

A Primer on the History Behind the CLC With Some Personal Observations

It is no secret that there is talk about the possibility of official doctrinal discussions between the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Since it has been 25 years since the last official meetings, perhaps it is time to try another round of discussions. New people are in positions of leadership in all three synods—people who will be able to look at the issues with a fresh set of eyes, yet people who are interested in the issues as sons of the original participants.

If discussions go forward, it will be important for leaders in the ELS and WELS to be aware of the history behind the formation of the CLC and its continuance. It is the purpose of this paper to offer a primer on that history as a foundation for our collective historical understanding and as a springboard for discussion at this meeting.

The paper is called a “primer” because it will only touch the highpoints in the history as understood by the author. The full history is long, complicated, and deep. I suspect that there are people who have entire file drawers of papers and articles dealing with the origin of the CLC and the history of its relationship with the ELS and WELS. In this paper, I will present what seem to me to be the salient points in the history. I will try to be objective and fair in presenting the viewpoints of all, but I will present things, understandably, from the perspective of a WELS observer.

1938-1955 – Admonition toward LCMS

What is behind the history is the slide of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) into more liberal teaching, especially with its unionistic tendencies. Books could be written on this topic. Suffice it to say here that starting in the late 1930s the LCMS very clearly put itself on a trajectory away from its Synodical Conference moorings. This threatened the unity that existed in the Synodical Conference between the LCMS, ELS, and WELS.

Tension began in 1935 when the LCMS entered into negotiations with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) with a view to establishing pulpit and altar fellowship. The first official WELS admonition was directed to the LCMS in 1939, when WELS objected to the documents that were offered as a basis for agreement between the LCMS and ALC. These documents implied that it was not necessary to have agreement on all non-fundamental doctrines in order to practice church fellowship. This was clearly the position of the ALC, as evidenced by a resolution at their 1938 convention: “We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.”¹ The 1938 LCMS convention in St. Louis gave the impression that the LCMS also accepted the idea.

Discord, strife, and admonitions continued unabated with increasing intensity throughout the next fifteen years. Starting in the 1930s WELS was concerned about the LCMS’s decision to participate in the military chaplaincy. In 1944 the LCMS officially allowed scout troops and defended the practice of “joint prayer” with people with whom they were not in fellowship. In 1950 the LCMS and ALC prepared the “Common Confession” as a union document. This “Common Confession” was found to be inadequate by

¹ Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 401.

both the ELS and the WELS. Already in 1951 P. E. Kretzmann, the author of the commentaries, left the LCMS, and many in the ELS and WELS were thinking that it was time to sever fellowship with the LCMS. This leads us to a place where we have to spend some time, painful though it may be—the WELS synod conventions from 1953 through 1961.

WELS synod conventions from 1953-1961

The WELS conventions from 1953-1961 were filled with tension and emotion, all revolving around what the WELS should do in regard to its fellowship relations with the LCMS. Each convention saw numerous memorials urging a separation from LCMS. Occupying a key role was the WELS Committee in Matters of Church Union, the forerunner to the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations. This committee brought its first report to the 1939 WELS convention, and throughout the next two decades it was active in interacting with the LCMS and bringing reports back to WELS.

Perhaps a quick sense of the difficulties and the confusion of this period can be gleaned by looking at a simple chart of the recommendations and resolutions of these conventions.

Year and place	Recommendation of the Church Union Committee	Recommendation of the convention floor committee	Convention resolutions
1953 – Watertown	Break fellowship	Don't break, be in protesting fellowship	Floor committee resolution passes Don't break, be in protesting fellowship <i>(in statu confessionis)</i>
1955 – Saginaw	Break fellowship	Wait until a recessed convention in 1956	Floor committee resolution passes Preamble passed identifying LCMS as causing divisions Resolution to break is postponed until a recessed session in 1956 (94-47)
1956 – Watertown	Because of 1956 LCMS convention, continue to work with LCMS	Continue protesting fellowship	Floor committee resolution passes Hold the Saginaw resolutions "in abeyance" Continue vigorously protesting fellowship Set up a "Protest Committee" to handle protests
1957 – New Ulm	No recommendation	Break fellowship	Defeated the floor committee resolution to break fellowship (61-74) Voted to continue vigorously protesting fellowship
1959 – Saginaw	Let Synodical Conference committees continue to work	Continue study with protesting fellowship	Floor committee resolution passes Continued study with protesting fellowship
1961 – Milwaukee	An impasse has been reached Break fellowship	Break fellowship	Break fellowship (124-49)

1955 – The crucial year

In regard to CLC history, there is one convention when it can be said that the match was struck that set the thing on fire. It was 1955 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan.

What happened at the convention was this. The Standing Committee on Church Union, though not unanimous in their thinking,² gave the opinion that the LCMS was guilty of causing divisions and offenses, and the time had come to break fellowship in view of Romans 16:17-18. Their report stated: “We have, however, arrived at the firm conviction that, because of the divisions and offenses that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed, further postponement of a decision would be a violation of the apostolic injunction of Romans 16:17.”³ The Union Committee recommended the following resolution: “RESOLVED: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God’s injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated.”⁴

President Oscar Naumann in his “Report of the President” said much the same, although he opened the door to the thought that perhaps the WELS had a “debt of love” still to pay to the LCMS:

We have reached the conviction that through these differences divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: “Avoid them!”

For those of us who have been closest to these problems, it appears quite definite that we must now obey the Lord’s Word in Romans 16:17. ...

We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply His definite command “Avoid them!” or whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.⁵

In the end, the convention unanimously passed the following preamble to a resolution that advocated a break in fellowship:

A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing.⁶

But the convention decided to postpone further action until a recessed session of the convention to be held in 1956. The official convention resolution gave two reasons for a delay until 1956: “1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences. 2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience

² E. Arnold Sitz was a member of the committee, and he delivered a convention essay entitled “Exercising Patience and Longsuffering” (available in the online essay file of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary). In this essay he strongly argued that WELS should continue to admonish the LCMS patiently and lovingly, and that the time had not come to “avoid.”

³ *WELS 1955 Reports and Memorials* 45.

⁴ *Ibid.* 45.

⁵ *WELS 1955 Convention Proceedings* 13-14.

⁶ *Ibid.* 85.

and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention.”⁷

To understand the thinking, one needs to remember that the LCMS was meeting in convention every three years and the WELS every two years. WELS met in 1953 and sent a serious word of admonition to the LCMS. The LCMS also met in 1953, so their next convention was scheduled for 1956. That means that the delegates at the 1955 WELS convention did not have any official LCMS convention response since the 1953 WELS convention. They postponed a decision in part because they wanted to hear from another LCMS convention before breaking, to see if their 1953 admonition had any effect.

The CLC interpretation of the 1955 resolutions

Many men who later organized the CLC were immediately upset by the actions of the 1955 convention. They felt that the WELS had acted contrary to God’s Word, because WELS had identified the LCMS as guilty of causing divisions according to Romans 16:17-18, but then WELS had not obeyed Romans 16:17-18 when they remained in fellowship with LCMS. WELS Seminary President Edmund Reim, the secretary of the Union Committee, immediately offered his resignation from the Union Committee and the seminary—but these resignations were not accepted by the convention and he continued in his positions for two more years.

One can have some sympathy for Reim and men like him. The official news release from the convention gave the impression that a conclusive judgment about the erroneous teaching of LCMS had been rendered, but a break in fellowship had nevertheless been delayed. The “Post-Convention News Bulletin” stated:

Agreement on the fact that Romans 16:17-18 applied to the situation in the Missouri Synod was almost unanimous. The divisions and offenses are clear. There was an honest difference of opinion on whether it was necessary to break relations completely with the Missouri Synod now or whether we, in the words of our President, “still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.” The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year.⁸

At any rate, it has been a consistent assertion in CLC materials throughout the years that WELS acted contrary to God’s Word at the 1955 convention by identifying LCMS as a heterodox church body and not breaking fellowship with them. Even more, CLC writers have looked upon this as an evidence of false doctrine in WELS. In CLC eyes, it must be possible according to the WELS doctrine of fellowship to identify a group as causing divisions and offenses and still maintain fellowship with them. The CLC says, “Look at the historical record.”

The official WELS interpretation of the 1955 resolutions

By all accounts, a game-changer in these years was the “Letter to the Protest Committee” sent by Prof. Carl Lawrenz on June 16, 1958. Lawrenz wrote as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the WELS Church Union Committee in response to an inquiry from the Protest Committee (the WELS men who were handling the various protests that the synod had received), when the Protest Committee wanted to be updated on the position of the Church Union Committee.

⁷ Ibid. 86. Notice that the wording reflects E. Arnold Sitz’s convention essay, referred to in footnote #2.

⁸ “Post-Convention News Bulletin,” WELS Board for Information and Stewardship (1955) 6.

In this “Letter” Lawrenz explained that when the 1955 Saginaw convention decided not to break fellowship with the LCMS, the convention was thereby also withholding the judgment of the preamble—that the LCMS was causing divisions and offenses according to Romans 16:17-18.⁹ So WELS was not guilty of continuing in fellowship with a church that it had marked as heterodox. WELS was still treating LCMS as weak brothers. The 1955 preamble was not in effect. Here is a quote from the letter:

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw was not merely the “avoiding,” the breaking of Fellowship, enjoined in Rom. 16:17f. but also the conclusive application of the very judgment of this passage, namely the judgment that the Missouri Synod was persistent in causing divisions and offenses. Not merely the judgment expressed in the resolution and the action recommended by it, but also the judgment expressed in the preamble was held in abeyance, pending the examination of the added bit of evidence desired by the majority of our Synod’s delegates, namely the answer of the subsequent Missouri Synod Convention upon our charges.

Who would want to say that the Saginaw resolutions did not leave room for greater clarity? But those who were there know the lengthy debate and discussion that was devoted to the problem and are conscious of the fact that the final decision was made in the closing hours of the convention. Thus they understand that there was no opportunity for editorial revisions in the interest of full clarity. The above interpretation given to the Saginaw resolutions is the only one that can make any sense. This was therefore also the official interpretation that was given to them by our Praesidium, by our Union Committee in its St. Paul report, and by our subsequent synodical convention at Watertown.¹⁰

It can be debated whether or not this explanation had been given prior to 1958 in the way that Lawrenz asserted in the last sentence quoted. However, CLC charter member Paul F. Nolting apparently did understand the intention of the 1956 Watertown convention in this way—that when the 1956 convention resolved to “hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance,” it was also holding in abeyance the judgment of the preamble.¹¹ Without a doubt this explanation became the official WELS interpretation from 1958 onward, as the Lawrenz letter circulated throughout WELS and was endorsed by others.

It is interesting to read “A Letter to the Protesting Brethren,” sent on June 27, 1958 from the WELS Protest Committee to people who had submitted protests. This letter refers to and endorses the explanation of Lawrenz:

In these several paragraphs Professor Lawrenz pin-points what is given as the official interpretation of the Saginaw resolution. It is true that many did not understand the resolution in that way originally. The members of your Protest Committee will need to admit that they did not understand it that way at the time. In his summary Professor Lawrenz makes this statement: “Who would want to say that the Saginaw resolutions did not leave room for greater clarity?” But our committee feels now that the presentation of the “official interpretation” certainly is truthful to the record, and those who make it have found it possible to point us to their consistency in that interpretation from the beginning. We believe that you will need to admit that that interpretation is the only one that does make sense in the light of the history of the development. It is furthermore the carefully considered official interpretation. We believe, therefore, that in spite of

⁹ I have never seen any reference to standard parliamentary procedure or *Robert’s Rules of Order* in any WELS writing in connection with the 1955 convention. It is my understanding, however, that if the “RESOLVED” portion of a resolution does not pass (which is supposed to be voted on first?), then nothing else in connection with the resolution has official standing.

¹⁰ Carl Lawrenz, “A Report to the Protest Committee” (June 16, 1958) 2.

¹¹ Paul F. Nolting, “Mark...Avoid...Origin of the CLC” 7-8.

whatever other interpretations have been placed upon the resolution, since a synod does have a right to interpret its resolutions through its Praesidium and through its subsequent conventions, charity demands that such an official interpretation must stand, unless it can be proven that it is not the interpretation originally intended. And to do that, we believe, will be found impossible.¹²

In my mind, these explanations of 1958 are clearer on the doctrine and practice of church fellowship than some statements from earlier years. From 1955-1957 the impression could easily have been given that it was legitimate to identify a church body as causing divisions in the sense of Romans 16:17-18, and yet still remain in fellowship with them. The Lawrenz letter clearly denies that possibility. In the midst of controversy, sometimes the church sharpens its thinking and writing in response to error.¹³ I think that WELS grew in the sharpness and clarity of its thinking and writing on church fellowship as the decade of the 1950s progressed.

The “to no avail” statement in Lawrenz’s “Letter”

Later in Lawrenz’s “Letter to the Protest Committee,” there was another paragraph that was going to become historically significant. Lawrenz made the point that when an individual or church body falls into error, a determination needs to be made if the individual or church body is a weak brother or a persistent errorist. Lawrenz indicated that admonition can play a role in making this determination. If admonition is rejected, this shows that the individual or church body is persistent in error. Lawrenz wrote:

The fact that an individual or a church body has fallen into an error of doctrine or practice, or even the fact that the individual or the church body still defends that error of doctrine or practice, is not yet in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship. Rather both facts may still be inducements for practicing this fellowship most vigorously in efforts to overcome the error and its defense. Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.¹⁴

CLC discontent with the official WELS interpretation = historical revisionism

At first reading, you might think that the Lawrenz letter would have been helpful and comforting to the protesting brethren and CLC founders. With Lawrenz’s explanation, WELS was not guilty of continuing in fellowship with a group that was causing divisions and offenses. WELS was not guilty of disobeying Romans 16:17-18. Rather, WELS had not yet conclusively labeled LCMS yet as persistent errorists.

However, the Lawrenz letter did just the opposite. It immediately stirred up a firestorm of hostility among the protesting brethren and CLC founders. To this day it has been at the center of the CLC’s criticism of WELS.

First, there were people who felt that Lawrenz was not being historically honest with his interpretation of the 1955 resolution. To many, including Edmund Reim, the Lawrenz interpretation sounded new—something they had not really heard from 1955-1958. They said that there was an official interpretation that had been given in connection with the 1955 resolutions. Now it was inappropriate for Lawrenz or anyone else to come along and offer a different official interpretation that conflicted with the earlier one.

¹² Erwin Scharf, Secretary of the Protest Committee, “A Letter to the Protesting Brethren” (June 27, 1958) 3.

¹³ It is sometimes pointed out that Franz Pieper’s writing on predestination is more refined and careful than the early writing of C. F. W. Walther on the topic.

¹⁴ Ibid. 4.

It is fascinating to read Edmund Reim’s “An Open Letter To the Protest Committee,” dated October 29, 1958. He recognizes that there are “two different interpretations of the Saginaw resolution.” He is willing to acknowledge that “what the Professor [Lawrenz] is offering now is what has been in his [Lawrenz’s] mind since Saginaw.”¹⁵ But Reim states that he and many others did not come away from Saginaw with Lawrenz’s interpretation.

The two interpretations could be summarized this way:

	Is the judgment of the 1955 preamble in effect?	Why did WELS not break fellowship in 1955?
Reim	Yes. LCMS is guilty of causing offenses in the sense of Romans 16:17.	WELS said they had a continuing debt of love to pay (in conflict with Romans 16:17).
Lawrenz	No. When the resolution failed, the preamble also was held in abeyance.	We had not conclusively identified LCMS as causing offenses in the sense of Romans 16:17.

I have included Reim’s “Open Letter” as Appendix B at the end of this paper. When I read this letter, I have to admit that I have some sympathy with Reim and his charge of historical revisionism. I can see how things hung together from his perspective, just as I can see how things hung together from Lawrenz’s perspective. We have two WELS seminary presidents—men at the pinnacle of theological respect in WELS—with different historical interpretations, and each is understandable. In the letters of these two men, I submit, we see the CLC/WELS difference on historical interpretation in embryonic form. The line of thought of Reim has been perpetuated in the CLC. The line of thought of Lawrenz has been perpetuated in WELS.

CLC discontent with the official WELS interpretation = false doctrine

But more importantly, the protesting brethren and CLC founders also saw doctrinal error in the Lawrenz letter. Especially they focused on this sentence as erroneous: “Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.” To them, Lawrenz was indicating that a subjective judgment about the expected course of admonition in the future was necessary to label someone as an errorist. They assumed that Lawrenz was demanding “clairvoyance.” They were fearful that Lawrenz was opening the door to admonishing an errorist indefinitely, as long as there was some chance that he might listen.

The identification of this sentence as false teaching started in 1959 when 30 people signed a memorial for the WELS convention entitled “A Call to Decision.” The key section of this memorial is the following, where Lawrenz’s sentence is said to be unscriptural, and a correct, contrasting statement is offered:

The latter document [Lawrenz’s “A Report to the Protest Committee”], under Section II, third paragraph, page four in our copy, the following sentence appeared:
 “Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.”

¹⁵ Edmund Reim, “An Open Letter to the Protest Committee” (October 29, 1958) 2.

This statement is basic to the entire issue which called forth the document. We hold that it is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable. We ask the Synod to disavow it.

For the purpose of clarifying our objection, we submit the following as a true and correct statement of the doctrinal issue involved:

Termination of church fellowship is called for when Scriptural correction has been offered and rejected and the erring brother or church body have continued in their error despite admonition. This is the persistence which distinguishes an errorist (Romans 16:17,18) from an erring brother (Galatians 2:11-14).¹⁶

The “Call to Decision” memorial went on to say, with obvious reference to Lawrenz’s writing:

We reject the notion that the action required by Romans 16:17 depends upon clairvoyance, namely the ability to determine the future fate of admonition. One who persistently causes divisions and offenses is marked, not when we are convinced “that admonition is of no further avail,” but when the evidence shows that despite admonition the erring has persisted and does persist in holding to his error. The text demands Christian awareness, not divination.¹⁷

In the CLC mind, it is very significant that the 1959 convention rejected this “Call to Decision” memorial, thereby affirming the Lawrenz statement. According to CLC writers, this was the moment when WELS became wedded to a false doctrinal principle.

Now in the years since 1959, this sentence from Lawrenz’s letter has taken on a life of its own in the CLC. For the CLC, this sentence encapsulates the WELS false doctrine, and it can be repeated verbatim by many CLC people. It is presented in CLC literature almost as the quintessence of WELS doctrine, even though the wording of the sentence has dropped out of use in WELS. It was not used in the “Theses on Church Fellowship” from 1959, nor in subsequent WELS writing on fellowship.¹⁸

In the 50th anniversary book of the CLC, David Lau gives this observation about the importance of Carl Lawrenz’s “Letter to the Protest Committee” and the actions of the 1959 convention: “It is possible, even likely, that if the Wisconsin Synod in its 1959 convention had separated from the Missouri Synod, the pastors and congregations that had withdrawn might have seen fit to return. But Professor Carl Lawrenz, who had replaced Edmund Reim as president of the Thiensville seminary, introduced a new understanding of Wisconsin Synod actions in the years from 1955 to 1959 and also a new criterion for suspending fellowship with erring church bodies in a letter he addressed to the Protest Committee of the Wisconsin Synod on June 16, 1958.”¹⁹

WELS response to this CLC discontent

Simply put, when the CLC accuses the “to no avail” statement of Carl Lawrenz as false doctrine, WELS insists that the CLC is putting more into the statement than what Lawrenz intended. From the WELS perspective it seems that the CLC is setting up a straw man. What Carl Lawrenz intended to say is simply that admonition is to be given to weak brothers, and if the admonition is rejected, then fellowship should

¹⁶ 1959 WELS Proceedings 210.

¹⁷ Ibid. 210.

¹⁸ For additional discussion of this sentence see: Thomas P. Nass, “Observations on the CLC,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 98 (2001) 58-61.

¹⁹ David Lau, *Out of Necessity: A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession* (CLC Board of Education and Publications, 2009) 38-39.

be broken. His intention is nothing more than what Edmund Reim confessed in his article on “Admonition and Romans 16”:

When such efforts at brotherly admonition have been made and have nevertheless been rejected—whether in so many words or by deliberate adherence to the error—then one must come to the reluctant conclusion that this is indeed the very situation which the Apostle had in mind, that one is dealing with causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned.

It is this rejection of admonition that has made the identification not only possible but positive.²⁰

In a private letter to Rollin Reim dated March 17, 1959, Carl Lawrenz wrote the following, reacting to the “Call to Decision” memorial which accused Lawrenz of false doctrine and offered a supposedly correct alternative. One can sense Lawrenz’s frustration at being misrepresented.

After reading and rereading your Memorial I must frankly confess that I find that on the one hand you are enunciating principles which, if I understand you correctly, I have shared, still share, and have no thought of denying; on the other hand I find that you are rejecting principles which I have never thought of espousing, either now or in the past. ...

Let me ask: Are you really willing to maintain that with the words “reach the conviction that admonition is of no further avail” I am actually holding a brief for gaining a conviction by some kind of clairvoyance concerning “the future fate of admonition” that one has given or is giving? That I am not talking about the future fate of admonition, its future failure or success in getting the erring brother to see his error and to depart from it, should be evident from what follows in the sentence: “and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.” Note that I am not saying: will demand recognition. I am not speaking of what the erring brother will do or might do. I am speaking of what he is doing now to show that “admonition is of no further avail.”²¹

In one of the first issues of the *CLC Journal of Theology*, Egbert Schaller acknowledged that Carl Lawrenz insisted that with his “to no avail” sentence he didn’t mean anything other than what the writers of the “Call to Decision” memorial held to. Lawrenz had even offered to amend the sentence. Schaller wrote:

Proponents of the offensive statement, in reply, protested that they did not wish to insist upon its wording, but would be prepared to amend it. They affirmed that they desired to convey no doctrine other than that formulated in the “Call for Decision.” They insisted that the thesis defended by the memorial, and the proposition set up in their document, were identical in substance. ...

It is quite true that at the Saginaw convention in 1959, and doubtless on subsequent occasions, dissident members of the Synod were given the assurance that the original author of the official synodical formula distributed by the Protest Committee in 1958 was quite willing to change its wording. We may well assume that the Protest Committee and, for that matter, the majority of Synod’s membership, would have underwritten that effort. It is also true that at Saginaw, and subsequently, proponents of the Synod’s position insistently affirmed that they saw no difference between their statement and the principle they found expressed in the memorial.²²

²⁰ Edmund Reim, “Admonition and Romans 16,” *Journal of Theology* 2 (1962) 8.

²¹ Carl Lawrenz, Letter to Rollin Reim (March 17, 1959). Copy in author’s files.

²² Egbert Schaller, “To Set the Record Straight,” *Journal of Theology* 1 (1961) 42-43.

However, Schaller (in very strong language) went on to explain that these offers would not be accepted:

Both the offer and the affirmation thus made were rejected by those who signed the “Call for Decision.” The reason for their intransigence ought to be manifest to any intelligent Christian. To put it into the simplest terms: Of what possible value is a change in the wording of a principle unless it is accompanied by a change in practice? ... Events have conclusively demonstrated that their offer included no promise of a concomitant reversal of Synod’s unionistic practice....

The correct interpretation of the resolutions of the Synod on this subject, on the other hand, is seen in the manner in which the Synod has failed to terminate its fellowship relations with a church body that is and has long since been causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine. To continue to maintain, in the face of the record of divergent performance, that there is no difference between the statement of principle of the respective groups, is an affront to ordinary human intelligence, to say nothing of the barriers it raises against the hope for ultimate clarification and reconciliation of the deplorable division between former brethren.²³

Here is a definite difficulty in the CLC/WELS conversation. The CLC sees false doctrine in the “to no avail” statement of Carl Lawrenz, but the historical events of the 1950s are needed to illustrate their contention. WELS recognizes that the statement is unclear and open to misunderstanding, and therefore WELS has never used it in official writing. But WELS contends that it can be understood properly and that the intention of the original author was nothing different than the principles of the CLC itself.

Establishment of the CLC

To follow the story of the history, we need to say that, painfully, each year from 1956-1961 saw more and more pastors, laypeople, and congregations leave WELS, including well respected leaders—convinced that WELS was disobedient to Romans 16:17-18. After the 1956 convention, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Mankato with over a thousand members withdrew from membership in the WELS. At the close of the 1957 convention three startling announcements were made: Dakota-Montana District President Paul G. Albrecht announced that he could no longer fellowship with those who advocated a continuation of fellowship with LCMS; Pacific Northwest District President Maynard J. Witt reported that he was leaving the fellowship of the WELS; and Edmund Reim, the president of the WELS seminary, announced that he was discontinuing his fellowship with WELS. Leaving in 1959 was Dr. Martin Galstad, a professor at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm and former professor at Bethany in Mankato.

From the WELS point of view, it is interesting to note that different people left WELS at different times—all the way from 1955 through 1961. To us this illustrates that there is a degree of human judgment involved in the timing of separation. Different Christians, operating with the same doctrinal principles, can come to differing opinions about when separation is necessary because a church body has become guilty of causing divisions.

In 1958 an organization called the “Interim Conference” started to function with people who had left the Synodical Conference, and this group made plans for a more permanent organization. On August 9-12, 1960, the organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession was held in Watertown, South Dakota. Statistics for 1960 showed 7120 souls in 44 congregations, and by 1975 the number had grown to 9790 souls in 72 congregations. Currently the CLC website indicates a membership of 7624 souls in 77 congregations in the USA and Canada, with more than 58,000 souls in sister churches in foreign fields.

²³ Ibid. 43-44.

The situation in the ELS

This paper is focusing on CLC history over against WELS, but something should be said about the ELS. In large part the ELS story is a mirror image of the WELS story, with years of admonition toward LCMS and years of emotional discussion and inner dissension over the matter of breaking with LCMS. There is one significant difference, however.

In 1955 the ELS voted to suspend fellowship with the LCMS, so the ELS officially broke fellowship with LCMS six years prior to WELS. But the ELS decided to continue its membership and participation in the Synodical Conference, since the Synodical Conference was seriously trying to address the issues and there was some hope of progress. It wasn't until 1961 that the ELS asked for the dissolution of the Synodical Conference, instructing its delegates not to meet in a fellowship framework. Then in 1963 the ELS officially withdrew, when the Synodical Conference did not dissolve itself. By continuing in the Synodical Conference from 1955-1961, many thought that the ELS was practicing sinful unionism. So the ELS discussion in the late 1950s was similar to the discussion in WELS. However the issue was not breaking fellowship with LCMS, but rather breaking with the Synodical Conference where fellowship with LCMS was being practiced.

When the 1957, 1958, and 1959 ELS conventions resolved to continue in the Synodical Conference, pastors and congregations began leaving the ELS. As in WELS, losses in the ELS included some well respected leaders. C. M. Gullerud, pastor at Mt. Olive, Mankato and Salem, Eagle Lake, and one-time ELS president, resigned from the ELS in 1959. The retired dean of the ELS seminary, Norman Madson, Sr. left in 1960.

Reconciliation efforts in the 1960s

After WELS finally broke fellowship with LCMS in 1961, you might think that the CLC and WELS could have gotten back together. The fact is that there were reconciliation efforts in the 1960s. The historical records indicate that there were official meetings of CLC officials with WELS officials on the following dates:

November 10, 1962
January 2-3, 1964
March 1, 1966
December 19-20, 1966.

But from the published reports of these meetings, it seems that they fell into a fruitless pattern. The CLC representatives insisted that the actions and resolutions of WELS from 1955-1961 be reviewed. The WELS representatives felt that such a review would not serve a useful purpose, but that the discussions should focus on the principles of fellowship espoused by each synod. So the meetings foundered over procedural disagreements. At the same time, the WELS representatives regularly maintained that they saw no difference between the fellowship principles of the CLC and WELS, and that the WELS position was being misrepresented by the CLC.

As one example, here is a quote from a February 27, 1963 letter from WELS President Oscar Naumann to CLC President Paul Albrecht, reflecting on the November 1962 meeting:

Now we find that the *Journal of Theology*, December 1962, on page 6, apparently charges us with "making admonition an essential part of the 'marking,' a determinate part that fixes the time when the 'marking' must cease and the 'avoiding' begin..." All three of us recall distinctly that we said "no" to the question "Is admonition determinative?" The question was asked by Prof. E. Schaller.

He was surprised at our answer. When he then asked what the role of admonition is, we replied “It may be helpful!” We also stated that at times it may be impossible to admonish. No opportunity may be afforded.

Upon the question by Prof. Schaller: “Must we first pay our full debt of love before we avoid?” we had replied that we may not be given an opportunity to do so.

I should like also to point out that we do not consider the obligation of “paying our debt of love” to a brother who has fallen into error the same as delaying separation “as long as the errorist will listen to admonition.” If this “argument” in your “Statement Concerning Church Fellowship,” quoted in the *Journal of Theology*, December 1962, page 11, is attributed to us, we want it known that we strongly disavow such a position.²⁴

In a subsequent letter dated July 31, 1963, Pres. Naumann continued:

From reports that reached us after the November 10 meeting we learned that we were again subjected to misrepresentation. This will not lay the ground for fruitful discussions.

We firmly believe that every church body has the right to have its confessional position correctly and accurately presented. This does not mean that everyone will agree with that position, but everyone in setting forth another’s position should do so factually as the other person has presented it himself. The Eighth Commandment places everyone under obligation to do this. Beginning with the “Call for Decision” memorial, our confessional position has been misrepresented by men now members of your church body.²⁵

At the meeting on January 2-3, 1964, Edmund Reim’s article “Admonition and Romans 16” was studied.²⁶ The WELS representatives said that they agreed with Reim in this article, but they “disavowed the position ascribed to the Wisconsin Synod in the article.”²⁷ This was acknowledged in a *Journal of Theology* article by Egbert Schaller:

An article in the *Journal of Theology* of December 1962 was used as the basis for a discussion of the Scriptural doctrine of termination of church fellowship. The Wisconsin representatives declared that they were, in their words, “aware of nothing in its exposition of Scriptural fellowship principles to which we would have to take exception.” They affirmed that their church held to the principles expressed by the article. At the same time they disavowed the position ascribed to the Wisconsin Synod in the article. Thus they wished to place their church on record as being in agreement with our church in the doctrine under discussion.²⁸

A similar outcome is reported in the *Journal of Theology* in regard to the December 19-20, 1966 meetings, at which the official doctrinal statements on church fellowship of the CLC and WELS were critiqued:

On December 19-20, 1966 the Board of Doctrine met with the Wisconsin Commission to discuss the principles of church fellowship. The discussions “at the first meeting” were to be “restricted to the two published formulations of the doctrine of fellowship,” that is, to the official confessional

²⁴ Oscar Naumann, Letter to Paul Albrecht (February 27, 1963). Copy in author’s files.

²⁵ Oscar Naumann, Letter to Paul Albrecht (July 31, 1963). Copy in author’s files.

²⁶ Edmund Reim, “Admonition and Romans 16,” *Journal of Theology* 2 (1962) 1-11.

²⁷ Egbert Schaller, “A Report of the Board of Doctrine,” *Journal of Theology* 4 (1964) 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 30.

statement of the CLC “Concerning Church Fellowship” and the document “Church Fellowship” adopted by the Wisconsin Synod in 1961.

The Board of Doctrine had prepared a critique of Wisconsin’s statement of fellowship; and most of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of that critique. The Commission on its part offered no formal statement concerning the CLC confession. The reaction of the members of the Commission seemed to be that, while they might have preferred a different choice of wording at certain points in our confession, they agreed with it in substance and in principle. Meanwhile they rejected what we presented as our understanding of the sense and meaning of certain portions of Wisconsin’s “Church Fellowship.”²⁹

All along the CLC representatives were frustrated that the actions and resolutions of WELS conventions from 1955-1961 were not allowed to be brought into the discussion. Here is the CLC viewpoint, from the writings of Egbert Schaller:

“We have previously indicated, both by word of mouth and in writing, that our purpose in calling for reference to statements and events of the past is not recriminatory.” In other words, it is not, and never has been, the desire of the CLC or its Board of Doctrine to use a meeting of the two discussion panels as a forum for the rehearsal of old grievances or the opening of old scars. ...

Certain pronouncements and decisions made by the Wisconsin Synod in matters of fellowship during the years 1955 to 1961, as well as actions based thereon, appear to us to contradict what the Wisconsin Commission now sets forth as being its synod’s position in the matter of termination of church fellowship. Those official statements and resultant actions remain a part of the record of that synod, and continue to be upheld and defended. It was because of the error which many saw in those resolutions and actions that several thousand souls were compelled by conscience bound in God’s Word to withdraw from membership in the Wisconsin Synod. This was, and is, neither a light nor a small thing.

It is therefore imperative, if we are now to determine whether or to what extent Wisconsin’s doctrine and our own are in conformity, that both sides learn to understand the entire picture, that we compare and discuss the whole record. ... If then the CLC, which charged the Wisconsin Synod with doctrinal error in the matter of termination of church fellowship, is invited to prove its charges, it ought to be granted the opportunity of presenting all the evidence it believes to be relevant and necessary.³⁰

The meeting in 1972

Another attempt at official discussions was undertaken in Milwaukee on July 18-19, 1972, with the encouragement of the 1971 WELS convention. This time the proposed agenda did allow for references to official resolutions and reports from the past, and the CLC brought a document with such references. But unfortunately the meeting did not bring the CLC and WELS any closer together.

From the printed reports, it is evident that the meeting focused on the matter of dealing with church bodies when error has arisen. This difference was noted: As part of the admonition process prior to identifying a church body as persistent errorists, the WELS representatives were willing to allow for a declaration of “*in statu confessionis*”—a “state of confession.” WELS, of course, had done that over

²⁹ Egbert Schaller, “Wisconsin Synod and CLC—A Report,” *Journal of Theology* 10 (1970) 30-31.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 30-32.

against the LCMS in 1953. The CLC representatives rejected the appropriateness of such a “state of confession.”

One gets the feeling that the meeting, though friendly and restrained, ended early with a certain sense of futility. The WELS report states, “When the CLC representatives expressed the conviction ‘that continued discussion at this meeting would lead to repetition and serve no purpose,’ the joint discussion of the agenda was concluded.”³¹

There was a further offshoot from this meeting. At the following WELS convention in 1973, this meeting was discussed and a floor committee prepared a resolution that was adopted. One of the resolutions stated: “We express regret over the failure at that meeting to reach agreement on the doctrine under discussion.”³² Subsequently the CLC picked up this convention resolution as proof that WELS recognizes a doctrinal difference between the CLC and WELS. From the WELS point of view, however, this resolution should not be used as such proof. WELS has never been able to see that there is a difference in the doctrinal principles espoused by the CLC and WELS. About the 1973 convention resolution, John Brug made this comment in his book on church fellowship: “A 1973 WELS convention resolution referring to a ‘doctrinal difference’ was an anomaly since it did not accurately reflect the wording of the report submitted by the WELS commission that had met with the CLC.”³³

1987-1990 – The “Joint Statement”

An impetus for a new round of discussions started with grassroots meetings of CLC and WELS pastors in the state of Washington in 1985, who found themselves able to come to agreement on a document called “The Separation Principle of Church Fellowship.” This document was passed on to the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) and the CLC Board of Doctrine, and it opened the door to a series of official meetings:

- June 12, 1987 in Tomah, WI
- January 13-14, 1988 in Eau Claire, WI
- February 1-2, 1989 in Milwaukee, WI
- January 31–February 1, 1990 in Milwaukee, WI
- April 5-6, 1990 in Eau Claire, WI.

Without a doubt, these meetings were the most productive of any in CLC/WELS history. In the end a document entitled “Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship Between Church Bodies” was jointly signed by the nine-man subcommittee that produced it, including three from the CLC, three from the ELS, and three from WELS.³⁴

As could be expected, these meetings focused on the role of admonition in the termination of fellowship with an erring church body. It was found that everyone agreed on the necessity of admonition prior to the termination of fellowship and the limited duration of the admonition. Everyone also agreed that fellowship needs to be broken “when it has been ascertained that a person or a church body is causing

³¹ Gerald Hoenecke, “Recent Meeting of the Board of Doctrine of the Church of the Lutheran Confession and the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 69 (1972) 282.

³² *WELS 1973 Proceedings* 93.

³³ John F. Brug, *Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1996) 92. Brug’s entire book and especially his chapter on the CLC are important reading for anyone who wants to understand the WELS point of view.

³⁴ This “Joint Statement” is attached as Appendix C at the end of this paper.

divisions and offenses ... Pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break in fellowship with those who have shown themselves to be not weak brethren but persistent errorists.”³⁵

Adding to significance of this document is the fact that the doctrinal committees of all three synods approved it in their 1990 meetings. According to the CICR report for the 1993 WELS convention, “WELS CICR discussed and approved the Joint Statement in its April 26-27, 1990, meeting. ... The ELS Doctrine Committee approved it in its May 3-4, 1990, meeting.”³⁶ In a May 25, 1990 letter, Robert Reim, the chairman of the CLC Board of Doctrine, stated that the CLC Board of Doctrine found the “substance of the Joint Statement” to be “doctrinally correct.”³⁷

With such a promising start, it is discouraging to hear how the story proceeded. The “Joint Statement” came upon a “preamble problem.”

The 1990 “preamble problem”

When the proposed “Joint Statement” went to the CLC Board of Doctrine, the CLC Board of Doctrine insisted that a preamble needed to be added. The proposed preamble read as follows:

In a meeting held on July 18-19, 1972, representatives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Church of the Lutheran Confession recognized the existence of a doctrinal difference between the two synods. The discussion demonstrated a lack of agreement in the application of the scriptural principles of church fellowship to dealings between church bodies when error or false doctrine has arisen. (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 69:4 [Oct. 1972], 281f.; *Journal of Theology*, 12:4 [Dec. 1972], 36ff.) The following statement, agreed upon by representatives of these two synods and of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in a meeting on April 5-6, 1990, is presented as a scriptural resolution of the aforementioned doctrinal difference. Any previous expressions or actions which may not be in conformity with it are hereby set aside and rejected.³⁸

This proposed preamble had actually been shared with the nine-man working group on the last day of their meeting, but was rejected. The WELS and ELS representatives had made it clear that they were not opposed to a preamble, but they didn’t want to say that there had been a doctrinal difference. WELS recognizes that there was a difference in the application of church fellowship in the 1950s, but WELS has never been able to see that there has been a clear difference in the doctrinal principles between our synods.

In 1992, the WELS and ELS representatives jointly proposed an alternate preamble that included this wording:

We, the Board of Doctrine of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have met a number of times in the hope of coming to a God-pleasing resolution of the differences between our church bodies. ...

³⁵ “Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship Between Church Bodies” (April 6, 1990) 3.

³⁶ *1993 WELS Reports and Memorials* 238. This report covering 11 pages is where the WELS perspective on the “Joint Statement” is told. It should be read by anyone interested in the WELS side of the story.

³⁷ Rollin Reim, Letter to Wilbert Gawrisch and Gaylin Schmeling (May 25, 1990). Copy in author’s files.

³⁸ *1993 WELS Reports and Memorials* 237-238.

In a joint meeting of our three full committees held in ... (place) ...(date)..., this Joint Statement was unanimously adopted for presentation to the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as a God-pleasing resolution of the differences in the matter of fellowship that have separated us for so many years. It is our firm conviction that it is in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures and expresses God's truth without reservation or compromise. This Joint Statement, therefore, when accepted by our three church bodies, supersedes any and every previous statement that might be or might appear to be in conflict with this document. Any and all such conflicting or possibly conflicting statements are herewith disavowed.³⁹

You can see that the two preambles are very similar, with one exception. The CLC preamble twice refers to the existence of a "doctrinal difference." The WELS preamble simply refers to "differences in the matter of fellowship."

WELS and ELS suggested that the subcommittees meet again to try to resolve the preamble problem. But the CLC convention in 1992 resolved to terminate discussions with WELS/ELS, since there was no agreement that there was a doctrinal difference. There never were any face-to-face meetings to try to resolve the problem of the preambles. And that is where the matter has been left—now for 25 years.

The 2014 Mankato proposal

Earlier in 2014 a series of informal meetings of some CLC, ELS, and WELS pastors from the Mankato, Minnesota area was held. The meetings started with the CLC pastors at Immanuel, Mankato visiting with some of their ELS neighbors from the top of the hill. After two sessions, a WELS pastor (the author) was invited to join.

At these sessions, there was discussion about the "Joint Statement" of 1990 and about the history behind the CLC. The sessions were very cordial and encouraging. It was the thinking of the group that it might be good for the three synods to try another round of official doctrinal discussions at this time. In September, the six pastors in the group sent a letter to the presidents of the three synods asking them to "call upon the respective doctrinal committees of the CLC, ELS, and WELS to convene jointly for formal discussions, with the 'Joint Statement' of 1990 as the starting point."

Realizing that the last discussions broke down over the addition of a "Preamble" to the "Joint Statement," the informal Mankato group also tried its hand at crafting a new "Introduction" to the "Joint Statement," and they offered it as a possible starting point for the formal discussions. Their document is attached as Appendix D to this paper.

Some personal observations

From my viewpoint—removed in time and not personally connected with the events, I will share some observations, for what they are worth. In doing so, I do not mean to denigrate anyone who was involved in the previous events. I know they were all trying to do the best they could to be faithful to the Lord and his Word. Still, there are some things that are hard for me to understand.

First, it is hard for me to understand why greater efforts were not expended in 1990 and thereafter to see if the preamble problem could be overcome. We came so close to an agreement. Couldn't we have worked a little longer to try to work through the preamble disagreement? This is where I think discussions could start today. We could start with the "Joint Statement"—to see if we still agree to it, to examine what was

³⁹ Ibid. 239-240.

behind the preamble problem, and to think about what could be done differently today in regard to a preamble.

Second, it is hard for me to understand the dogged insistence by WELS for many years that the historical record not be examined in joint meetings.⁴⁰ If this was so important to the CLC and the continuation of talks depended on it, maybe WELS could have acquiesced? I think I know what would happen if the historical record were examined. We would see that there were imperfect and confusing statements and actions on all sides in the midst of that challenging and emotionally charged decade. I'm sure there are some things on the WELS side that would make me grimace, but it seems to me that appropriate apologies and disclaimers could humbly be offered, without casting aspersions on the men who were caught up in events. If this would help the healing process, then maybe it should be done.

Finally, it is hard for me to understand why CLC men repeatedly seem to pour content into statements of WELS that go beyond what was intended. Throughout the historical record there is the repeating refrain by WELS theologians that the CLC is misunderstanding or misrepresenting them. WELS pastors read in CLC literature about the false teaching of WELS, but these WELS pastors don't know anyone in WELS who actually teaches what is ascribed to WELS. If there is to be any success in reconciliation attempts, there will be a need for the CLC to listen carefully to WELS writers and speakers, and to accept what WELS men say is the intention of their words, without putting some different interpretation on them.

What about the history?

As for the history, it seems evident to me that there have been two different streams of historical interpretation from the very beginning of the controversy in 1955. And, when you look into the two sides, you can see that each interpretation hangs together and has a certain level of validity.

According to the CLC viewpoint, the WELS conclusively identified the LCMS as heterodox in 1955, but then WELS continued to fellowship with LCMS until 1961. This action suggests that the WELS was holding to a false doctrine of church fellowship at the time. The CLC understanding of the 1955 preamble—that it continued in effect even though the resolution failed—seems to have been the way it was understood by many people in 1955, and it was reflected in some official publications immediately after the convention.

According to the WELS viewpoint, when the 1955 convention resolved not to break with LCMS, it also held in abeyance the judgment of the preamble that the LCMS was a heterodox church. Therefore WELS was not fellowshiping with a heterodox church from 1955-1961. When the WELS conclusively determined that the LCMS was heterodox in 1961, then they broke immediately. The WELS understanding of the 1955 convention may not be the way that the 1955 resolution was initially perceived by everyone, but it was the official interpretation provided consistently by WELS leaders since 1958.

This difference in historical interpretation has significance. It has been said that if the CLC view of history is correct, then WELS has been guilty of false teaching for 50+ years. If the WELS view of history is correct, then the CLC has been a schismatic church body—separated from others not on Scriptural grounds. Consequently, neither church body is eager to admit that the other's interpretation of the history is correct. And neither church, I suspect, will ever convince the other of the superiority of their historical interpretation.

⁴⁰ One possible reason why WELS leaders were leery of such a historical review is the way that discussions had gone with the Protestant Conference after 1927. The Protestants always wanted to review the history. WELS leaders found limited benefit when that was done.

But I ask: Do we have to agree on every aspect of the historical interpretation to be in fellowship? When it comes to history, no one ever knows the whole story. All that anyone is able to comprehend about history is partial. Maybe it is enough if we each charitably recognize the validity of the other's historical interpretation, and we confess that there were unfortunate, imperfect statements and actions on all sides.

From the WELS perspective it can be said that we do not fault those who founded the CLC, and we do not accuse the CLC of being schismatic. None of us knows what we would have done if we had lived in the 1950s; perhaps some of us would have joined the CLC. We admire men on both sides who courageously stood up for their convictions and followed their consciences in trying times.

From the WELS perspective the following can also be said about the history: If the impression was given in the 1950s that it is possible to identify a church as heterodox and still have fellowship—that impression was wrong. If the impression was given in the 1950s that admonition can go on and on forever with a heterodox church with no act of separation—that impression was wrong.

But—and here is the crucial point—for purposes of pursuing reconciliation and fellowship, we will have to focus on the doctrinal principles that we each hold to and teach today. In the end, we will have to determine if we teach and practice the same thing on the basis of God's Word. Unity will need to be founded on a commitment to Bible doctrine and practice, not historical interpretation.

And in regard to the history, as a recent letter in *Forward in Christ* stated, it may be necessary “for members of both synods to exercise a great deal of godly ‘amnesia’ about wrongs and perceived wrongs of the past,” if God-pleasing fellowship is to be re-established.⁴¹

Final thoughts – from Prof. E. C. Fredrich

As a student of Professor Edward C. Fredrich at Mequon, I still remember his lecture about the CLC. As a young pastor, he was the secretary of the WELS floor committee at the 1957 convention. Since he was personally involved in the chaos of the conflict and saw the damage, he said he regularly prayed that someday the logjam between the CLC and WELS could be overcome. He encouraged us to do the same. He wrote briefly about this in a *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* article in 1977, and I suspect that his sentiments still resonate within the hearts of many in WELS:

That the difference has not diminished in 1961 or the years since then but has actually seemed to harden into an irreducible gap, is reason to reflect and regret.

We ought to do all in our power to help prevent that solidification in perpetuity. It should be remembered that back in the 1940s and early 1950s it was Missouri that erred, neither the present members of the CLC nor Wisconsin. Somehow, however, between these two a conflict ensued...

The essayist will always be one who hopes that everything will be done that can be done in order to bring the CLC and WELS together again. Perhaps fruitful discussion is ruled out for the present. That need not hinder each one of us from praying fervently for such a desirable outcome.

The worst that could happen would be for us to freeze the cold, bleak situation of the present into a permanent state of affairs by assuming no more prayers and no more efforts on our part are needed or wanted.⁴²

⁴¹ Michael Thom, “Feedback,” *Forward in Christ*, 101:8 (August 2014) 6.

⁴² Edward C. Fredrich, “Interchurch Relations in Recent Years,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 74 (1977) 239-240.

Appendix A

This report was drawn up for the Protest Committee upon the request of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union. On June 16, 1958, it was sent to the Protest Committee without a previous opportunity of presenting it to the Committee on Matters of Church Union for approval. On October 21, 1958, the Union Committee, however, reviewed this report and adopted it as the report of the Committee. The Union Committee also resolved to have copies of this report prepared and sent to all pastors and male teachers throughout the Synod.

Carl Lawrenz, Chairman of the Executive Committee

A REPORT TO THE PROTEST COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union shares the deep concern of the Protest Committee for all the brethren in our midst who have been led by their consciences to protest the 1957 resolution of our Synod concerning our relations with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and who consequently are also in protest against the continued discussions which the Union Committee is carrying out in the joint meetings of the doctrinal unity committees of the Synodical Conference.

We would like to remove what troubles the protesting brethren and allay their apprehensions, so that they might again be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with us in upholding our testimony on the divisive issues which have arisen between our Synod and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We feel the deep urgency for this all the more keenly because we are convinced that we still have a common stand with all the protestors on the issues themselves; thus we long for an understanding with them.

This longing arises, first of all, out of a deep fraternal concern for our protesting brethren, whose continued fellowship is not a light matter with us. But our longing for an understanding arises likewise out of a deep need of our own, as members of our Synod's Union Committee in pursuing the responsibility which our Synod has placed upon us of continuing our discussions with Missouri. For as we continue our effort to break through with our stand on the issues in the Synodical Conference we would appreciate the full support also of our protesting brethren, instead of having our testimony weakened in the eyes of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by the appearance that there is no longer harmony and unity in our midst on the stand that we represent over against Missouri. Moreover, we deplore any needless disharmony in our own midst that would discourage and arrest a growth of understanding in our own Synod concerning the divisive issues present in the Synodical Conference, concerning their continued seriousness, and concerning the great need of resolving them.

Because of these considerations we would plead with our protesting brethren that they would give full thought to what we in turn feel constrained by our conscience to say in respect to some of the main points of their protests.

I. WHAT WAS THE IMPORT OF OUR SAGINAW RESOLUTION?

One point that seems to be basic in the protests of a great number of brethren is this that they are convinced that our Synod was disobedient to the Word of God in holding the vote on the Saginaw resolution up for a year. It is their conviction that the Synod placed the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. by the unanimous adoption of the preamble and then arbitrarily postponed for a year the avoiding which should certainly follow immediately when an individual or a body has been

placed under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. We can understand that the conscience of anyone who thinks of the Synod's action at Saginaw in this manner would be troubled.

We plead, however, with the protesting brethren who hold this view to face the question anew: Did our Synod at Saginaw conclusively put the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f.?

As a Synod we indeed stated in the preamble that on the basis of all the fruitless, official discussions with Missouri, its past convention resolutions, and the final *Lutheran Witness* articles of President Behnken, Rom. 16:17f. would have to be applied. Yet the Synod resolved not to vote, not to reach a decision on this resolution, until the Missouri Synod had had another opportunity to speak in delegate convention. Our Synod wanted to be sure whether the added testimony which had been brought on our part during a period of three years had not made an impact on the Missouri Synod at large, even though it had not changed the stand of the Praesidium, and of the Missouri Synod's official representatives with whom our Union Committee had had an opportunity to deal. Our Synod was not willing to put the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. until it had also heard the official stand of that Synod over against our charges reconfirmed by another delegate convention.

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw was not merely the "avoiding," the breaking of fellowship, enjoined in Rom. 16:17f., but also the conclusive application of the very judgment of this passage, namely the judgment that the Missouri Synod was persistent in causing divisions and offenses, Not merely the judgment expressed in the resolution and the action recommended by it, but also the judgment expressed in the preamble was held in abeyance, pending the examination of the added bit of evidence desired by the majority of our Synod's delegates, namely the answer of the subsequent Missouri Synod convention upon our charges.

Who would want to say that the Saginaw resolutions did not leave room for greater clarity? But those who were there know the lengthy debate and discussion that was devoted to the problem and are conscious of the fact that the final decision was made in the closing hours of the convention. Thus they understand that there was no opportunity for editorial revisions in the interest of full clarity. The above interpretation given to the Saginaw resolutions is the only one that can make any sense. This was therefore also the official interpretation that was given to them by our Praesidium, by our Union Committee in its St. Paul report, and by our subsequent synodical convention at Watertown.

Now we need to remember that when we found unclarities in the wording of the Missouri Synod resolutions on the CC [Common Confession] in 1950, the very resolutions that we were asked to evaluate, and that when we met with different interpretations on the part of Missouri Synod constituents, we operated exclusively with the official interpretation given by its Praesidium, its Doctrinal Unity Committee, and its subsequent conventions. We need to do the same thing in respect to our own synodical resolutions. When, upon our Union Committee's evaluation of the Missouri Synod's St. Paul convention resolutions, our Synod at Watertown took up the Saginaw resolution anew, it resolved to hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolution in abeyance until the next convention, not merely the matter of breaking fellowship.

At our convention at New Ulm in 1957 our Synod again held the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. in abeyance. Neither at Saginaw, nor at Watertown, nor at New Ulm, did our Synod vote on whether it wanted to be obedient to Rom. 16:17f. No synod of Christians could presume to vote on such a matter. It did vote on the question whether in the Missouri Synod we have a church body falling under the indictment of Rom. 16:17f., which calls for a breaking of fellowship.

We earnestly feel therefore that there need not, and there should not, be a division between us on this

point. We are not finding fault with those who at Saginaw did not understand the resolutions in this way, who were earnestly troubled, and who therefore felt constrained to express this in the form of a protest. But a synod does have a right to interpret resolutions through its praesidium and through its subsequent conventions; and the nature of a resolution that it has previously passed will from time to time make it necessary for a synod to exercise that right, so that there may be clarity; and we shall want to welcome that clarity, even though we may personally feel that another interpretation had better warrant than the one that has officially been given and that now obtains.

II. IS THE APPLICATION OF ROM. 16:17f. TO THE MISSOURI SYNOD SIMPLY A MATTER OF OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD?

Others among our protesting brethren may be ready to grant the previous point that on the basis of the official interpretation which now obtains both the preamble and the resolution of the Saginaw report were held in abeyance. They question, however, whether our Synod at Saginaw, or at the two subsequent conventions, had any right to hold that judgment in abeyance: They question whether the matter of applying Rom. 16:17f. to Missouri leaves room at all for any human judgment, and thus whether it could properly be put to a synodical vote in the ordinary sense in which such a vote calls for the expression of a human judgment. For them the application of Rom. 16:17f. to the Missouri Synod is simply a matter of obedience to the Word of God. Hence they are inclined to think of the synodical vote in terms of a confession which merely expressed willingness or unwillingness to be bound by God's Word. Since they see an unwillingness to be bound by the Word of God, though not necessarily a conscious one, in the majority vote of our Synod, they have been led to protest against it.

In view of their conception of the import of the synodical vote that was taken, we can indeed understand their protest. Yet, here again we plead with our protesting brethren to face the question: Is there not an area of human judgment involved before a Christian comes to the conviction concerning a brother who has fallen into error that he can no longer treat him as a weak brother, to whom he owes further patient admonition, but that he must now be treated as a persistent errorist, from whom the Lord bids him to withdraw all further fellowship? Yes, we ask them to face the question: Is there not an area of human judgment involved before a church body comes to the conviction concerning a sister synod which has become involved in error of doctrine or practice that it is now no longer to be made the object of further patient admonition, but that it is now to be treated as a persistently erring church body, with whom further fellowship must be terminated?

The fact that an individual or a church body has fallen into an error of doctrine or practice, or even the fact that the individual or the church body still defends that error of doctrine or practice, is not yet in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship. Rather both facts may still be inducements for practicing this fellowship most vigorously in efforts to overcome the error and its defense. Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.

We will surely all grant that when we deal with an individual erring brother in our congregational work, we know of no simple mechanical formula by which we can come to the conviction that he now ceases to be a weak brother and must be regarded and treated as a persistent errorist. We know that we can come to such a conviction only by earnest and prayerful use of our Christian judgment in evaluating all the details and factors of the case. We also know that if a whole congregation is to reach a decision as to what to do with such an erring brother, they must jointly come to the conviction by the use of their Christian judgment that everything that can be done in the way of admonition has been carried out and that therefore there is nothing left but to part ways with him. Even so, they are not all likely to come to this conviction at one and the same time. Surely then when a church body has become involved in error, a church body in which there will always be a number of different trends in evidence and striving for

mastery, one trend supporting the error and fostering it, another still testifying against it, it will take an even richer exercise of Christian judgment to come to a decision in the matter. If not only an individual is to come to a conviction concerning such an erring church body, but a whole synod of Christians is to come to that conviction and is to express it jointly, all involved will have to exercise their Christian judgment. Here again it is not at all likely that they will all come to this conviction at quite the same time. All these considerations will be kept in mind in dealing with erring individuals and church bodies.

This is what our Synod sought to do at Bethesda, at Saginaw, at Watertown, and at New Ulm. In each case the majority of our synodical delegates, while recognizing the divisive nature of the issues, were not yet able to come to the conviction that everything had been done in the way of patient admonition and that the Missouri Synod must now be treated as a persistently erring church body, henceforth to be avoided. Those voting in the minority, and others who did not happen to have voting rights at the conventions, did not share that judgment, and no one can deprive them of their right to their own judgment.

Yet to become unwilling to abide by the prevailing judgment, they would have to be convinced in their own conscience that they could bring and did bring conclusive proof that the judgment which had prevailed was necessarily wrong and sinful. For if their own judgment had prevailed, they, too, would have expected those who had not yet come to the conviction that a termination of fellowship was called for, to abide by the prevailing judgment or to be firmly convinced in their own conscience that they could and did offer conclusive proof that a severance of fellowship at this time was wrong and sinful.

We dare never forget that it is the Lord who has also drawn us together with other Christians in congregations and synods, and that in dealing jointly with those with whom the Lord has drawn us together we cannot simply foist our judgments, no matter how correct we may think they are, upon our brethren, nor can we break away from our brethren if our judgments are not shared by them when we think that they ought to be shared, as long as there is no open disobedience to God's Word in evidence on their part. From what has previously been said, it should be needless to say that it is a different matter when one is convinced that he can conclusively show that the prevailing judgment which he is asked to endure is clearly wrong and sinful.

III. WAS THERE ANY WARRANT FOR HOLDING THE JUDGMENT OF THE SAGINAW RESOLUTION IN ABEYANCE AFTER THE ST. PAUL CONVENTION?

Granting even the previous point, our protesting brethren may probably ask: Was there anything in the answer of Missouri at their St. Paul convention that warranted holding the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. upon the Missouri Synod in abeyance at Watertown, and again at New Ulm?

At Saginaw our Synod had stated in its preamble that all the evidence before us at that time through the Missouri Synod's past convention resolutions, and the stand of its official committees and its Praesidium, would necessitate our placing the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. Hence the past forums of discussion were discontinued, and a resolution to terminate fellowship was drawn up to be acted upon after having received the answer of another delegate convention of the Missouri Synod.

After evaluating pertinent St. Paul resolutions of the Missouri Synod as they pertained to membership in the Lutheran World Federation, to the CC, and to intersynodical relations, the majority of our Union Committee, including some who at Saginaw had strongly advocated a break, recommended to our Synod "not to close the door to further discussions at this time" but prayerfully to await the outcome of added efforts at attaining unity in the issues, efforts for which the Missouri Synod had pleaded in its convention resolutions, and

in the meantime to hold our Saginaw resolution in abeyance (Proceedings, Recessed Session of the 33rd Convention, 1956, pp. 52-57).

Through the St. Paul convention a change had been brought about in one of the divisive issues listed in our Saginaw report, namely in the CC. Our Union Committee stated in its St. Paul evaluation that the pertinent resolution of the Missouri Synod had in essence supplied the action which our Synod had specifically requested in its objections to the Missouri Synod's 1950 resolutions on the CC. What was meant was this that the Missouri Synod had set the CC aside as a settlement of the past controversies between the Missouri Synod and the ALC in the doctrines treated therein.

Our Synod at Watertown let this change in the status of the CC be one of the factors that induced it to hold the Saginaw resolution in abeyance until the next convention. Yet our Synod did so, pending further confirmation on the part of the Missouri Synod that our Synod's evaluation and understanding of the pertinent resolutions were correct.

Our Synod at Watertown indeed admitted that in the practical issues, all of which involved a unionistic trend, there had not yet been a change evident in the Missouri Synod's stand. It was, however, heartened by the Missouri Synod's earnest plea to discuss these matters anew, and this all the more since the Missouri Synod had made a fine expression of fellowship principles in declining membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

In the interval of a year between our recessed convention at Watertown and our 1957 New Ulm convention, the Synodical Conference had established a new form for the renewed discussion of the controversial issues, namely, the forum of the doctrinal unity committees of the four constituent synods. This joint committee had set up a mutually satisfactory program for discussing the issues. It had not found it possible to establish as a common premise that all the issues which we had listed in our charges against the Missouri Synod were in their very nature divisive, since in several instances that in itself seemed to be a point of controversy. It had, however, pledged mutual willingness to come to grips with all the controversial issues without equivocation or evasion.

The actual discussion of the controversial issues had not yet progressed far enough at the time of the New Ulm convention to permit any conclusive judgment as to whether they would be successful. The presentations on Scripture, Revelation, Inspiration, to the extent that they had been discussed, seemed to hold out the promise of agreement.

Upon our Union Committee's request the Missouri Synod Praesidium had supplied answers to further questions concerning the import of a number of St. Paul resolutions of the Missouri Synod, also those affecting the CC. At the time of our New Ulm convention our Union Committee felt that even these answers still left something wanting in full clarity. The majority of our Union Committee was, however, of the opinion that these answers did sustain our Synod's evaluation of the Missouri Synod's CC resolutions at St. Paul, while a minority in our Union Committee did not find itself able to share this opinion. On the other hand there were a number of endeavors in which official committees of the Missouri Synod were currently active, particularly in connection with the Lutheran World Federation convention, which seemed to point to a continuation of a unionistic trend and raised grave apprehensions in the minds of our delegates at New Ulm. Still the majority of our representatives at the New Ulm convention were of the conviction that not enough had happened since Watertown to warrant reversing the resolution passed there to hold the Saginaw resolution in abeyance.

IV. WHAT JUSTIFICATION IS THERE FOR CONTINUING OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH MISSOURI NOW?

Some of our protesting brethren, who are still willing to let the New Ulm decision of our Synod stand, although it did not represent their own judgment, nevertheless ask: What have the subsequent meetings of the joint union committees revealed that still justifies a continuation of the discussions?

As far as the CC is concerned, we have, in the opinion of the Union Committee, received further assurance in the meantime from the Missouri Synod Praesidium that the St. Paul resolutions on the CC do mean that the CC is no longer to be regarded or employed as a settlement of the controversies that existed between the ALC and the Missouri Synod. It was explained that not merely the fact that the ALC may soon cease to exist as a separate church body, but also the fact that the ALC has been willing to settle for the unacceptable United Testimony of Faith and Life in merging with the ELC and the UELC has led the Missouri Synod to conclude that the CC would now no longer be adequate as a settlement of the past controversies and hence can no longer serve as a functioning document for establishing church fellowship with anyone.

Our Union Committee did not feel a need of pressing for an answer to the question whether the Missouri Synod is now also ready to admit that the CC also at no time during 1950-1957 was an adequate settlement of the past controversies. It is our conviction that what our Synod was concerned about since 1950 was this that the CC had official status in Missouri as a settlement of the past controversies in the doctrines treated therein. As long as that official status of the CC obtained, we were conscience bound to testify concerning the inadequacy of the CC as such a settlement, lest the confessional stand of the Synodical Conference on the pertinent doctrines be undermined and made uncertain. If the CC now no longer has that official status of a settlement of the past controversies between the ALC and the Missouri Synod, the inadequacy of the CC ceases to be a controversial issue in this respect.

There is, however, still this fact to be considered that the status of the CC in the past, with its inadequate statements, could have weakened and undermined the Scriptural understanding of the doctrines involved in our own circles and also made it unclear to those outside of our Synodical Conference circles whether this body as a whole still holds to the full Scriptural position on these doctrines as this was true in the past. For this reason it remains a vital part of the program of the Joint Union Committees to set up, both thetically and antithetically, a detailed joint confession on these articles, e.g. inspiration, justification, conversion, election, Antichrist, Church and ministry, articles concerning which we held that they had not been set forth adequately in the CC. We feel that this method will do more to reestablish within and without our circles just where the Synodical Conference stands confessionally on these doctrines than would even a resolution of a Missouri Synod convention stating that the CC was an inadequate settlement in 1950.

Our Joint Union Committees are ready to present such a comprehensive joint confession on Scripture and Inspiration to the August convention of the Synodical Conference and are convinced that it speaks clearly in all the matters not adequately covered by the pertinent treatment in the CC. Our Union Committee has hope that similarly satisfactory joint statements on other doctrines involved in the CC issue can be drawn up.

In the Scout issue the extensive discussions of the joint Union Committees have not yet progressed beyond this that the points of agreement and the points of disagreement have been drawn up and will be presented in a further report to the Synodical Conference. Also here the mutual pledge to come to grips with the issues without evasion or equivocation has been in evidence in the discussions.

The area of fellowship principles and fellowship practice, involving also the issue of Church and

ministry, remains to be taken up. Our Synod has repeatedly asserted at its various conventions that it sees a unionistic trend at work behind all the controversial issues that have arisen between it and the Missouri Synod. Since our Union Committee also agrees with this view, it is also of the opinion that our real work of resolving the issues will face us as we come to grips with the matter of fellowship principles and the issues of Church and ministry, and that, until we have thoroughly discussed these matters and are able to evaluate the outcome, it will be impossible to come to any definite convictions concerning our future fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod. It is my opinion that until that time the members of the Union Committee would not feel free in their conscience to terminate these discussions, now that they have been initiated and carried on with an evident willingness to come to grips with the issues.

Appendix B

An Open Letter to the Protest Committee, Wisconsin Synod

by Edmund C. Reim

(The letter which follows is chiefly concerned with the reply which I owe to the Protest Committee. In giving it Synod-wide distribution, I am moved only in part by the fact that by resolution of the General Synodical Committee the "Report to the Protest Committee" supplied by Prof. Lawrenz is to be distributed to all pastors and male teachers of the Synod. I am also moved by sincere concern for those who were once my brethren.

I know that this will by some be construed as agitation and interference. This reproach I am willing to bear. To those, however, who are ready to consider the matter, I offer the assurance that what I have written has been said with the sincere intention of aiding the reader to arrive at the truth by studying this presentation of the "other side" of the case.)

Rhineland, Wis.
October 29, 1958

To the Members of the Protest Committee
Pastor Leonard H. Koeninger, Chairman
1101 So. Eighth St.
Manitowoc, Wis.

Dear Len:

First of all, let me acknowledge receipt of the letter which you and your committee have sent to all protesting members and ex-members of the Wisconsin Synod. I note the obvious sincerity of your closing paragraph in which you plead with those of us who have severed our relations with the Synod to reconsider the step which we felt bound to take. Nor am I insensible to the warmth of those paragraphs of Lawrenz's letter which you quote in this connection. Nothing would please me more than such a solution—if it could be done without violating the very conscience and the very principles for the sake of which I have chosen the lonely way of separation from a Synod which for so many years I have tried faithfully to serve. You must surely realize, however, that this is not possible on the basis which you and your committee outline.

As you state the case, it is we who have separated or who are protesting the course of Synod who are guilty of weakening Wisconsin's testimony in the eyes of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by the appearance that there is no longer harmony and unity in the stand over against Missouri. That Wisconsin's stand has been weakened, I will grant indeed! I neither will nor can grant, however, that this has been done by our recent action and protest. Has it been forgotten how President Brenner's letter to the 1953 (Houston) convention of the Missouri Synod (sent with the full approval of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, and with the unqualified endorsement of the General Synodical Committee) was virtually disavowed by the adoption of the first of those sorry resolutions of postponement and procrastination (Watertown-Bethesda, 1953) which have progressively weakened what had once been spoken of with some respect as "the Wisconsin Position"? Has it been forgotten how Saginaw spoke boldly in its Preamble, and then shrank back from decisive action in regard to its Resolution? And how New Ulm capped the climax by rejecting in its entirety the recommendation of its Floor Committee

(which felt conscience-bound to call for suspension of church fellowship with Missouri “lest our own Wisconsin Synod be affected by the same unionistic spirit which finally weakens and destroys all true doctrine and leads to indifference and liberalism concerning Scriptural truth.”)! Can subsequent protests and even withdrawals “weaken” a testimony, the effectiveness of which has already been destroyed by these official Synodical actions?

Since your report, however, places the burden of responsibility on those of us who have protested these actions, it practically compels a reply. Therefore, even though such a course is utterly distasteful to me, I find myself constrained to answer publicly both your report and the letter of Prof. Lawrenz which it quotes so liberally. And since your report is receiving wide circulation, and Prof. Lawrenz’s letter even wider, I see no other way of meeting the situation which has thus been created than to make this, my reply, an Open Letter—reserving to myself the decision as to how widely it shall be circulated. In doing so, I shall for convenience follow the outline of the Lawrenz letter.

I. “What was the import of our Saginaw Resolution?”

Under this heading we are asked “to face the question anew: Did our Synod at Saginaw conclusively (original emphasis) put the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f.?” We are told (page 2) that not merely the judgment expressed in the resolution and the action recommended by it, but also the judgment expressed in the preamble was held in abeyance, pending the examination of added evidence desired. This thought is repeated on page 5:

At Saginaw our Synod had stated in its preamble that all the evidence before us at that time . . . would necessitate our placing the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. [Here as well as in most other cases the emphasis is mine. After this I shall restrict myself to indicating original emphasis when it occurs in direct quotations. E.R.]

I hold that this is beside the point. Surely the real issue is not whether Synod has been consistent in its course, or whether the interpretation that is offered “makes sense”, but rather whether the course that has been followed is right, whether it is true to Scripture. I could, therefore, go on to the next point, which raises the real question, were it not that this argument has apparently made such a profound impression on your committee, and is cutting such a wide swath in the Synod. I will grant that this is now becoming “the official interpretation,” and must be accepted as such. It is now the only basis on which one can deal with Synod. But does that make it right? Isn’t there a difference between objective fact and subjective interpretation—which is so often governed by wishful thinking?

Let me state clearly that I do not imply that Prof. Lawrenz has reached his conclusions in this manner. I distinctly recall an occasion (in May of 1957, as our Standing Committee was preparing its report for New Ulm) when I said to him that now it becomes clear to me that we had been operating with two different interpretations of the Saginaw resolution. He agreed. (I am also reminded of something that I had long forgotten, an incident at the Watertown convention of 1956, where I had stated that in order to be consistent and to clear the record Synod ought to repeal its Saginaw resolution because of the judgment expressed—to which Prof. Lawrenz replied that this would not be necessary since that judgment was not a conclusive one. The full significance of these remarks must have escaped me at the time.)

I fully believe, therefore, that what the Professor is offering now is what has been in his mind since Saginaw. But I also believe that my failure to note this sooner was not due solely to obtuseness on my part. Your committee admits that it, as well as many others, “did not understand it that way at the time” (page 3). That your earlier views were perhaps closer to the real situation than your present thinking will, I believe, become clear as one reviews certain facts as they stand in the record. They leave little room for

the idea that the Saginaw Preamble dealt with a situation where the evidence was still incomplete, and a conclusive verdict could therefore not yet be rendered. I ask you to consider:

A. The immediate context of the Floor Committee's report.

The Floor Committee had before it the report of the Standing Committee which, after mentioning a few considerations that might seem to counsel further delay, stated:

F. We have, however, arrived at the firm conviction that, because of the divisions and offenses that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed, further postponement of a decision would be a violation of the apostolic injunction of Romans 16:17 (I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them). (Proceedings, 1955, p. 79)

The Floor Committee had also heard President Naumann's Opening Address:

The charges which we brought in an effort to do our brotherly duty before God, have been definitely denied. We have reached the conviction that through these differences divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: "Avoid them."

For those of us who have been closest to these problems, it appears quite definite that we must now obey the Lord's Words in Romans 16:17. (Proceedings 1955, p. 13)

B. The text of the Floor Committee's Report

Three sentences out of the Preamble have been quoted many times. Permit me to repeat them, but also to add a fourth which follows a few lines farther down, and which I shall set off by renewing the quotations marks.

"A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also become subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing." (Proceedings, 1955, p. 85)

"In view of these facts your Floor Committee, together with the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, affirms 'our position that the Missouri Synod . . . has brought about a break in relations, and that our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter.'" (Proceedings, 1955, p. 86)

C. The text of the resolution

Leaving aside for the moment the committee's suggestion to postpone a vote until a later day, let me ask you to consider the simple text of the proposed resolution.

RESOLVED, 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." (Proceedings, 1955, p. 86)

D. The reasons given for the postponement

It is true indeed that the committee report calls for a postponement of the vote on the proposed resolution. But was it because the evidence was not yet complete? Concerning this deferment of action the committee itself says:

We recommend this course of action for the following reasons:

1. This resolution has far reaching consequences.
2. 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." (Proceedings, 1955, p. 86)

Surely, if need for further evidence was one of the reasons for postponement, that would have had to be said at this point, particularly after the strong statements of the Standing Committee and the President's Report, and in view of the stern judgment of the resolution. Nor should the dissent of a substantial minority of the committee be overlooked:

We, the undersigned members of the Floor Committee, although we are in full agreement with the Preamble and the resolution to terminate fellowship, are of the conviction that the reasons stated for delay do not warrant postponement of action upon the resolution." (Proceedings, 1955, p. 86f.)

If the point at issue in this difference within the committee itself was that there still was need for further evidence, how could this have escaped mention in the foregoing quotations? If after the Standing Committee's pointed words (that further postponement would be a violation of Romans 16), and after the emphatic "now" of President Naumann (we must now obey the Lord's Word) the Floor Committee mean to plead insufficient evidence as the cause for the delay, would they not have said so in plain words? Yes, if the evidence was not yet all in, how could they formulate a verdict so stern as that of the Preamble—to say nothing of reporting it publicly? How could they even arrive at a verdict?

May I venture to suggest that your Protest Committee was a bit hasty in adopting Prof. Lawrenz's interpretation? It is after all an interpretation which is not borne out by a careful examination of the record.

Bear with me if in this connection I introduce one more point, one that I mention reluctantly because it involves me personally, but one that is nevertheless a part of the public record. I refer to my protest offered after the adoption of the Saginaw resolution, of which I need quote only the first part.

The decision of the Synod to continue its fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pending a vote to follow the convention of that body in 1956 (even while recognizing that there is full reason for a separation now) compels me to declare that I can continue fellowship with my Synod only under clear and public protest. (Proceedings, 1955, p. 87)

For our present discussion let me emphasize the parenthetical remark, "(even while recognizing that there is full reason for a separation now)." If further evidence was needed before Synod could speak conclusively, would that not have been the obvious answer to my protest? If Synod was not recognizing that there was full reason for a separation at that time, would that not have been the conclusive reply?

I am ready to make full allowance for the fact that all this came up during the closing hours of the convention, and that this answer might not immediately have occurred to those who had advocated passage of the resolution. It was a trying situation for them also. But if my protest was based upon a misunderstanding on my part of the true meaning of the Saginaw resolution, how is it that a few weeks

later, when there had been time for ample reflection, the entire Standing Committee, with the addition of the chairman of the Floor Committee of Saginaw, spent the better part of an afternoon session in trying to persuade me to reconsider my protest, without once pointing out this oversight on my part—if an oversight it was? How explain the fact that for another two years our entire Seminary faculty lived and worked with me without at least trying to open my eyes to this simple solution?

I have gone at some length into these points which I believe your Protest Committee has overlooked in arriving at its present position, and am convinced that your conclusions therefore are premature. Even as you ask me to reconsider my action, so let me ask you to go into this entire matter once more. I still believe that, on the basis of the record, you will find that the thesis of Prof. Lawrenz, which was certainly latent in his mind ever since the events of Saginaw, matured quite gradually (as such things do), and began to emerge into public view only as we were approaching the crisis of 1957. Since both the final development by its author and its eager acceptance by so many others fall into the period when it became imperative to find what is called "an interpretation that makes sense," is it not possible that the natural human desire to "rationalize" a bad situation has played a part in all this? Isn't the real question before you not whether the interpretation, but whether the original action of Saginaw made sense? My contention, and I think that of most protesters, is that it did not.

II. "Is the application of Rom. 16:17f. to the Missouri Synod simply a matter of obedience to the Word of God?" (Lawrenz letter, p. 3)

Frankly, I wince at the formulation of the question. Are we beginning to operate with the idea of a qualified obedience? I shall come back to this later.

But in the meantime let me ask whether your Protest Committee sustains the way in which Prof. Lawrenz describes the thinking of those of us who would answer his above question in the affirmative? Do we "question whether the matter of applying Rom. 16:17f. to Missouri leaves room at all for any human judgment"? Is the record of the many years of patient dealing with Missouri to be so lightly set aside? Surely, the very duration of these dealings shows that we knew "of no simple mechanical formula" which we might apply, but were trying to see the problem in its full scope and with all its implications, in the meantime exercising the best judgment of which we were capable (or, to quote your adviser, (page 4) coming to such conviction "only by earnest and prayerful use of our Christian judgment in evaluating all the details and factors of the case."). Nor was there any lack during all this time of "efforts to overcome the error and its defense." They were made in committee, in local conferences, in the form of direct communications to the Praesidium and the conventions of the sister synod, as well as in the forum of the Synodical Conference which, among other things, had been created for that very purpose. And when after all these efforts the Standing Committee finally presented its findings to the Saginaw convention, and when President Naumann formulated his Opening Address—surely, this all was done only after the most careful thought and judgment, even as this must be assumed also for the procedure of the Floor Committee and the convention itself with regard to the Preamble. The protests that followed the action of postponement were not against the judgment that had been exercised, but against the mounting delay—even as present protests do not object to judgment in its proper place, but against making the plea for an area of judgment to become the basis for further (and sometimes almost interminable) postponement of decision and action.

Judgment indeed, but judgment of the most patient and careful kind, as long as we are studying the question of whether Romans 16:17 applies to a given case. But when that has been determined, when a Synod speaks as ours did at Saginaw (quoted in the foregoing section), when official word is sent out "that this passage does apply to the Missouri Synod because of its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices" (post-convention News Bulletin, submitted to and approved by President Naumann before release by the Board for Information and Stewardship), when the Northwestern Lutheran in its post-

convention number reports the unanimous adoption of "the Preamble, which reiterated the 1953 charges of our Synod and applied Romans 16:17-18,"—when the situation becomes so clear, then surely the Synod has by its own words recognized that it has passed out of the area of judgment into that of action, and that now simple obedience is indeed the only Scriptural course that is left, since it has been compelled to conclude that it has been dealing with "causers" of divisions and offenses. Does that leave any alternative but to "avoid"? Is it not an injection of a foreign, man-made thought into the simple sense of Rom. 16:17-18 to say that "termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."? (Lawrenz letter, foot of p. 4) After all, the passage in question states that this is to be done when one has "marked" (noted, identified, recognized) them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned.

It is also argued that the judgment of the Preamble could not have been conclusive because further evidence was desired. In this connection let me ask only whether it is a question of what we "desire," when the evidence was already conclusive—and was officially recognized as such? Can we improve upon the method of the Lord? Saul tried that, I Samuel 15,—and was rejected.

III. "Was there any warrant for holding the judgment of the Saginaw resolution in abeyance after the St. Paul convention?" (Lawrenz letter, p. 4)

At this point most of the signers of the protests that are before you will probably disagree with me when I say that there was such warrant. But when I say that, I do not place these three resolutions (Saginaw, Watertown, New Ulm) on a par with each other, as the Lawrenz letter does. Nor can I let the statement stand that our Union Committee in its St. Paul report operated with what is now offered as the official interpretation of the Saginaw resolution (Lawrenz letter, p. 8) Let me explain.

In 1956 our Synod faced an anomalous situation, finding itself in a sort of no-man's land of its own creation, caught by the consequences of the failure at Saginaw to match its words with action. Now came Missouri's St. Paul convention with its resolutions, some of which might mean what we were hoping for, some of which sounded a note of humility and regret that might possibly be an expression of genuine repentance. Faint though these possibilities were, they made it impossible to advocate a break without leaving a nagging doubt as to whether a genuine offer had not perhaps been rejected, whether a smoking flax had not perhaps been quenched. Not until the meaning of those doubtful resolutions had been further explored could Synod act with certainty. Hence the recommendation of the Standing Committee, which is also incorporated in the Watertown resolution, "to hold in abeyance." That this is not simply a continuance of the policy of Saginaw should be clear. There is was a matter of postponing a decision "because further evidence was desired," where the sufficiency of the evidence had already been acknowledged by the acceptance of the Preamble without a dissenting vote. At Watertown, however, the Synod was confronted with a new situation. That is why the resolution does not read, "that we continue to hold in abeyance," but simply, "that we hold in abeyance." This is why, without seeking to attribute my view to any of my fellow-protesters, I do believe that there was warrant for the Watertown resolution (which did not, however, envision the prolonged postponement which is now in effect).

That this does not hold good for the New Ulm postponement is demonstrated by the replies received from the Missouri Praesidium to our inquiries concerning the meaning of certain of the St. Paul resolutions, particularly those concerning the Common Confession. It should not be forgotten that the Watertown resolution, "to hold in abeyance," was based on certain premises which were spoken of as the irreducible minimum of which we must be assured in answer to our inquiries. They follow:

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod resolved "that hereafter the

Common Confession (Parts I and II) be not regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies"; and

WHEREAS, we understand this to mean that thereby the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's 1950 resolutions concerning the Common Confession have been set aside (Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1951, page 117, Resolution No. 14, the first and third Resolved). (Proceedings, 1956, p. 60—quoted from N-Wis. District Supplement)

Twice during the time between the 1956 and 1957 conventions the Missouri Praesidium was asked whether we may assume the above to have been the meaning of the Missouri resolution. It was indeed a serious breach in the ranks of the Standing Committee when the majority held "that the expressed attitude of the representatives of the Missouri Synod 'still gives us some reason to hope for the eventual settlement of the differences'," while a minority (including both Prof. Lawrenz and myself) felt constrained to state "that the major basis upon which we resolved to enter into further discussion with the Missouri Synod has been removed." (as quoted by the chairman of the Floor Committee in his "Introductory Remarks"—Proceedings, 1957, p. 141f) Recognizing this situation as well as other points mentioned in the report of the Standing Committee, the Floor Committee spoke of itself as "conscience bound to declare publicly, that these principles, policies, and practices create a division between our Synods which the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod alone can remove," and followed this with its resolution to suspend church fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. (Proceedings, 1957, p. 143)

I submit that in spite of the common denominator of postponement, there is no warrant for placing these three resolutions on a par with each other, or to argue for any recognizable measure of consistency in their respective implications.

IV. What justification is there for continuing our discussions with Missouri now? (Lawrenz letter, p. 6)

It is at this point that Prof. Lawrenz makes his strongest appeal, introducing a record of achievement, pointing to marks of progress, raising the guarded hope of better things to come for those who have been troubled about the events of the last few years. Above all, he offers the comforting assurance that nothing less than full agreement will satisfy, by quoting the expressed determination of the Committee "to come to grips with the issues without evasion or equivocation."—But what about the record? As I read it, the foundation for all this guarded optimism is the success that is claimed for the Committee's efforts to dispose of the inadequacy of the Common Confession as a controversial issue. But has the Committee actually achieved such signal success? Let me point to two simple facts.

A. The Committee has substantially scaled down the stipulation of the Watertown convention (with its irreducible minimum).

The premise upon which the Watertown resolution was based has been quoted above, in Part III. For the tracing of the subsequent developments let me set excerpts from the Committee's successive questions and the corresponding answers of the Missouri Praesidium into parallel columns.

QUESTIONS	ANSWER
1. Does the first "Resolved" . . . set aside and replace Resolution 14 . . . of 1950? (Proceedings, 1957, p. 132)	1. The 1950 resolutions remain true in the 1950 setting of negotiations and are therefore upheld in this setting. <u>Synod has not set them aside or replaced them</u> . The "recent historical developments," however, have induced Synod to

	<p>set aside the Common Confession . . . as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies. (Proceedings, 1957, p. 132)</p>
<p>2. Does the action of the 1956 convention mean that henceforth the Common Confession is not to be regarded or employed as the settlement of <u>past</u> doctrinal differences between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod? (Proceedings, 1957, p. 132)</p>	<p>2. . . . the Common Confession will <u>henceforth</u> not be regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of . . . fellowship with other church bodies, which . . . includes the settling of doctrinal differences, which is basic for such fellowship. (Proceedings, 1957, p. 132)</p>
<p>3. Do you <u>now</u> have a document of which it is claimed that it is a settlement of the differences with the American Lutheran Church? (Progress Report, Northwestern Lutheran, June 22, 1958, p. 204)</p>	<p>3. In view of the recent historical developments . . . and in view of our Synod's resolutions at St. Paul . . . it follows that the Common Confession can not <u>now</u> [original emphasis] be employed as a "de facto" (i. e. actually functioning) settlement of doctrine between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. The Common Confession is not an "actually functioning" document. (Report to the Nine Districts, 1958, p. 41)</p>

As one goes down the line of the questions it becomes clear that Wisconsin began with a demand that looked back to 1950, but ended with one that contents itself with a "Do you now have." Missouri, on the other hand, has consistently defended its 1950 resolution, granting only that "recent historical developments" had changed the picture. Wisconsin seems to have gained a point by exacting the use of the word "settlement" from Missouri. But Missouri promptly protected that salient by its emphasis on the "now" ("can not now be employed" etc.) This conviction grows as one observes that all this is merely an expansion of Pastor Nickel's earlier statement, "that the Common Confession ceases to be a de facto settlement of doctrinal differences." So there was a time when it was an "actually functioning" document! Can it be said more plainly that Missouri has not receded by an iota from its 1950 position?—The Watertown convention did not ask for much in its stipulation on this subject. The Committee has, however, settled for less—far less!

B. The Union Committee bases its reassurances on future, still unfulfilled performance.

It is granted (foot of page 6) "that the status of the Common Confession in the past, with its inadequate statements, could have weakened and undermined the Scriptural understanding of the doctrines involved in our own circles and also made it unclear to those outside of our Synodical Conference circles whether this body as a whole still holds to the full Scriptural position on these doctrines as this was true in the past." This certainly is quite a grave matter. And yet, instead of holding its announcements which actually concede the issue of the Common Confession in abeyance until this was settled beyond possibility of doubt, these remaining matters are left for future settlement, in the new (and still problematical) Joint Statement of Doctrine. And this includes the doctrines of justification, conversion, and election—the very

ones in which we found the SOLA GRATIA impaired when we reviewed the Common Confession in 1950!

If these things are true—and I think that the record bears it out—then the question at the head of this section ("what justification is there for continuing our discussions with Missouri now?") must indeed be answered in the negative. For if the foundation is so dangerously weak, then continued building on this foundation is presumptuous, and invites the disaster of Mt. 7:27—the house built on sand.

That God in His infinite mercy may avert such a tragedy—this is the sincere and fervent prayer of a one-time brother.

(Signed) E. Reim
P.O. Box 701
Rhineland, Wis.

Appendix C

The following is a study document prepared for consideration by the Board of Doctrine of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

JOINT STATEMENT Regarding the Termination of Fellowship Between Church Bodies

- I. On the basis of Holy Scripture and in a spirit of Christian unity and love we believe and affirm that it is God's gracious will and purpose:
 - A. That his church on earth be one flock under one Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' sheep listen to his voice (Jn. 10:16, 27). They gladly hear his Word and follow him because he is "the way and the truth and the life." No one comes to the Father except through him (Jn. 14:6). The words that Jesus speaks are precious to his followers because they "are spirit and they are life" (Jn. 6:63). Jesus alone has the words of eternal life because he is the Holy One of God (Jn. 6:68, 69). His church lives by his Word and gladly shares it with others.
 - B. That all who believe in Jesus as their Savior and accept him as their Lord agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among them and they may be perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Cor. 1:10). He urges them "to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Dissensions and divisions arise when Jesus' disciples do not carefully listen to his voice as he speaks to them in the Holy Scriptures, God's inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word. Jesus assures them that if they remain in his Word and hold firmly to it, they are really his disciples. He promises, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:31, 32). For this reason Scripture admonishes us to watch our life and doctrine closely and to persevere in them so as to save both ourselves and our hearers (1 Tm. 4:16), to keep as the pattern of sound teaching what we have heard from God's spokesmen (2 Tm. 1:13), and to do our best to be workmen who do not need to be ashamed and who correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tm. 2:15).
 - C. That Christians as individuals and as church bodies be on constant guard against falsehood and error. False doctrines and unscriptural teachings are sown by Satan, "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44). "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth" (Jn. 8:44). His aim is to separate Jesus' sheep from their Good Shepherd and to take them with him to eternal destruction. With fatherly love God therefore warns us to beware of false prophets (Mt. 7:15), to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in our way by going contrary to the teaching we have learned and to "keep away from them" (Ro. 16:17). Out of loving concern he commands us not to "be yoked together with unbelievers," but rather to "come out from them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:14, 17). Earnestly he admonishes us not to assist or encourage those who do not continue in Christ's teaching (2 Jn. 10, 11).
 - D. That Christian brethren, motivated by Christian love and concern, exercise their fellowship by admonishing one another whenever it is called for, and particularly also

when they notice that their brethren have strayed into error (Eze. 33:1-9; Ro. 15:1-14; Ga. 6:1-5; Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:12-17; 2 Tm. 4:2). Failure to admonish would be disobedience to God and evidence of an unloving heart. Those giving the admonition will not do this in a self-righteous, haughty spirit or in a loveless, mechanical way, but humbly and patiently, in the spirit of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who lovingly seeks every lost and straying sheep and strives to rescue it (Lk. 15:3-7). The response to such fraternal admonition given to a brother or a church within the fellowship will help to determine whether the error is a matter of weakness or whether the erring brother or church is causing divisions and offenses by teaching contrary to God's Word (Ro. 14:1; 16:17). If the erring brother or church is willing to be instructed from the Word of God, the error is a matter of weakness. If, however, the erring individual or group rejects the admonition from Scripture and holds to the error, it is causing divisions and offenses.

- II. With respect to Romans 16:17, 18, on the basis of Holy Scripture and in a spirit of Christian unity and love, we believe and affirm:
- A. That the present active infinitive *skopein*, meaning "to keep on watching out for," refers to Christians' ongoing activity of being constantly alert and on the lookout for those who are causing divisions and offenses by teaching contrary to God's Word. (Cf. III, A, B).
 - B. That while the word *skopein* does not in itself specifically and directly enjoin admonition, this does not deny that admonition as enjoined in other passages of Scripture will naturally take place concurrently with the watchfulness of which *skopein* speaks whenever error appears within the circle of fellowship.
 - C. That the purpose of admonition is, first of all, to show the erring individual or group that it has left the truth of God's Holy Word, and then also with the help of the Holy Spirit to bring it back, if possible, to the "pure, clear fountain of Israel" (Formula of Concord, S.D., Comprehensive Summary, 3; *Concordia Triglotta*, 851). (Cf. III, C).
 - D. That admonition continues until the erring individual or group either repents of its error and turns away from it or until it shows itself to be persistent in its error by adhering to it in its public doctrine and practice, by demanding recognition for it, or by making propaganda for it and trying to persuade others of it. (Cf. III, D).
 - E. That Christians will rejoice when those who have misspoken or inadvertently strayed into error accept admonition and correction from God's Word. (Cf. III, F).
 - F. That Scripture enjoins us to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn. 4:1). This testing involves making a judgment based on the principles of Scripture as to whether we are dealing with weak brethren or persistent errorists. (Cf. III, E).
 - G. That in making this determination with regard to a church body we need to consider not only its official statements and resolutions, but also its corporate actions or inactions. We cannot assume that every expression of individual members reflects the position of the church body, or that the correctness of its official statements and resolutions automatically guarantees that there is scriptural practice within the body.
 - H. That the imperative *ekklinate* calls for a clean break of fellowship with those who persistently adhere to error. When it has been ascertained that a person or a church body

is causing divisions and offenses (*tous poiountas dichostasias kai ta skandala*) by teaching contrary to Holy Scripture, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior God in his holy Word. Pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break in fellowship with those who have shown themselves to be not weak brethren but persistent errorists. (Cf. II, D).

- I. That a break in fellowship with persistent errorists is a forceful, continuing testimony that the errorists are jeopardizing their own salvation.
 - J. That the apostle's peremptory *ekkline* ("avoid," "keep away from") is the voice of the Good Shepherd himself as he lovingly protects his sheep and lambs from the deception of error and as he graciously gives warning to the false teacher. A termination of fellowship with persistent errorists serves the spiritual welfare of Christ's flock. Continuing in fellowship with those who are causing divisions and offenses exposes Jesus' disciples to the dangerous leaven of error, which is contrary to his saving intent (Mt. 16:5-12).
- III. With respect to Romans 16:17, 18, on the basis of Holy Scripture and in a spirit of Christian unity and love:
- A. We reject the view that the verb *skopein* refers to labeling or branding those who have already been identified as individuals or a church body causing divisions and offenses. The translation "mark" can be misleading. (Cf. II, A).
 - B. We reject the view that *skopein* does not refer to an ongoing, durative activity. (Cf. II, A).
 - C. We reject the view that the primary purpose of admonition is to determine the errorists' persistence in error. (Cf. II, C).
 - D. We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonition and proceed to avoid is to be made on the basis of a subjective judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition. (Cf. II, D).
 - E. We reject the view that permits the use of human judgment to prolong fellowship with persistent errorists contrary to the principles of Scripture (Cf. II, F).
 - F. We reject the view that the *ekkline* injunction is to be applied to those within the circle of fellowship who have misspoken or inadvertently erred, or to those who are weak brethren. Christian love will lead us to rather to "correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction" those who have erred in this way (2 Tm. 4:2). (Cf. II, E).
 - G. We reject the view that a break in fellowship with persistent errorists is *per se* the equivalent of excommunication. A termination of fellowship is a judgment on the doctrine of the church body, not on the personal faith of its individual members.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin
April 6, 1990

Church of the Lutheran Confession:

Daniel J. Fleischer
Clifford M. Kuehne
Robert A. Reim

Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

Juul B. Madson
George M. Orvick
Gaylin Schmeling

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

Wilbert R. Gawrisch
Carl H. Mischke
Armin J. Panning

Appendix D

To: CLC, ELS, WELS Presidents and Doctrine Committees
From: A group of CLC, ELS, and WELS pastors from the Mankato, MN area
Date: September 2014
Re: A recommendation in regard to the “Joint Statement” of 1990

The “Joint Statement” of 1990 with a New Introduction

Background

In 1990, official representatives of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) drafted and agreed to a document titled “Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship Between Church Bodies.” This document was subsequently recognized as a correct presentation of Biblical principles by the doctrinal committees of all three synods. The production of this “Joint Statement” was viewed by many as a positive first step toward the restoration of God-pleasing fellowship relations between the CLC, ELS, and WELS.

At that time, however, discussions broke down when there was disagreement over the addition of a preamble commenting on the history between the various synods. The CLC Board of Doctrine insisted on a preamble that was unacceptable to the ELS and WELS. WELS offered a preamble that was unacceptable to the CLC. Face-to-face meetings to work out a solution to the preamble problem were not held.

Today, after almost 25 years, the “Joint Statement” is still recognized as a strong, Biblically sound statement when it is read by pastors in the CLC, ELS, and WELS. We believe it is time to see—through formal meetings of the doctrinal committees of the three synods—if there is agreement with the doctrinal principles that it presents. Perhaps there are improvements that could be made in some of the wording, which would make the document more acceptable to all.

We also believe it is time to see if a new, mutually agreeable introduction could be drafted dealing with the history between the synods. The following new introduction is offered as a possible starting point for new discussions between representatives of the three synods.

New Introduction to the “Joint Statement” of 1990

Ever since the establishment of the CLC in 1960, the CLC, ELS, and WELS have had different ways of understanding the history involved in the formation of the CLC and the precise nature of the differences between the synods.

According to their understanding of the history, the ELS and WELS do not think that there was a difference in the doctrinal principles of church fellowship, but rather a difference in the application of the principles of church fellowship over against the Missouri Synod. They follow a line of reasoning that highlights the explanations given by ELS and WELS leaders in the late 1950’s, early 1960’s, and subsequent years.

According to their understanding of the history, the CLC is convinced that there was a difference in the doctrinal principles of church fellowship between the CLC and the ELS/WELS. They follow a line of reasoning that highlights the actions of the WELS conventions in the 1950’s.

It is possible that the CLC, ELS, and WELS will never settle all of the questions that might be raised about the historical interpretation of this period. At least, we can agree that there were imperfect statements and actions on all sides during the chaotic and emotion-filled years when the Synodical Conference was falling apart.

What God desires of us today, however, is that we come to agreement on the doctrinal principles of God's Word. Then we will react to circumstances in the future with a common understanding of Bible doctrine. To that end, the "Joint Statement," drafted in 1990 by representatives of the CLC, ELS, and WELS, is offered as a scripturally sound presentation on the matters of church fellowship that have troubled our relationship for many years.

It is understood that this "Joint Statement," if and when it is adopted by the three synods, will supersede all previous statements or actions that are in conflict with it in any of the three synods. It hopefully can be used as a positive first step toward the restoration of God-pleasing fellowship relations.