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Lutheranism in North America  
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## Standing Up for Confessionalism in Canada

*The move of St. Paul Lutheran Church of Ottawa, Ontario from the Lutheran Church - Missouri  
Synod to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*

Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning – and my conscience is captive to the Word of God – then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.<sup>1</sup>

- Martin Luther, April 17, 1521

Standing up and fighting against an entire church body is an arduous and often dangerous task, much like what Martin Luther experienced when he contended with the entire Roman Catholic hierarchy and their false doctrine in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Yet certain circumstances make stands on theological battlefields such as these necessary. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, one man, along with his congregation, stood against their synod's decision to join fellowship with an erring church body. This is the account of how Pastor Thomas Pfothenhauer led his congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church out of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and into the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

It begins with a man: Thomas Pfothenhauer. He describes himself as a man born with a "theological silver spoon in his mouth."<sup>2</sup> His theological heritage was rich indeed. Friedrich Pfothenhauer, his paternal grandfather, served as the fifth president of the Missouri Synod from 1911-1935.<sup>3</sup> On the other side of the family, Dr. J. F. Boerger, Tom's maternal grandfather, was a respected member of the Missouri Synod clergy. Boerger was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree for his services to the church, appointed by Synod President John Behnken to chair the

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: the Story of the Man and His Career*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1986, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Pfothenhauer, *One Man's Ministry*, presented at the Colonial North Pastor's Conference at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Clifton Park, New York on October 17, 1995, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jason Todd and Rev. Marvin Huggins, *Presidents of the Missouri Synod: Past & Present*, St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 1997-1998, accessed on 7 December 2008; available from [http://chi.lcms.org/presidents/pres\\_pfothenhauer.htm](http://chi.lcms.org/presidents/pres_pfothenhauer.htm) ; Internet.

President's investigative committee on the "Forty-four" and their controversial statement,<sup>4</sup> and was once extended the call to teach Greek at Concordia Seminary in Springfield, IL.

These theological role models were supplemented by Tom's own father, who also was a pastor. The elder Pastor Pfothenauer showed his sons how to remain faithful to Christ and to the Christian cause despite struggling to tend the needs of his congregation of 1200 communicants without the assistance of a secretary or an associate pastor. Already while Tom was just a confirmand, his father feared that a split within the Missouri Synod might occur over the issue of unionism brought up by the "Statement of the Forty-Four."

Even though his parents were great Christian role models, they did not encourage Tom to enter the public ministry. Tom recounts that his work-laden father would often say to him, "Tom, don't go into the ministry. It's too hard."<sup>5</sup> For Tom, the encouragement to join the public ministry would come through a summer spent working on the steamship *City of Grand Rapids*. There, his eyes and ears were opened to the depth of sinfulness of the world as he was exposed to the depraved moral state of humanity. After six weeks of overhearing the men's graphic descriptions of sexual encounters, their drinking exploits, and other unmentionable activities, Tom was convinced that the world was in desperate spiritual need. A few weeks later he found himself enrolled at Concordia College in St. Paul, MN on the track to become a pastor.

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<sup>4</sup> The Statement of the Forty-Four was a document written in 1945 by forty-four prominent men within LC-MS. This tract contained twelve propositions with comments. Nine of these points challenged existing statements of the LC-MS including their historic position on church fellowship. Within this document, the idea of a lax fellowship practice and unionism with other Lutheran Churches was being promoted. Their statements challenged the "Brief Statement" issued in 1931. The theses of the "Brief Statement" were meant to present doctrines of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in the shortest and simplest manner and were accepted as such.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Pfothenauer, *One Man's Ministry*, presented at the Colonial North Pastor's Conference at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Clifton Park, New York on October 17, 1995, 2.

Tom was prepared in his early years for the difficulties that he would face in his ministry. His father insisted that he be sent to Concordia Seminary in Springfield, IL, because he wanted his sons to receive error-free seminary training. Although the heresy being promoted by certain faculty members at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO had not yet surfaced, the elder Pfothenhauer knew it was lurking underneath the glossy veneer of a supposedly confessional Lutheran seminary. Although the issues were unbeknownst to Tom at the time, he simply trusted that his father was doing the right thing by sending he and his brother to Concordia Seminary in Springfield, the more conservative LC-MS<sup>6</sup> seminary at the time. This decision provided Tom with the solid, confessionally Lutheran seminary training he would need throughout his life.

In his seminary years, Tom was challenged with some of the same issues that he would face later on in his ministry, but on a smaller scale. While spending a summer working at St. Joe National Forest in Idaho, Tom was tested on the doctrine of fellowship as the camp superintendent, who was a seminary student in the LCA<sup>7</sup>, suggested that the workers have a joint worship service on Sundays. Tom rejected this offer. He instead went off with his two fellow students and held their own service separately. The taunts of "Missouri fanatic" rained down upon the small Missourian group throughout the whole summer because of their actions. Tom's commitment of putting pure doctrine into practice was severely tested as he was cut off from his primary support groups. By the grace of God and the theological knowledge instilled in him, he stood strong.

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<sup>6</sup> Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

<sup>7</sup> Lutheran Church of America

Tom's first assignment out of the seminary was to start a new mission in Fort Garry in Manitoba, Canada. It was near Fort Garry where Tom Pfothauer attended his first pan-Lutheran conference. Lutherans from many different synods came together for a dialogue meeting. There for the first time Tom heard a Lutheran pastor deny the historicity of Genesis 1-11. Upon hearing this rational dismemberment of Scripture, Pfothauer went on the offensive by quoting Jesus' words from Luke 11:51 to show that Jesus himself affirmed the characters of first eleven chapters of Genesis to be real, historical people. "Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary..."<sup>8</sup> Tom's point was simple: how could a fictitious character bleed? How can you go against the words of our Savior – the words of our Lord and God? In response, the LCA clergyman explained that Jesus did not actually accept the historicity of people such as Adam and Eve, but that he simply accommodated his teachings to the ignorance of his hearers. Now the Lutheran clergyman was pedaling the idea that Jesus deceived his listeners by playing to their ignorance instead of dispelling it. Needless to say, Tom knew that this man was compromising the Scriptures and thus, in the long run, compromising his salvation.

Tom's courage was further tested in his second call, which was to Seebach's Hill in Ontario, Canada. In this rural area, he served two parishes: one was Missouri Synod and the other had no denominational connection. The congregation with no denominational connection had a freemasonry problem which had not been dealt with by the previous pastor. Being warned ahead of time of the situation, Pfothauer was advised to move slowly and to

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 11:50-51a (NIV)

deal with this issue evangelically but firmly. He prepared cautiously, making sure he established his presence and a good relationship with the members as he visited every member in their home. He also read primary source material from the freemasons.

After about two years serving this congregation, he brought up the matter to the Church Council. After outlining the scriptural objections to masonry, he asked for each member's support to add a clause into the congregation's constitution to disallow members of the congregation to also be members of the Masonic lodge. The Church Council members did not want to deal with the problem in a forthright way, but Pastor Pfothenauer pressed the point. Quickly the congregation figured out that Pfothenauer meant business when it came to the lodge issue. That's when the nastiness started.

Pfothenauer's actions to separate his members from the work righteous ideology from the freemasons was met with heavy resistance. Members would write him hate letters while others defiantly declared their status as a freemason and that they were coming up for communion on Sunday. Rotting groundhogs were tossed on his lawn. One lady in the congregation refused to even greet Tom's wife for three years over this whole lodge matter.

The tension came to a head at their voters' meeting. Fifty-five men had come to this small rural congregation looking for a fight. Early on in the proceedings, one man stood up and made a motion to dismiss Pastor Pfothenauer because of the trouble he had been causing in the congregation as well as the community. The motion was seconded by a man Pfothenauer considered to be a friend and ally. Tom took the floor and delivered the ultimatum from District President Phillip Fiess: if the congregation did not give up the freemasonry, they would no longer be receiving pastors from Missouri Synod. Before long the vote took place as to whether

or not the congregation would add the lodge clause into its constitution. The motion passed by two-thirds majority vote. Then the man who had moved for Pfothenhauer's dismissal announced with anger in his voice, "I'm pickin' up my hymnal."<sup>9</sup>

Slowly and deliberately, he got up from his chair, walked up several flights of stairs into the church sanctuary, walked over to the pew where he always sat, picked up his hymnal, walked back down the stairs, and, as he strode past the 54 remaining voters he held high his hymnal; with a look of defiance before going out into the raging blizzard.<sup>10</sup>

Tom had stood up for the truth of God's Word as he defended the doctrine of fellowship once again.

A year later, after the freemason issue had been resolved, Tom received what District President Fiess described as a "tough and weird call." At age 33, Pfothenhauer was called to serve St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ottawa, Ontario. He never doubted for a second that he would accept this call.

In 1964, the congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church had a rich ninety-year-old heritage with a membership of 836 communicants and about 20 years of training vicars for their synod.<sup>11</sup> The First Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's Church was constituted on November 14, 1874 by forty men who attended the organizational meeting at the home of Heinrich Haul on Cumberland Street in Ottawa. The people from that first meeting had come to Ottawa from the province of Pomerania in Prussia. They immigrated to the Ottawa Valley of Canada after the

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Pfothenhauer, *One Man's Ministry*, presented at the Colonial North Pastor's Conference at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Clifton Park, New York on October 17, 1995, 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Kept By His Power*. Ottawa, Ontario: 1974. 3-4. This is a centennial book put together by St. Paul congregation. No author is attributed or place of publication. Information about the congregation's founding was gathered from this book.

Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. They were devout Lutherans intent on finding a church home with a pastor who could preach and teach them God's Word in their mother tongue. When they finally found someone capable of this task, they discovered before long that they were not being served God's Word in its truth and purity. The words of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans rang out to them, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."<sup>12</sup> Following this biblical principle, the congregation sought after a new pastor. They found exactly what they needed in Pastor H. W. Schroeder of Grace Lutheran Church of Locksley, Ontario. So began St. Paul Lutheran Church.

The congregation enjoyed a long period of growth and prosperity. Although having to wrestle through issues from time to time, they were finally enjoying peace and harmony at the voters' meetings toward the end of Pastor Ernest H. Kanning's ministry. Thankfully, this peace lasted as Pastor Pfothauer arrived as their new pastor in 1964 because it would not be long before the young pastor found himself having to stand up for the true orthodox biblical teachings here in Ottawa as he had done before.

At this point in his life, Thomas Pfothauer had experienced first-hand the unionistic tendencies of other Lutherans and had gained valuable insight from his father concerning the conflicts simmering below the surface of a seemingly problem free Missouri Synod. These past experiences were confirmed as editorials compromising the long-held position of the Missouri Synod on fellowship began to appear in the *Lutheran Witness*. Tom witnessed the underlying heresy begin to bubble to the surface in a dialogue session that included Missouri and Canada

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 16:17 (NIV)



Synod Lutheran pastors. At this meeting the Virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Christ were openly challenged. Although the Missouriians challenged the LCA clergy to provide evidence for their claims, they gave only unsatisfactory answers to the effect that virgin births were reported in South America or that acceptance of the bodily resurrection of Christ is not a major doctrinal issue, nor should it be something that keeps Lutherans from being in fellowship with one another. After lunch, one of these pastors took a walk with Tom, put his arm around his shoulder, and said, "Tom, the Presbyterians have gotten together, why shouldn't we get together?"<sup>13</sup> Although the exact phrasing of his response is not certain, Tom certainly shook that arm off his shoulder immediately in disgust.

Unionism was not the only thing Pfothenauer had to fear creeping into the church. He had noted from his father that the Missouri Synod seemed to be waning from its strong stance on biblical inerrancy. People such as Martin Marty were advocating that Concordia Seminary in St. Louis should adopt some of the latest theology coming out of Europe. Marty thought that the theology of "Old Missouri" needed to be reviewed, revised, and upgraded. Slowly but surely the historical critical approach, as applied to the interpretation of Scripture, was becoming acceptable in the LC-MS as long as Lutheran presuppositions were applied. Missouri's confessional stance began to crumble under these new ideas. They were slowly being led away from the truths taught in God's Word.

First hand experience with the change in approach toward Scripture came in the form of a college-aged member from the Quebec congregation where Pfothenauer was serving in addition to his duties at St. Paul. She was attending Concordia College in Bronxville, New York,

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Pfothenauer, *Why WELS?* Presented at the North Atlantic District Convention during June 6-7, 2000. 4.

when she was deeply troubled to hear her professors completely deny the historicity of the biblical characters of Genesis. Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph – she was being taught that they were all just myths.

Pfotenhauer had also come in direct contact with liberalism from St. Louis through some of the vicars he was training. One vicar from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis chided Pastor Pfotenhauer for mentioning Martin Luther during a Reformation sermon. He claimed that the Martin Luther Pfotenhauer should be preaching about has King as his last name. This vicar's concern was for promoting civil rights and not for reaching souls with God's Word in its truth and purity.

After this vicar, Pfotenhauer and St. Paul Lutheran congregation requested that no more St. Louis trained vicars be sent to Ottawa. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod did not take kindly to this request and did not find it in the least amusing. Thus they refused to comply. In the fall of 1968 Pfotenhauer received another St. Louis trained vicar. By the vicar's own admission, he should not have been sent out for his vicar year. He had failed to complete major term papers which precluded him from vicar year. Pfotenhauer still believes that this vicar was sent to punish him. This was certainly a trying time for Pastor Pfotenhauer.

As his direct experiences with the unionistic tendencies among Lutherans grew and as he heard more and more people within the Missouri Synod questioning biblical inerrancy, Pfotenhauer began to do personal research on the subject. Being mindful that the LC-MS was looking to join fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC), Tom went ahead and ordered various books and materials from the ALC's publishing house – Augsburg. He quickly saw the historical-critical method applied to Genesis with the same results as before: the Bible

stories became nothing but myths; Christians could accept evolution as a viable alternative to creation; reason trumped the clear words of Scripture. His research and his experiences warned him of the dangerous path on which Missouri was embarking.

Tom began writing letters and urged his brother clergymen to elect conservative officials to change the heading of the LC-MS, but the divisions among them were becoming more apparent and seemingly irreparable. Pastoral conferences became painful as the opposing liberal viewpoints became more vocal and the groups more exclusive based on ideology. The historical-critical method was being pitted against the historical-grammatical method. Shouting matches were not uncommon among these "brothers."

As the controversy progressed, Tom found it hard to continue in the Missouri ministerium in good conscience. He wondered how long he could keep fighting a battle that he knew he and his conservative brothers were losing. He and his wife put the options on the table: stay with Missouri and hope and pray that matters would improve; resign from the congregation and try to join an authentic Lutheran synod; or seek other employment altogether. After much prayerful consideration, Tom was convinced that he could not leave St. Paul congregation to the wolves by resigning from the ministry. Therefore, there was only one solution to the problem: leave the synod and take the congregation with him. Pastor Pfothenauer was determined to take a stand and to lead his congregation to do the same.

To implement such a radical change, Tom knew that he would have to do it slowly and carefully. He began the process of congregational education. Pfothenauer started by briefing three to four of the most respected, prominent, and influential men of the congregation. After informing them of the problems, he asked for their support in teaching the rest of the

congregation to do something about this developing situation. One of these men was Douglas Ruch, the superintendent of the Sunday School. In reaction to the information Pastor Pfothenauer presented, Doug replied, "What?? What I've been teaching all these years to the Sunday School children is false?? No way!"<sup>14</sup> The core group of members was behind their pastor. They were behind the Word of God and ready to take a stand for it.

From there, he went on to inform the Board of Deacons – his leadership team. Through individual meetings with all the various organized groups of the congregation, he made the troubling doctrinal issues known. He taught them what was going on – everyone from the golden-aged senior group to the Walther League youth group. Tom produced many articles on the subject which he publicized in the church newsletter: *The Ottawa Lutheran*. Open hearings, or open forums, invited all the congregation's communicant members to come and learn how their beloved synod was beginning to tumble down the wrong path. In order to avoid riding this hobbyhorse issue, Pfothenauer only preached one or two sermons concerning the specific issues going down in the Missouri Synod.

Some people thought that their pastor was making too much out of the subject and did not take him seriously at first. That changed when Pfothenauer announced that he would be resigning his position as District Secretary. Pastor Pfothenauer also made it known that he might lose his pension for standing up against what the Missouri Synod was moving towards.

Pfothenauer's fellow clergymen did not take him seriously at first either. When Philip Feiss, the District President of Ontario, caught wind of what St. Paul congregation was doing, he offered to come in and clarify the issues. To this request, Tom, through guidance from leaders

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<sup>14</sup> Quote paraphrased by retired Pastor Thomas Pfothenauer to me in an interview conducted for this paper.

of the congregation, responded succinctly saying that everything was under control and that they did not need any clarification on the issues. In Tom's mind, this short response kept the Missouri Synod leaders from coercing St. Paul congregation to stay in the synod.

After a three-year long education process, the voters put their confession into action. They were now ready to stand up for the truth with their pastor leading the way. In 1969, the voters' assembly passed "empowering resolutions" which would go into affect should the Missouri Synod vote in favor of declaring fellowship with the ALC at the Synod's Convention that year in Denver, CO.<sup>15</sup> This union was doubly offensive since the ALC was in fellowship with the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), but the LC-MS was unwilling to join fellowship with the LCA. This declaration of fellowship on Missouri's part would result in an odd triangular fellowship. The ALC and the LCA were chipping away at God's Word by putting their reason above Scripture. Pastor Pfothenauer could not stand for this, and neither could St. Paul congregation. Once again, the members of St. Paul Lutheran Church found themselves applying the words of St. Paul to their lives: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."<sup>16</sup>

Another motion was passed at this voters' assembly concerning the impending decision to leave the LC-MS if fellowship was declared with the ALC. The voters passed a statement of warning to people who might think about meeting secretly in order to turn part of the congregation against the current leadership, namely Pastor Pfothenauer and the Church

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Pfothenauer, *One Man's Ministry*, presented at the Colonial North Pastor's Conference at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Clifton Park, New York on October 17, 1995, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 16:17 (NIV)

Council which was backing their pastor. This warning discouraged any disgruntled members from mounting a counteroffensive against the leadership of the congregation. If members had problems, they would have to discuss them in the open with everyone.

Finally, the synod convention came and the LC-MS voted to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with the ALC. Pastor Pfothenauer was bewildered over the events which had just transpired. Sadness gripped his heart as he knew he would have to announce this news to the congregation. They would have to make good on their word, their motion, to break their fellowship with their parent synod because they had entered into an unscriptural and compromising fellowship. The following Sunday, Tom read a letter he had prepared explaining what would not be happening because of the events at the Denver convention. A 95-year relationship was now destroyed. To this day, Tom is saddened by what he had to do, what his conscience demanded him to do, but he knew that he was standing up for the truth. He was standing up for God's Word.

Immediate consequences followed because of the congregation's decision. Nineteen communicant members resigned, one of which was the church secretary. Although this was only two percent of the congregation, the loss was still felt. Pfothenauer lost his help as he would no longer receive vicars. Because of all the stress and work involved in making this decision, Tom was run-down physically and mentally. His parents were saddened that they no longer shared synodical fellowship, but at the same time they understood that Tom had to do this. They had seen the problems too, but they were staying, praying, and hoping that the Missouri Synod would correct itself.

Now, since the congregation made good on its promise to leave the synod, Tom's fellow clergymen finally were taking his threat to leave seriously. Clemens Neuhaus, First Vice-President of the Ontario District, circularized a hand written letter to the congregation of St. Paul trying to pull on their heart-strings to return to their good ol' beloved Missouri Synod. The letter consisted mainly of a reminiscent and nostalgic theme. Neuhaus waxed eloquently about how Pastor Pfothenhauer's grandfather had been president of the Missouri Synod. He even brought up the historical visit of C. F. W. Walther to St. Paul Lutheran Church with a St. Louis graduate in tow to give this congregation their very first full-time pastor. The members saw through the smoke and mirrors and realized that Neuhaus said absolutely nothing concerning the issues at hand, the issues that forced this congregation to separate themselves from their synod of 95 years. St. Paul congregation was affirmed in their doctrinal stance.

The biggest impact, though, was the newfound loneliness that St. Paul Lutheran Church felt in Ottawa. They could no longer fellowship with the other LC-MS congregations in the area. The members saw their church as the only Confessional Lutheran haven in the capital of Canada. This loneliness did not last for long, though.

As Christians, the congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church had a strong desire to carry out Christ's words given to the disciples before he ascended into heaven. They wanted to go and make disciples of all nations. They yearned to carry out the Great Commission. However, if they wanted to do this in an English-speaking, confessional Lutheran church body, the options were rather limited. They had two options: ELS<sup>17</sup> and WELS<sup>18</sup>. The question at hand was,

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<sup>17</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod

<sup>18</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

“Which of these church bodies can give us similar benefits to what we enjoyed in the Missouri Synod?”

Before this time, Pastor Pfothenauer, as well as a majority of his congregational members, knew nothing of either the Evangelical Lutheran Synod or the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The WELS was considered to be a midwestern church body comprised of country bumpkins, or at least a great number of rural congregations. Since he was busy fighting freemasonry in his congregation at Seebach's Hill, Pfothenauer was not all that familiar with the issues surrounding the break of WELS from LC-MS. Now he had to familiarize himself with the Wisconsin Synod and the little Norwegian Synod.

After examining size and resources, it quickly became apparent to Tom that the Wisconsin Synod was the preferable choice. The WELS was considerably larger than the ELS; the Wisconsin Synod had Northwestern Publishing House, an attractive synodical newsletter in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, and other resources. The education process began all over again as Pastor Pfothenauer ordered many WELS materials from NPH to evaluate their usefulness and their doctrinal purity.<sup>19</sup> Thus Pastor Pfothenauer and St. Paul Lutheran Church begin investigating the WELS to see if this could be their new synodical home.

Already by October 26, 1969, St. Paul congregation held a WELS-Day. The congregational turn-out was outstanding with 750 members attending various meetings in order to acquaint themselves with this synod they knew little about. Again having Paul's words of Romans 16:17 in mind, they insisted on an interview with the leaders of the Wisconsin Synod to question them about doctrinal purity, mission mindedness, adequate Sunday School

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<sup>19</sup> Northwestern Publishing House



material, usable literature, and other things that they had enjoyed from the Missouri Synod. In response to their request, President Waldemar Zarling of the Michigan District and Professor Carl Lawrenz from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary made a trip up to Ottawa to speak with the congregation and answer their questions concerning the WELS. Professor Ken Cherney, WELS vicar at St. Paul Lutheran Church from 1986-87, recalled a story from the members that they asked Professor Lawrenz for a guarantee that the WELS would not go the same way as the LC-MS did. To this, Professor Lawrenz replied that he could not give such a guarantee, nor could anyone else. However, the members of St. Paul Lutheran Church could help the Wisconsin Synod from falling into this same problem by offering its guidance and insight to the WELS.

Though these various meetings, St. Paul Lutheran Church was warming up to the idea of joining the Wisconsin Synod. To make this possible, Pastor Pfothauer began the colloquy process. He felt strange having to fly to Milwaukee, WI to stand before people he didn't know who would question him about his doctrine when he knew where he stood, but he didn't know where these people personally stood doctrinally. It seemed surreal to him to have to prove his qualifications for being a doctrinally pure minister. Through the process, it was made clear where Pastor Pfothauer stood. He was through and through a confessional Lutheran. St. Paul Lutheran Church and Pastor Pfothauer were received into the WELS at the Michigan District Convention held in Saginaw in June of 1970.

Pastor Pfothauer recalls that he was warmly welcomed into this new synod as many pastors went out of their way for him. In the summer of that same year, the members of St. Paul were welcoming a Wisconsin Synod part-time summer vicar named Martin Stuebs. By August, they would welcome their first full-time vicar from the WELS - Allen Zahn.

Even in 2008, Vicar Allen Zahn is remembered fondly as their first WELS vicar. In his time up in Ottawa, Vicar Zahn made a significant impact on the member's view of the Wisconsin Synod. Members are still talking about the "Super Safari to Synod Schools" that he organized for the youth group that year. To get them acquainted with their new synod, Vicar Zahn came up with the idea to take a bus tour to the major synodical schools in Saginaw<sup>20</sup>, Mequon<sup>21</sup>, Watertown<sup>22</sup>, Mankato<sup>23</sup>, and New Ulm<sup>24</sup>. For many members, this trip was taken as a great act of welcoming St. Paul Lutheran Church into their new synod. Pastor Pfothenauer also attributes to Vicar Zahn the idea of starting WELS mission congregation in the Ottawa Valley. The fruits of his seemingly small idea turned into the reality of two self-sustaining WELS congregations just outside of Ottawa: Abiding Word in Orleans and Divine Word in Nepean.

Twenty-eight more WELS vicars were trained under the tutelage of Pastor Pfothenauer. In speaking to a few of these vicars<sup>25</sup>, they all expressed the same sentiments. To them, the members of St. Paul's in Ottawa were a doctrinally sound group. The members were not tied down so much to their synod, but they were bound to the truth of God's Word as a Christian out to be. The vicars sensed that the congregation had been well educated and well prepared

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<sup>20</sup> Michigan Lutheran Seminary

<sup>21</sup> Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

<sup>22</sup> Northwestern Prep and Northwestern Lutheran College

<sup>23</sup> Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Theological Seminary

<sup>24</sup> Doctor Martin Luther College

<sup>25</sup> The author of this paper interviewed former vicars Martin Stuebs (summer of 1970), Allen Zahn (1970-1971), John Schuetze (1979-1980), Ken Cherney (1986-1987), and one of the Missouri Synod vicars - Loren Kruse (1967-1968).

for their break from the Missouri Synod. St. Paul Lutheran Church was an orthodox church who had been carefully guided by Pastor Pfothauer to stand up God and his Word.

Out of this tumultuous break from Missouri Synod and then becoming part of the Wisconsin Synod, Pastor Pfothauer found his congregation to be revitalized. By the grace of God, the members were brought together by this controversy instead of being ripped apart and divided into factions. God provided the man for this congregation who would stand true to his Word, someone who would deal with this issue with a true pastor's heart. God provided a man to stand up for the truth of his Word. God continues to provide watchmen for St. Paul Lutheran Church to this day. May He keep the members of St. Paul Lutheran Church ever watchful for false doctrine in all its various shapes and forms as he has done in the past.

*I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.*

- Romans 16:17

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