonds of fraternal relations with us...and our fellowship with that congregation must be regarded as suspended." Almost immediately, an announcement appeared in *The Mankato Free Press* that a Boy Scout Troop would be meeting at Our Savior's. The Missouri Synod Mankato group had rejected every attempt to discuss the issues according to Scripture. They had openly lied about their intentions and then denied making any promises—which were remembered by everyone on both sides—that they would not do the very things they did in the end. At one later attempt at reconciliation (July 22, 1953), Pastor Fehner actually "admitted that all the charges that were leveled against him and Our Savior's were true. (He) further admitted that their action was contrary to numerous Bible passages" (*Mankato War* p. 9).<sup>20</sup>

This incident opened the eyes of many in the WELS and ELS of what was happening in the LCMS, and it also more firmly cemented the bond between the WELS and the ELS, a bond that continues to the present day. This local picture of the troubles with Missouri was just one tree, but it would be good to step back to take a look at the whole forest.

## Part 2: The Broader Picture

As the Second World War loomed in Europe, a question was asked in both the WELS and LCMS: "What is our synod's stand on the military chaplaincy?" The answers from Wisconsin and Missouri were different,<sup>21</sup> and similar differences over whether or not Lutheran boys could belong to the Boy Scouts showed that by this time, the late 1930s, the two synods were no longer walking in lock step in every matter. The Missouri synod's overtures to the ALC (American Lutheran Church) were equally troubling, since their evident agreement was based on separate statements and not on a single, joint statement of faith covering doctrinal differences noted in the past. An *ad hoc* WELS committee reported in 1939 that such a statement "must be made in clear and unequivocal terms which do not require laborious additional explanations."<sup>22</sup> Since it was clear that the Missouri Synod was practicing *de facto* fellowship with the ALC, it put the other members of the Synodical Conference in a strained position at best.

How serious were the differences between Missouri and the ALC? In 1926, Michael Reu of the Iowa Synod opposed the use of the word *inerrant* when a document was being drafted on the doctrinal position of the then-forming ALC. "Scripture itself does not say that it is inerrant," Reu said, "when it talks about matters not directly related to faith and life."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Reported by George Bartels to the Church Council of Immanuel Lutheran Church in a letter in September 1953.

<sup>21</sup> WELS President Brenner said, "We should keep the separation of church and state clean in our own minds and in the minds of others." (Letter to W, Weisberger, February 15, 1935). LCMS President Behnken assigned the matter to a committee which felt that military chaplains "represent us only as long as they conform to the principles and practices of our Synod as members in good standing," which was as unsatisfactory to the WELS then as it still sounds now.

<sup>22</sup> WELS Proceedings, 1939 p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Braun, Mark, *A Tale of Two Synods* (Milwaukee: NPH, 2003) p. 290.

During the crisis over fellowship with Missouri in the 1940s and 1950s, the WELS was concerned that Missouri was acting as if it was in fellowship with the ALC—something that the WELS couldn't fathom. We focused on things like Boy Scouts and the chaplaincy, unaware that Missouri was behaving as if it was in fellowship with ALC because so many in Missouri really *were* in fellowship with the ALC. Those pastors and professors participating in such a fellowship believed exactly as the ALC did, rejecting inerrancy and no longer holding to a Scriptural understanding of the length of the creation days, miracles, Jonah, Job, the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement through Christ, or the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Wisconsin Synod feared it was dealing with Pharisees not realizing that it was actually dealing with Sadducees.<sup>24</sup>

The depth of Missouri's fall was not truly discovered until after the Concordia, St. Louis, seminary walkout in 1974. There was an overwhelming unbelief within Missouri's seminary faculty, which rejected Biblical inerrancy and many, many other doctrines. P.E. Kretzmann said:

How would you feel, as an instructor in our Concordia Seminary, if you have to be on the defensive on the doctrine of the Antichrist, on the length of a creation day, on evolutionism, on the sanctioning of modern dance, and other doctrinal and practical questions, when students blandly inform you that other men on the faculty hold more advanced views? I formerly kept a list of the questions on which opinions in our faculty differ widely from the straightforward teaching of a generation ago, but the subject was too painful.<sup>25</sup>

All of the later discussion within the WELS, the compassionate desire to “go the extra mile” with Missouri despite the departure of the men who created the Church of the Lutheran Confession, must be taken in view of the facts known to the WELS at the time. Even President John Brenner (remembered by many to have been more “hard line” than his successor Oscar Naumann) said that he was “not ready to refuse to make every effort to explain our position to the Missourians.”<sup>26</sup> The later shock of the basic doctrinal troubles within Missouri were not known as facts—even if some or much of it was suspected—until the staged Seminex walkout which ultimately led to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988.

By 1969, less than a decade after the WELS broke fellowship ties with Missouri, only 63% of Missouri's pastors under the age of 35 accepted the inerrancy of the Bible, and only 72% accepted

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<sup>24</sup> The Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day were two sects within Judaism with very different views about the Bible, angels, miracles, heaven, and other things. While the Pharisees accepted the inspired Old Testament, angels, demons, heaven, the resurrection or the dead, etc., they were very high-handed about sanctified living, often ignoring the will of God in favor of their own idea of morality (see, for example, Matthew 15:1-9). The LCMS seemed to be doing something like this with regard to Scouting and the chaplaincy, trying to accomplish social goals while ignoring the will of God. But in fact, since many in Missouri (especially teaching in the seminary in St. Louis) were beginning to reject inerrancy, the inspiration of the Bible, miracles, and even the resurrection of the dead, they actually resembled the Sadducees of Jesus' day, who rejected many of the same things.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from John Brenner to Rev. G.W. Fischer, February 12 1954.

the “historic Christian interpretation” that the Bible is to be understood literally (“or nearly literally”).<sup>27</sup>

### **A chronology of the Synodical Conference Breakup:<sup>28</sup>**

- 1951 ▪ The Wisconsin Synod creates an alternative to Boy Scouts of America when the Lutheran Pioneers is established at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Burlington, Wisconsin.
- 1952 ▪ Representatives from the WELS, ELS, LCMS and Slovak Synod meet in St. Paul, Minnesota to discuss objections to Missouri’s “Common Confession” with the ALC.
- 1953 ▪ The LCMS rules that it believes there is a distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship. It states that joint prayer at Intersynodical meetings is not considered to be a statement of fellowship, provided that such prayer does not imply a denial of the truth or support any error.<sup>29</sup>
- October* ▪ The WELS warns Missouri that due to its unionistic practices with the ALC, a break in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod is imminent. The Wisconsin Synod also calls for an in-depth study of this and other issues within its own congregations, so that all members of the WELS will be informed of the doctrines involved, the history and the context of the situation.<sup>30</sup>
- 1954 ▪ The ELS recommends that the Synodical Conference reject the “Common Confession” between Missouri and the ALC.
- 1955 ▪ The Wisconsin Synod in convention votes 94-47 to postpone action on its resolve to terminate fellowship with the LCMS. Forty delegates record their dissent with this vote.
- The ELS breaks its fellowship ties with the Missouri Synod.
- 1956 ▪ The Missouri Synod terminates its work with the National Lutheran Council, a cooperative agency of most of the Lutheran church bodies in America (since 1918) that were not part of the Synodical Conference. The ALC was not happy about this action, but the WELS took it to be a hopeful sign of a turn back for Missouri.
- 1957 ▪ The Wisconsin Synod in convention votes to remain in fellowship with Missouri, but to remain only “in vigorous protest” against the course the Missouri Synod was taking.

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<sup>27</sup> Hadden, Jeffery K. *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1969) 51, 251.

<sup>28</sup> This section is taken from the presenter’s WLS history paper (1999) *A Chronology of Confessional Lutheranism: 1500-1999*, pages 103-107.

<sup>29</sup> Koelpin, Arnold J. “Historical Profile: 1950-1961,” published in WELS *Historical Journal* Volume 8, no. 2 (fall 1990) p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Koelpin, “Historical Profile 1950-1961” p. 23.

- WLS President Reim resigns. His conviction is that “the continuing fellowship of the Wisconsin Synod with the erring Missouri Synod cannot continue.”<sup>31</sup> Carl Lawrenz accepts the call to become president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.
- 1959 ▪ The Wisconsin Synod in convention (Saginaw) votes to continue vigorously protesting Missouri’s course, but expresses that it is encouraged by Missouri’s willingness to face all of the issues.<sup>32</sup>
- 1960 ▪ The (new) American Lutheran Church (ALC) is formed in a merger of the UELC, the Buffalo Synod, the Iowa Synod, the Ohio Synod, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (a Norwegian synod).
- Frustrated with the WELS’ failure to break fellowship with Missouri, seventy WELS pastors and congregations form the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). The CLC establishes its own worker training program complete with a seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.<sup>33</sup>
- 1961 ▪ In convention, the Wisconsin Synod declares that it is no longer in fellowship with the Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17-18. The WELS also presents the “unit concept” of fellowship.

### **Continuing Differences**

For the sake of thoroughness, it would be good to mention the main differences which remain between the WELS and the LCMS. They are: (1) The Biblical understanding of fellowship. Our position is that “Church fellowship should be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith.”<sup>34</sup> The LCMS distinguishes between altar (communion) and pulpit fellowship (where complete doctrinal agreement is required) and prayer fellowship, which they maintain does not require full fellowship. (2) The doctrine of the ministry. The LCMS holds that the pastoral office is the only divinely established office in the church. The WELS denies this and maintains that other forms of public ministry are also established by God. (3) The role of men and women in the church. Although both the WELS and LCMS oppose the ordination of woman on Scriptural grounds, the LCMS does not forbid women suffrage (the right to vote) in the church.

### **New to the District 1940-1969:**

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<sup>31</sup> Fredrich, Edward, The Parting of Professor J.P. Koehler and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. WELS Historical Journal Fall 1983, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> This was also the convention that officially changed the synod’s name to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

<sup>33</sup> Brug, WELS and Other Lutherans p. 90-91.

<sup>34</sup> “Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” 1970, pp. 51-52.

1941	Grace, Oronoco		Grace, Hutchinson
1942	First, La Crescent	1954	Divinity, Saint Paul
	St. Mark's, Mankato		St. Paul's, Cannon Falls
1943	Redeemer, Saint Croix Falls	1956	Prince of Peace, Mason City (IA)
1944	Calvary, Glenwood	1959	Brooklyn, Brooklyn Park
	Immanuel, Willmar		Zion, Morgan
1945	Grace, Le Sueur	1963	Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids
	Grace, Oskaloosa (IA)	1964	Beautiful Savior, Austin
1946	Cross, Charles City (IA)		Good Shepherd, Burnsville
	Lincoln Heights, Des Moines (IA)	1966	Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth
1947	St. Andrew's, Saint Paul Park	1967	Martin Luther, Saint Louis (MO)
1948	St. John's, New Ulm	1968	Faith, Prior Lake
1951	Holy Trinity, New Hope		Petra, Sauk Rapids
1952	Bloomington, Bloomington		St. Paul's, Alexandria
	Timothy, Saint Louis Park	1969	Christ, Baxter (Brainerd)
1953	Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids (IA)		Faith, Excelsior

### 1970 - 1995: The Roles of Men and Women

Following the breakup of the Synodical Conference, the districts of the WELS set about the task of discovering what it means to be a small church body (in fellowship with an even smaller one) but without the support, encouragement, or safety-net quality we had been used to with our “big brother” in Missouri. Big Brother had proven to be flawed, fallible, and foundering (there was a well-publicized walkout of students and faculty from Concordia, St. Louis, in 1974 which ultimately led to the formation of the ELCA), and it was time for the WELS to fully mature as a synod on our own. Mission work and building programs commenced (see comments below on the construction of Lutheran Elementary Schools during the 1970s).

Then in 1977 a paragraph appeared in the WELS Book of Reports and Memorials (BORAM) in the report from the Committee on Higher Education:

Also under study is the role of women as instructors at our synodical schools. Several special meetings of the commission have been held for this study. We are now awaiting the preparation of a position statement on the role of women with emphasis upon the scriptural principles involved.”<sup>35</sup>

Pastor Iver Johnson of Saint James (West St. Paul) had a strongly critical reaction to the “statement” that was published in 1978, called “The Role of Men and Women According to Holy Scriptures,” written primarily by Professor Carl Lawrenz (BORAM 1979, 5-16).<sup>36</sup> Johnson

<sup>35</sup> BORAM 1977, 3. The presenter is indebted to an excellent WLS Church History Paper on this topic by David Wietzke, “When Here Our Pathways Part: An Account of the Dissolution of Fellowship Between Saint James Lutheran Church of West St. Paul, MN and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.” 22 April 2002. (Hereafter “Wietzke”).

<sup>36</sup> Pastor Johnson had served as a high school principal and as choir director of Bethany Lutheran High School in Mankato. He was trained for ministry at both Concordia (St. Louis) and Bethany Lutheran Seminary.

protested the adoption of this position paper, which he said “does not clearly represent what the Bible says, that it derives certain doctrines which are not justified, and that it does not fairly state the position of everyone in the Wisconsin Synod.”<sup>37</sup>

The 1980 Minnesota District convention did not endorse the theses. Johnson himself served on the floor committee that recommended the non-endorsement. The district and the synod began to wrestle publicly with the issue throughout the 1980s. Issues of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* presented exegetical briefs on the key passages that discuss gender roles, especially Genesis 2:18-24; 1 Corinthians 11:1-18 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15. In 1982, the district presidents appointed a committee of ten pastors, one from each district of the synod, to produce a study of the issue. That summer the committee (chaired by Pastor Wayne Mueller) produced the essay “Man and Woman in God’s World.” NPH published this essay in 1985, and “Man and Woman in God’s World: An Expanded Study” was published in 1987. Some of its key statements:

- The first man and first woman whom God created represent in their lives what the Lord wants in the lives of all people. What applies specifically to that man and that woman we know as Adam and Eve applies to all men and women generally (p. 9).
- Paul’s exhortation<sup>38</sup> is not rooted in a changing custom of the day. It is based on the headship principal which God established at the time of creation and which therefore applies to all times (p. 17).
- The second area in which the New Testament applies the principle of the headship of the man is the church... We do not assume that the description of the Gospel now sets aside the principles of the law. Restored men and women use the precepts of the law to direct them (p. 16-17).
- In 1 Timothy 2 Paul again emphasizes the headship of the man as he discusses the public ministry of the church... A woman who has “authority over a man” violates the principle of the headship of man (p. 17).
- The Bible, however, does not make direct application of the headship principle in society... The principle is clear and unchanging, but for the application of the principle in a society Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment (p. 20-21).

The 1989 synod convention adopted “Man and Woman in God’s World” as a correct exposition of the Scriptural teachings regarding gender roles. Although the adoption was urged by a resolution from Minnesota’s own Mankato conference, a number of pastors from the district were troubled by the action. A resolution to rescind the adoption was signed by Pastor Stadler of Saint James

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<sup>37</sup> Johnson, “Some Views on the Role of Men and Women in the World and Church,” p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:12, NIV-1984, the translation in use at the time).

(West St. Paul) and district vice-president David Ponath. Although Pastor Ponath and others were concerned more about the process by which the study had been adopted, Pastor Stadler (Iver Johnson's associate) maintained that the exegesis underlying "Man and Woman in God's World" was unclear.<sup>39</sup>

A new committee of five men was selected to compose a brief doctrinal statement.<sup>40</sup> The document they produced was "Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles" (or Scriptural Principles), published in *Northwestern Lutheran* in March 1991. "Scriptural Principles" consisted of 29 theses and 16 antitheses summarizing earlier studies. Readers were invited to respond, and a synod-wide study of the roles of men and women led to six memorials to the 1991 synod convention. The convention adopted "Scriptural Principles" but asked for Bible study materials for congregations. This request was fulfilled by John F. Brug's "Bible Study on Man and Woman in God's World" (1992).

The Saint James Pastors (Johnson, Stadler, and newly called Michael Albrecht) showed their disagreement with the WELS position by writing a statement of their own, "Heirs Together of the Gracious Gift of Life" (or "Heirs Together"). In it, they stated that "the New Testament does not prohibit women from participating in the decision making process of the church... it is not automatically sinful for women to express their opinions or to cast votes in a gathering in which men are also participating" (Thesis 26), and "We do not believe that 1 Corinthians 11:3<sup>41</sup> prescribes a general headship of men over women. This is one of the passages where we believe the scriptural context indicates the words *aner* and *gune* are to be translated 'husband and wife.'" (Ant. 3). While the Synod's "Scriptural Principles" stated clearly: "We reject the opinion that the mutual submission encouraged by Scripture for all believers (Eph. 5:21;<sup>42</sup> Mt. 20:25-28<sup>43</sup>) negates the exercise of male headship" (Antith. 10), the Saint James document "Heirs Together" countered: "The basic meaning of the Greek verb *hypotassomai*, which is usually translated 'submit' is 'to arrange oneself under' another person. Such submissiveness is urged upon all Christians, not just wives (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Corinthians 16:16)" (Thesis 16). There were other examples. The Saint James pastors simply believed that the word "head" is used only as a metaphor for husband in the New Testament and does not stress the exercise of authority (Thesis 9). It was clear that the Saint James staff was in disagreement with the synod. Meetings with Minnesota District president Birkholz and synodical officials took place not only with the Saint James pastors, but also with their congregation, which sided with pastors Johnson, Stadler, and Albrecht.

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<sup>39</sup> Weitzke p. 9, from an interview with Pastor Stadler.

<sup>40</sup> Minnesota District Proceedings (1990), 91-92.

<sup>41</sup> "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and head of Christ is God" (NIV 1984).

<sup>42</sup> "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (NIV 1984).

<sup>43</sup> "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" (NIV 1984).

The turning point was the 1992 Minnesota District Convention. A memorial from the Saint James pastors was defeated, and the convention elections completely changed the leadership of the district. Pastor Larry Cross of Rochester was elected as the new president. Cross had been an outspoken proponent for accepting the synodical statements on the roles of men and women. Pastor Ron Ulhorn of St. Paul's, New Ulm, was elected first vice president, and Pastor Charles Degner of St. Peter was elected second vice president (Pastor J.D. Liggett of North Mankato was re-elected as secretary).

The new presidium traveled to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to study the relevant passages together and followed with a series of face-to-face meetings with the three Saint James pastors.

The group thoroughly examined and discussed each verse of the debated passages. Yet the disagreements were not resolved. One presidium official admits that he never felt that the meetings were making progress in bringing the two groups together. As time went on the groups slowly became less optimistic of reaching agreement.<sup>44</sup>

In 1993 the Saint James pastors submitted a memorial to the synod convention which charged both "Scriptural Principles" and the Wisconsin Synod of doctrinal error, accusing the WELS of burdening consciences "by creating a new category of relationships between men and women" (1993 BORAM 421-423). In response, the WELS resolved to "communicate to Saint James Lutheran Church, through the Minnesota District Praesidium, clearly identifying these inaccurate and unbiblical statements" (WELS Convention proceedings [1993] p. 55). The studies took place, and many, many hours were spent in pursuit of coming to an agreement in doctrine. In November, the district presidium requested a formal written response to doctrinal questions and asked the Saint James pastors to withdraw "Heirs Together." In April of 1994, each of the three Saint James pastors submitted letters agreeing to withdraw "Heirs Together" but still objecting to the synod's stance on the roles of men and women expressed in "Scriptural Principles."

Additional meetings took place, but by February 1995 the district officers stated firmly, "We do not believe that these matters can be treated as open questions" (Letter from the Minnesota District Presidium to Pastor Michael Albrecht, 20 February 1995). Three specific areas of disagreement were specified:

- A. In our studies of 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 you say that the verses speak primarily about husband and wife. You disagree with the interpretation of "Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles" when it applies these passages to men and women beyond the husband and wife relationship.
- B. You believe that the headship of man and the submission of woman is not taught in the Bible except in the context of marriage. You believe that there is headship of man over woman in the church only as it applies to marriage. You do not believe that that headship principle applies in any way to society.

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<sup>44</sup> Weitzke 16.

- C. You disagree<sup>45</sup> with “Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles” that the role of man and woman is moral law. For this reason you do not believe that these principles can be applied in society”<sup>46</sup>

Letters from the Saint James pastors in response showed that “the Saint James pastors not only disagreed with the synod’s position, but they also disagreed with each other to some extent” (Weitzke 21). The Elders of the Saint James congregation submitted a letter which sped up the process. They asked that the district either declare their pastors out of fellowship or stop interrogating them. One last exchange of letters showed that there was no agreement.

The district presidium informed the Saint James pastors on May 12 1995 that they were declared to be out of fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The Saint James congregation voted overwhelmingly to retain their pastors and effectively terminate their membership in the synod.

After this, a lot of people in the district held their breath. Would more churches walk out? But no one did—which surprised some, and relieved all. Once Saint James left, the whole matter died down. Church discipline did what it’s supposed to do: It invited the erring to repent, and stopped the error from spreading.

The clarification of Scripture’s position has actually helped to expand the roles women typically hold in many of our congregations. Activities once felt to be out of place for women due mainly to tradition have been shown to be permissible as long as they do not involve the exercise of authority over men. No doubt the thorough Biblical studies of men’s roles, when considered with the Gospel motivation to carry out these roles, have moved many men to carry out their role as “head” in active expressions of Christlike love.<sup>47</sup>

#### **New to the District: 1970-1995**

1971	Faith, River Falls (WI) Shepherd of the Hills, Inver Grove Heights		Crown of Life, Eagan St. Luke’s, Grand Rapids
		1977	Ascension, Plymouth
1972	Forest Lake, Forest Lake		Shepherd of the Lakes, Fairmont
1973	St. Mark’s, Bemidji	1987	Abiding Savior, Elk River
1975	Bethlehem, Lakeville Emmanuel, Hudson (WI) Emmanuel, Owatonna Grace, Columbia (MO)	1989	New Life, Shoreview Zion, Springfield
1976	Ascension, Rochester Christ, Cambridge Christ, Eden Prairie	1991	Redeemer, Maple Grove
		1992	Christ the Lord, Cottage Grove Good Shepherd, Pipestone Our Savior, Kasson

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<sup>45</sup> The original has “You do disagree” which the presenter and two proofreaders maintain is difficult to say accurately in public speaking and be properly understood, so the above wording, expressing the same thought, was adopted.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from the Minnesota District Presidium to Pastor Michael Albrecht, 20 February 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Weitzke 29.

1993 Christ Our Rock, Rochester  
Peace, Marshfield  
Hope, Andover

### **1995 – Present Amalgamation**

The 1991 *Book of Reports and Memorials* begins with serious news: “This convention finds the synod directly at [a] crossroads with a decision to be made regarding future direction. The major decision involves the structure of the system of schools preparing future called workers.”<sup>48</sup>

The report from the Board for Worker Training kept its focus on the God-pleasing outcome of the Synod’s training system: “The bottom line in worker training is not the structure of schools, nor yet the program in separation, nor even the necessary supporting funding, but rather the young people God presents to his church in their professional lives.”<sup>49</sup>

In the 1980s, a “decision package process” had been implemented. This was a process of budgeting through prioritization which helped the synodical schools focus on what was necessary and vital as opposed to what was traditional or simply desired. The process helped to show an overall lack of available resources for funding ministerial education.

The Board for Worker Training indicated a conservative estimate of a \$330,000 gap between needed funding and minimum support for existing programs annually.... Although the gap impacted the Worker Training Division in previous years, the impact was absorbed through two means: through the downsizing of faculty as enrollment declined and through the deferral of needed maintenance.<sup>50</sup>

These means were no longer sustainable, and so three options were presented to the Synod:

- Option A: immediate and sustained increases in Synod Mission Offerings, if possible, or
- Option B: temporary reallocation of funding and/or deficit spending, if possible, or
- Option C: consolidation from a five-campus worker training system into four campuses.<sup>51</sup>

A fourth option, strongly recommended but ultimately rejected, was to amalgamate two (or all) prep schools on the Watertown campus, sell the New Ulm and Prairie du Chien properties, and build an entirely new facility as the college campus in a new location (probably along the corridor between Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee). The convention’s vote, after long (and for many, very painful) deliberation and argument, was to do two things:

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<sup>48</sup> 1991 *Book of Reports and Memorials* p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> The five campuses included the Seminary in Mequon, two prep schools (MLPS in Prairie du Chien, WI, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, MI), DMLC in New Ulm, MN, and NWC/NPS in Watertown, WI.

1. Amalgamate Northwestern College (NWC) and Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) on the New Ulm campus.
2. Combine Northwestern Prep School and Martin Luther Prep School (MLPS) on the existing Watertown campus and sell the Prairie du Chien property. (This could be done only after the colleges amalgamated in New Ulm).<sup>52</sup>

The amalgamation took place in 1995. The presenter was a Senior at Northwestern College at the time and therefore one of NWC’s last graduates. My most distinct on-campus memory was of taking Professor Eickmann’s Hebrew elective final exam—sight translation of a chapter of the prophet Amos—while workmen were jack-hammering the sidewalk just outside the classroom windows during the exam.

The feeling of the Northwestern faculty was mainly resigned depression and anger only sometimes expressed; not at the colleagues who recommended and planned the amalgamation, nor at the congregations who had struggled financially through the 1970s and 1980s and could not keep up with the financial demands of the system as it had been, but at short-sightedness in general and at sin in general (or specific sins committed within the student body). It was a time of frustration and an almost indescribable malaise noticed by students on both sides of the Watertown campus (prep and college). But faculty, staff, and student body got through it together.

In our Minnesota District, amalgamation was seen from the other side. In New Ulm, the school was not closing; it was growing. Businesses were happy the college was growing. On campus in New Ulm there were concerns about space and classroom sizes and student relations. Staff and faculty moving to New Ulm were faced with housing sticker-shock as realtors in the city presented homes often double the expected price. And a question asked by everyone in those days was, will the “Northwestern spirit” survive? Would that be a good thing in New Ulm, or not?

WELS laypeople in our district had mixed emotions about the amalgamation; it was, as one veteran pastor remembered “as hotly contested as closing Mobridge had been.” The many conventions that had faced the financial doldrums of the 1980s were just about at an end. Faced with a tremendous problem, the Board for Worker Training had wisely agreed that “the bottom line in worker training...is the young people God presents to his church.” The process which lifted the Synod out of its financial hole was painful. It broke hearts. But it accomplished a solution to the crisis, and our worker training system today is strong, vibrant, and trains those young people whom God presents to his church.

**New to the District: 1996 - Present**

1996	Living Hope, Shakopee	2003	Christ Our Savior, Collinsville (IL)
1998	Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines (IA)		Crown of Life, West Saint Paul
1999	Mt. Olive Chinese, Saint Paul	2017	Christ Alone, Dardenne Prairie (MO)
2000	Immanuel Hmong, Saint Paul		

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<sup>52</sup> 1993 *BORAM* p. 35. Another idea was to retain the Saginaw campus as a sort of hybrid, acting partly as Michigan’s area Lutheran high school and partly as a prep school.

## **Christian Education**

### **1. Our Lutheran Elementary Schools**

Our district currently has 37 Elementary schools (one is in Iowa). Of the existing schools, the majority were built during four periods: 7 between 1867-1885, 7 between 1944-1955, 10 between 1976-1985, and 6 between 2002-2007. Following the Civil War, World War II, Viet Nam and 9/11 it would seem that our people's hearts have turned to our children and the need to invest in their salvation with daily Christian education. It should be pointed out that post-war economies usually support building programs, which the Lord has used for the good of his kingdom.

### **2. Our Lutheran High Schools**

Before 1958, the Minnesota District encouraged its high school students, especially those interested in ministry, to attend one of the Synod's prep schools. Locally, students in southern Minnesota were able to attend Martin Luther Academy (formerly DMLHS) on the campus of DMLC.

In 1958, St. Croix Lutheran Academy opened its doors for students in the Twin Cities. The first students met in the basement of St. James Lutheran Church in St. Paul, but by 1960 the first permanent building on Crusader Avenue was opened. The present building on Oakdale Avenue was completed in 1992.

In 1978, West Lutheran High School opened. The present facility in Plymouth, Minnesota, opened in 1996. West serves twenty west metro area churches including five Lutheran elementary schools.

In the late 1970s, the decision to move Martin Luther academy from the DMLC campus to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, caused an exploratory committee spearheaded by Pastor Tom Henning of St. Paul's, New Ulm, to investigate operating an area Lutheran high school supported by southern Minnesota congregations. Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School opened in 1979, using space in the new building of St. Paul's Lutheran Elementary School and then moving to its present location in 1981.<sup>53</sup>

### **3. Martin Luther College**

The establishment of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm is well-chronicled elsewhere. Begun by the Minnesota Synod in 1884, it was originally intended to be a worker training school for future pastors. When the Minnesota Synod affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod in 1892 and with the Michigan Synod, it was decided jointly that the New Ulm campus would focus on training teachers with a two-year program. This was expanded to three years in 1927<sup>54</sup> and to a full four-

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<sup>53</sup> The presenter is grateful for the useful (and annual) illustration that "Bethlehem is about five miles away from Jerusalem—exactly the same distance from our sanctuary here at St. Paul's (New Ulm) out to MVL."

<sup>54</sup> Golden Jubilee History p. 32.

year “normal” program in 1951.<sup>55</sup> The 1995 amalgamation with Northwestern College was described previously. Currently, MLC reports 756 undergraduate students and 995 graduate and continuing education students. Students on campus come from nine different countries, and MLC has a student/teacher ratio of 12:1.

### **The Growth of Early Childhood Education**

The need for early childhood education has long been recognized. Early planners (Prof. Beverly Haar, Dr. John Isch, Dr. Art Schulz, and Dr. Dave Wendler) made an intensive study of the issue in 1985. By the time of DMLC’s amalgamation with Northwestern College in 1995, MLC President Ted Olsen allocated space in the off-campus dorm on Highland Avenue (Luther Manor). This space became the present Early Childhood Learning Center to give MLC students practical, hands-on classroom instruction time with local children ages 0-5. At the present time there are 61 early childhood programs operating in our district; 3 in Wisconsin and all the rest in Minnesota.

In the 2014 Report to the Twelve Districts, out of 694 students, 119 were enrolled in early childhood education as their major (42 of these had a double major, mostly with elementary education).

### **Reaching out to God’s people with special needs.**

There is an excellent report about the Jesus Cares Ministry (JCM) program in the Minnesota District in the “Continue in My Word” anniversary booklet (pp. 39-40). The outreach of JCM partnering with WELS Kingdom Workers to reach people with special needs in Malawi is especially encouraging. May God permit us to expand our ministry in this way in many more places in the years to come.

Another concern in this area is a growing malady worldwide which affects more and more of our children: Autism. According to the medical historians at webmd.com citing the National Institute of Health, the number of children diagnosed with autism or similar disorders was about one in 2,000 in the 1970s and 1980s. That number began to change drastically in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1999, the incidence was about one in 800. By 2010, it was estimated to be about one in 400 children affected. In 2016, the incidence of autism spectrum disorder was estimated at about one in every 150 8-year-old children, with the occurrence being more common among boys than among girls.<sup>56</sup> This year, the estimate is that one in every 63 children<sup>57</sup> is on the Autism spectrum, with autism occurring about five times more often among boys than girls. In a survey of twenty

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<sup>55</sup> *WELS Historical Journal* Vol. 8 No. 2, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> The presenter does not wish to turn this section into a medical journal, but understand that the “1 in 150” number includes Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome (a brain development disorder), and a related malady known as Pervasive Development Disorder (not otherwise specified) more commonly known as PDD-NOS.

<sup>57</sup> Statistics confirmed in an IEP/ISP meeting with District 88 Autism specialists and educators, May 21, 2018.

WELS elementary schools and all three of the Area Lutheran High Schools in our district, I found the incidence to be closer to one in fifty in our fellowship.

Specialists and physicians do not agree as to whether this increase is at least in part due to better diagnosing skills. For example, the presenter's first cousin, now diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at age 54, was diagnosed as "mentally retarded" as a child in the 1970s despite having an IQ well above 80.<sup>58</sup> Another factor may be that "autism" is receiving an expanded definition in most school districts. However, educators and autism specialists agree that the number of main stream students with special educational needs fitting the definition of autism is on the rise.<sup>59</sup>

It is not the goal of this paper nor of our teachers to wrestle with the problems of definition, cause, or effect, but rather to raise awareness of the phenomenon and to offer solutions toward teaching the gospel to our people, young and old, who are affected by a different set of social skills and different learning needs than more typical students. Pastors and teachers need to understand that many families hesitate to have their children diagnosed. There have been cases of families pulling their children from our WELS Elementary schools to attend public schools because they think that there are better educational opportunities there, without realizing that the public school districts will work with our WELS schools, providing (free of charge) classes in social skills and other developmental needs for one to five hours per week (or more), often working closely with our LES teachers as to appropriate scheduling for these classes, and providing free bussing to and from classes for the children.

### **How Are We Doing?**

When this paper was assigned, the District Praesidium requested that focus be given to two areas: What have we done well, and where do we need to improve? I asked these questions of some of our most senior called workers, many of whom have been in service since before the District's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and one whose lifespan was identical with the District's hundred years. All agreed that this was not an easy question. Most gave special thought to the conflicts or challenges with which they were personally involved—the question over the roles of men and women, the LCMS and CLC division, amalgamation, the rise of early childhood education, and so on.

Professor Mervin (Julius) Ingebritsen (1918-2018) remembered the Missouri Synod difficulties from the perspective of a called worker:

"I don't know what we, or they [the pastors of our Synod] could have done differently. Nobody had all the facts, but everyone felt strongly about the facts they knew. We used the

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<sup>58</sup> The average IQ in the U.S. is between 70 and 130.

<sup>59</sup> A sampling of Lutheran Elementary Schools in our District, taken by phone in May, 2018, showed that we serve about one student with ASD out of every 140-145 students, very close to (in fact a little higher than) the current national average in the United States. Some students included in the count from our WELS schools are students who are not medically or educationally diagnosed with ASD but whose teachers or principals "strongly suspect" are affected.

word of God together, for each other and against each other, admonishing and rebuking. We held on to the Scriptures, and we did our best in the moment.”<sup>60</sup>

Pastor Melvin Schwark (Courtland Lutheran and Zion, Brighton Township in Brown County, MN) recalled:

“We gave them (Missouri) ample opportunity. I remember that the ELS was pushing us—the ELS left the Synodical Conference first—and probably because the ELS was pushing we finally left [the Synodical Conference]. Maybe we were overly patient with Missouri, but we didn’t make any assumptions about them. We acted on what we knew, and I think it was handled very well.”<sup>61</sup>

An area where we could improve is in remembering these historical challenges, especially regarding fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Most of us have shared the experience where a faithful member, delighted to have a cousin or grandparent visiting, asks the pastor just minutes before a service begins whether their family member, “A good Lutheran with a strong faith,” yet LCMS, can have communion with us. Their shocked expressions and angry mutterings prove as much as anything else that we need to remind one another about where we have been and what that means for the present and the future. It might be noteworthy that many of our people with the shocked expressions actually lived through the split, and we who have apparently shocked them weren’t born yet, but nevertheless, we are the ones called to serve, to teach, to remind, and clearly to proclaim law and gospel.

Regarding the controversy over the roles of men and women, we should not lose sight of a key point which seems matter-of-fact to all who were on both sides of the issue, but which amaze many outside our fellowship: No one involved in the controversy questioned the infallibility of Scripture, the inspiration of Scripture, or that Adam and Eve—mentioned by name in almost every exchange of letters and memorials—were real, historical persons. Even in the LCMS, certainly in the ELCA and clearly in many other churches calling themselves Christian, this kind of disagreement would never have accepted such fundamental details without question as they were throughout the decades during which the controversy continued in the WELS and ever since.

Praise God for his blessings to us. Throughout the Wisconsin Synod and our Minnesota District, his grace abounds.

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<sup>60</sup> Private interview, February 15, 2018. Professor Ingebritsen was called home to glory in May 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Phone interview, May 22 2018.

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- Special thanks to Rev. LeRoy Lothert, Rev. Thomas Henning, Rev. Melvin Schwark, Mr. Marvin (Julius) Ingebritson, and others for private interviews.