

BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
OF OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN
AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVENTS SURROUNDING HER CHANGE
IN SYNODICAL MEMBERSHIP

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April 29, 1987
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Change is never easy yet few are ever able to escape it. Our nation endured tremendous changes during the 1960's and 1970's. Old norms were challenged. Time-tested truths were thrown out the window. We suffered through great civil unrest and turmoil. We witnessed the breakdown of morals. Truth was determined by each man's own interpretation.

Changes had already been going on quietly in the church for many years. Through the influence of such "enlightened" men as Herman Gunkel, Wellhausen, Bultman and many others the truth and authority of Scripture were questioned and undermined.

Many Lutheran bodies fell victim to their attack on Scripture and joined the growing ranks of those who could not and would not hold to traditional views of Scripture. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) was still blessed with well instructed laity. Nevertheless the LCMS, to a certain extent, gave way to the historical-critical approach of Scripture. Although Bultman's existential demythologizing was too radical for a church like the LCMS they did adopt a mediating position. They attempted to retain Lutheran doctrine while accepting the historical-critical approach as the modern method of interpretation.

It was during these difficult years of the '60s and '70s that Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church of Oshkosh was faced by the changes going on in her beloved synod. Bethlehem faithfully but unsuccessfully tried to urge the LCMS back to her former doctrinal stand. It became apparent to the pastor and members that Bethlehem herself would have to undergo a change - quite

a different change. On September 12, 1971 Bethlehem Lutheran church officially left the LCMS. The following is a closer look at the events which led to that historical decision and to the events which followed it.

Needless to say a pastor generally has great influence upon the souls entrusted to his care. The influence of Pastor Walter H. Moll was no exception here. Through the guiding influence of Pastor Moll, together with many faithful and supportive members, Bethlehem has remained faithful to her Lord, to Scriptures and to the Lutheran confessions. We acknowledge our Savior's loving hand working through these men. Bethlehem, today, stands solidly on the sure foundation by the grace of God alone.

Pastor Walter H. Moll graduated from Concordia, St. Louis in 1958. At that time he was assigned to a small congregation in Omaha, Nebraska. Quite obviously Missouri's problems were already surfacing when Moll was at the seminary. He recalls that he was aware that there were problems. They were talked about, though not publically. As a busy seminarian he knew something was happening but concerned himself more with the studies at hand. Pastor Moll also indicated that LCMS's long stand of faithfulness to Scripture tended to make a person accept all that the church taught and practiced without questioning it.

While in Nebraska, Moll served as editor for the Northwest Nebraska District edition of The Lutheran Witness. None of the articles, however, concerned themselves with any of the problems going on in the LCMS. Moll recalls that he still was not fully aware of what was going on; he did not realize the extent of

the doctrinal difficulties.

On June 20, 1965, Walter Moll was installed as pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. When asked if he found the members of Bethlehem informed or aware of the problems in LCMS he responded, "I can't say that I knew much about it myself." He recalls that he was at Bethlehem about a year before he really learned what was happening.

It was chiefly through synod and district officials that Pastor Moll began to discover the extent of Missouri's problems. One of the officials moved to Wisconsin at about the same time (Moll declined to reveal his name). This man would keep Pastor Moll informed and alert him to what was happening behind the scenes. It was largely through this individual and others working closely with him that Pastor Moll became concerned. It was at this time that he joined in working together with the conservatives.

Pastor Moll made his concerns known to the congregation and sought to keep them informed on the issues. A series of forums were held at Bethlehem to which anyone was invited to attend. Guest speakers included Professor Wilbert Gawrisch of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WELS) who spoke on women suffrage. Other men who either spoke at these forums or preached included a conservative pastor from Minnesota, Dr. Walter Meyer Jr., Pastor Waldo ^eWarning, and Herman Otten. The forums were well attended and included many visitors from area churches.

In 1965 Pastor Moll initiated a monthly newsletter. This too was used as a means of keeping the congregation better informed. It's interesting to learn later that WELS and ELS officials

were reading these newsletters.

As the 1969 Missouri convention in Denver approached there was a push for LCMS to establish altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC. Many in the LCMS contended that the ALC also held to the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy. However the actual evidence seemed to be to the contrary. One ALC professor, Dr. Paul Jersild of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, was honest enough to admit that he and the other faculty members at this ALC college did not hold to the inerrancy of Scripture (see appendix A). Despite this clear evidence being given to officials in LCMS it was suppressed and the New York convention of 1967 was misled into believing that the ALC upheld this doctrine.

The pastor and members of Bethlehem were concerned with all that was happening. The 75th anniversary booklet of Bethlehem (1976) states: "Our pastor, council, voters assembly, and many individuals in the congregation made repeated efforts to do our part in keeping the Missouri Synod faithful to its historic heritage." A number of members became active in a group which met throughout the district. Bethlehem drafted a statement of confession which was mailed out to 5,000 LCMS congregations to be signed by the conservatives. (appendix B).

Pastor Moll himself brought a resolution to the Denver convention. (appendix C). He was serving as the pastoral delegate for the conference. The congregation also drafted a document on its position. (appendix D). In both of these, concern was expressed over LCMS's move toward fellowship with the ALC while doctrinal disagreements existed.

Pastor Moll recalls his involvement at the Denver convention. He spoke on behalf of the conservatives - being "silently" backed by a number of prominent and influential conservatives of the synod. He recalls speaking at the microphone, and when refuted by the liberals, found no public support from those conservatives who were influential. He was even more disappointed by the statements of Dr. Preus - then candidate for the presidency. Preus had just finished meeting with the conservatives where he stated that there should not be fellowship with the ALC. He then went on public record by announcing that if elected president of LCMS he could live with it (fellowship with the ALC).

The conservatives sat down - they had lost their first fight. Pastor Moll states: "Theologically it was a sad convention." Additional disappointment was felt when District President Barth (a conservative) gathered the pastors together and remarked: "Since the Lord's will has been established through the vote don't make waves - even if you don't want to go through with it (altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC)."

Bethlehem moved quickly to respond to the LCMS decision to have fellowship with the ALC. On July 23, 1969 a "Declaration of Our Position" was adopted in which Bethlehem declared itself not in fellowship with the ALC. By so doing they were also protesting their fellowship with the LCMS. (appendix E).

Bethlehem continued to keep its members informed on the issues. A resolution was submitted to the October 1970 voters assembly. It was submitted for action in the January 1971 annual congregation meeting. (appendix F). It boldly stated that

if LCMS did not rescind fellowship with the ALC and terminate membership in LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.), then Bethlehem would withdraw its membership in LCMS.

The March newsletter of 1971 carried an article entitled "Two Trains on Different Tracks." (appendix G). It clearly displayed the two opposing theologies present within the LCMS. This was put together by a Minnesota pastor, Willard Koch. (appendix H). In another newsletter Pastor Moll wrote an article, "What Errors to Watch Out For?", in which he explained how to recognize error and false doctrine. (appendix I).

Between the Denver convention and the 1971 convention in Milwaukee "Meetings for Concerns" were held at Bethlehem. These were intended to further inform the members of the problems in Missouri, ie. the opposing theologies, ^{the} problems at Concordia, St. Louis and the investigation being conducted by President Dr. Preus and a fact-finding committee, and the problems of fellowship with the ALC. Every member who missed these important meetings was mailed a summary of the meetings to familiarize themselves with these concerns. (appendix J).

As the synod convention quickly approached Bethlehem submitted three resolutions. (appendix K and L). They called for withdrawal of LCMS from LCUSA; suspension of fellowship with the ALC; that no further declarations of fellowship be made until the differences in doctrine and practice between synods can be resolved and unity exist on the basis of the teachings of Holy Scripture.

Though not a delegate at the July 1971 Milwaukee convention,

Pastor Moll attended part of it. He recalls being appalled at what he heard. Things did not turn around as had been hoped for. That left Bethlehem with little else to do except what had already been tentatively decided if things didn't change - withdrawal of membership from LCMS.

An evaluation of the synod convention was compiled by Pastor Moll. (appendix M). It describes clearly the decisions reached at the convention and the ramifications of such decisions. Included were the evaluations found in other sources, ie. Christianity Today, The New York Times, Time Magazine, The Lutheran Sentinel and The Northwestern Lutheran.

In view of the set backs and refusal of LCMS to correct her problems Bethlehem was faced with her decision. Pastor Moll recalls that he and his family were concerned about what they would do if the congregation voted to remain in LCMS. There was a group of members who had already approached him with this possibility. They expressed their support and willingness to leave Bethlehem if necessary and begin worship services somewhere else with Moll as their pastor.

We should also mention that Pastor Moll was not the only one faced by this. In August of 1970 Bethlehem had called and installed Mr. Elmer Baacke as director of education and youth. Baacke had been principal of a Lutheran school in Denison, Iowa. Bethlehem of course was concerned about calling a conservative. Baacke had already been working with conservatives. Baacke and the pastor at Denison had already been thinking of leaving LCMS. Pastor Moll stated that Mr. Baacke was a real help through all

this because he too was well aware of what was happening and also was concerned.

When asked about what kind of response Bethlehem received from area pastors, both LCMS and WELS, Moll explained that the LCMS pastors in the area were, by in large, sympathetic, but did not agree with the idea of leaving. In an evangelical way, Pastor Moll stated: "It was difficult to pin these men down on doctrinal matters because they talked out of both sides of their mouths." The WELS pastors kept their distance. President Naumann of WELS commented to Pastor Moll: "We can encourage you privately - but we can't really do anything until you make the break."

Finally the voters assembly of September 12, 1971 arrived. Present at the meeting was District President Carl Barth. He was given an opportunity to speak. He pleaded for Bethlehem to stay and continue its support of the conservative cause. The voters however felt his arguments were not valid because he had five years to stand with Bethlehem in this cause but made no attempt to do so. Pastor Moll said, "It was unfair now to ask us to stay in when all along he didn't do anything to help."

The circuit visitor was also present, Pastor Stry. He was a son of the congregation and encouraged Bethlehem to remain in LCMS and use WELS materials for teaching and Sunday School. This seemed confusing to the voters.

The vote was finally taken and proved to be quite decisive. There had been a few heated ^{disputations} instances during the meeting but the vote was not close at all. There had been concern over what

would happen to the church property. Two lawyers had been consulted prior to the meeting so it never became an issue at the meeting and was dropped.

Asked if the outcome would have been any different had the question come up at an earlier time, Moll stated: "Our timing was a blessing because the congregation knew nothing was being done in haste." Even when the congregation entered into fellowship in protest in 1969 it was hoped that things would be turned around by 1971. Unfortunately that never happened.

Pastor Moll recalls that the members of Bethlehem were sympathetic and understanding. They had gone through a lot of instruction and were well informed about what was happening. The congregation, however, did lose about 50 members over a period of several months. Apparently many of these left because they thought Bethlehem was going to make drastic changes. When they saw that this was not the case, about 20 returned. Even those who left permanently were sympathetic, but they felt compelled to leave because of family ties.

Bethlehem decided to remain independent for a time after the break from LCMS. A committee was appointed to study the possibility of joining either WELS, the ELS, or the FAL. President Orvick of the ELS came and preached. During the Bible hour he answered questions about the ELS. A month later President Naumann of the WELS came and did the same thing. Materials about both synods were published for the congregation.

Recognizing the tremendous blessing Bethlehem would be to the ELS and the fact that the closest representation of the ELS

was in Clintonville, Wisconsin, the committee recommended Bethlehem Lutheran Church apply for membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. (appendix N).

Only a few days before the meeting of January 16, 1972 members were approaching Pastor Moll, wondering what the ELS was - and this after much material had been presented. Moll recalls that up until this time the committee was not getting any feedback from the congregation. Finally it also came out that if Bethlehem voted to apply for membership in the ELS a number of members indicated they would leave and join Martin Luther Lutheran Church (WELS). Martin Luther is less than a mile from Bethlehem. Many close ties had been established between the two congregations years earlier, when Pastor Lueders of Bethlehem and Pastor Kleinschmidt of Martin Luther were close friends.

On January 16, 1972 the decision was reached at the annual voters assembly to join the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The following day a letter was sent to the members of Bethlehem by Pastor Moll. (appendix O). In this letter Pastor Moll expressed praise to the Lord for leading Bethlehem through difficult decisions and finally into membership with the WELS. In this encouraging letter he called the congregation to a new joy and determination for the Lord's Kingdom!

Serving on the colloquy committee were Vice President Carl Mischke, Professor Martin Albrect and District President Karl Gurgel. They met for several hours with both Pastor Moll and Elmer Baacke. It was during this meeting that Pastor Moll first discovered that officials in the WELS had been following his

newsletter articles. This made the colloquy very simple.

The congregation of Bethlehem benefitted greatly through all that had happened during those years. The members were well informed of the issues and the problems in LCMS. Pastor Moll is careful to state that Bethlehem does not condemn LCMS and never has. Rather he sums up that the congregation was compelled to leave because of errors not being corrected and no sign of hope that conservatism would be restored to the Missouri Synod. This was a growing experience for the congregation.

In his letter of January 17, 1972, Pastor Moll writes: "Now in the years that lie ahead, may He grant us the zeal and courage and happy hearts to carry on His work and do His will in worship, education, missions, stewardship, evangelism, and every other avenue of service that He provides for His church." The Lord of the church has blessed Bethlehem and she does carry out his work. We rejoice that the Lord has kept this congregation faithful to his Word and our prayer is that she continue to be faithful to the Lord's service.

Special Thanks to Pastor Walter H. Moll for his help in gathering this material and for his cooperation in an interview on March 28, 1987.

The ALC--Inerrancy--Honesty

"We who teach at Luther College cannot subscribe to scriptural inerrancy because our knowledge of Scripture prevents us from making such a claim" says Dr. Paul Jersild in an address titled "What Are Those Theologians Saying?" We have photographically reproduced on pages 6 and 7 Dr. Jersild's entire address from the Spring, 1967 LUTHER, a publication of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

Dr. Fredrik Schiotz, president of the ALC and the Lutheran World Federation, defends the position taken by Dr. Jersild in this address. Officials of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, who have been urging their synod to declare fellowship with the ALC, claim that the ALC insists on the doctrine of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture.

Officials of the Missouri Synod have been given more than enough evidence to prove that many pastors and professors within the ALC reject the scriptural doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible.

A scientifically conducted poll published in the July/August 1967 TRANS-ACTION revealed that only 23% of the clergy of the ALC accepted the inerrancy of the Bible.

The same poll said that approximately 76% of the Missouri Synod's clergy accepted the inerrancy of the Bible.

Last year just before the delegates at the Missouri Synod's convention in New York adopted a resolution declaring "that the Scriptural and Confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church exists," we showed "What Are Those Theologians Saying?" to the chairman of the committee offering the resolution. In spite of the fact that officials had such clear evidence that inerrancy is being denied within the ALC, they suppressed the evidence and misled the convention into believing that the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible is being upheld within the ALC.

We commend Dr. Jersild for his honesty in saying that the professors at the ALC's Luther College reject the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. WE DEPLORE THE DECEPTION OF OFFICIALS WHO COVER UP THIS DENIAL OF THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE. OFFICIALS SHOULD BE HONEST.

RE: PULPIT AND ALTAR FELLOWSHIP WITH ALC

- Whereas, the 47th regular convention of the Mo. Synod declared, "...the Scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church exists, ..."; and further declared, "That the President of the Synod in conjunction with the Council of Presidents make the appropriate recommendations to the 1969 convention"; and
- Whereas, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod at its New York Convention urged "...all its representatives and officials to work earnestly and sincerely toward a unified evangelical position and practice in areas of church life where disturbing diversities still exist, particularly in reference to un-Christian and anti-Christian societies, through continued mutual study with the officials and representatives of the American Lutheran Church on the basis of the Word of God;" and
- Whereas, it is clear from current public teachings of the American Lutheran Church that doctrines contrary to Holy Scriptures are being taught; and
- Whereas, it is evident that the wide-spread practice of accepting into communicant membership members of Christ-denying organizations continues to exist in the ALC and that fellowship with the ALC at this time will cause a great confusion in our own midst with respect to the lodge question; and
- Whereas, the American Lutheran Church practices fellowship with the Lutheran Church in America and is also affiliated with the World Council of Churches and The Lutheran World Federation, which organizations are unionistic; and
- Whereas, not entering into pulpit and altar fellowship with the ALC at this point of our history would serve to strengthen the LC-MS in maintaining its firm theological position against present contrary trends in its own midst; Therefore be it
- Resolved, that the South Wisconsin District in Convention assembled declare that the conditions for a God-pleasing pulpit and altar fellowship between the ALC and the LC-MS do not exist at the present time; and be it further
- Resolved, that the South Wisconsin District request its president to present to the praesidium of the LC-MS that pulpit and altar fellowship should not be established with the ALC as long as the above impediments to fellowship with the ALC exist.

I approve _____

I do not approve _____

I would like to know more about the issues which are involved in the matter of fellowship.

Yes _____ No _____

Resolution to
The Convention of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod
Denver, Colorado, 1969

Re: Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church (TALC)

Whereas, I have followed the provisions of New York Resolution 3-23 of Synod for studying the issues involved in fellowship with The American Lutheran Church, including a thorough study of existing documents and publications of TALC, and a series of meetings on the local level with TALC pastors, and

Whereas, I have discovered that within the ranks of TALC pastors there are wide differences of belief and opinion with regard to the Holy Scriptures, and

Whereas, on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions it is clear that the position of our Missouri Synod is in obvious disagreement with the position of TALC regarding the Scriptures, anti-christian lodges, and affiliations in the ecumenical movement (LWF and WCC), and

Whereas, a declaration of fellowship with TALC would mean a compromise of our Synod's position, which has always been based solidly on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, as our Brief Statement clearly reflects, and

Whereas, TALC officially allows for more than one view or opinion even in major areas of doctrine, a fact which becomes obvious in such TALC publications as The Bible - Book of Faith, Theological Perspectives, The Reformation - Then and Now, and When God Speaks, a practice which is totally foreign to our Synod's single, unified doctrinal position, and

Whereas, statements in the above-mentioned publications have on occasion cast doubts on the Bible as the Word of God, as well as historic doctrinal statements of the Lutheran Church, and

(forward)

Whereas, the damage done to our Missouri Synod in terms of division and confusion, due to a declaration of fellowship with TALC, would be irreparable, and

Whereas, TALC, at its 1968 Omaha Convention, declared fellowship with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), a church body with which we are not in doctrinal agreement, thereby placing our Missouri Synod in the unfortunate position of having to decide the fellowship issue with both TALC and LCA, and

Whereas, the time allowed for official discussions with TALC as well as discussions between LCMS and TALC representatives on the local level has been far too short for such a critical matter,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, in convention assembled in Denver, Colorado, in 1969, declare itself opposed to fellowship with The American Lutheran Church at the present time, and be it further RESOLVED, that earnest efforts be made to establish full doctrinal agreement with The American Lutheran Church before making any further offers or attempts to declare fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.

Respectfully submitted,

Reverend Walter H. Moll
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

DOCUMENTATION OF OUR POSITION

In our day, when almost every major church body is internally divided between those who accept the Bible as the written Word of God, verbally inspired and inerrant, and those on the other hand who are not willing to accept the Bible as God's Word, it is necessary that every individual and every congregation take a stand. We have taken our stand, in the words of our own constitution, in support of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (see 1967 Handbook of the Synod), in support of the BRIEF STATEMENT, and in our resolution of July 1969 (Declaration of Our Position). We base our position on the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

The following documentation is given in support of Bethlehem Lutheran Church's decision to remain in a "state of confession," and not to practice altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.

- 1.) We believe that altar and pulpit fellowship between The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) and The American Lutheran Church (TALC) at this time would be unionistic because true doctrinal unity has not been established between the LCMS and TALC. The LCMS Constitution, Article VI, requires member congregations to renounce "unionism and syncretism of every description."
- 2.) Congregations of the LCMS are safeguarded by the LCMS Constitution as follows: Article VII - "In its relation to its members Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned."
- 3.) The BRIEF STATEMENT of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod, paragraphs 28 & 29, clarifies the meaning and limitations of church fellowship. We do not believe that fellowship between LCMS and TALC is permissible for reasons which we shall enumerate. Paragraphs 28 and 29 are reprinted here:

"28. On Church-Fellowship. Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, I Peter 4:11; John 8:31,32; I Timothy 6:3,4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matthew 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Romans 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Romans 16:17, II John 9:10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, II Timothy 2:17-21.

"29. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand,

(continued)

a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; I Timothy 1:3."

- 4.) We do not believe that the vote on Denver Resolution 3-15 (522 "for fellowship" and 438 "against fellowship") was a clear mandate to proceed with fellowship, since it revealed a deep cleavage in the LCMS, and no congregational referendum has been provided for.
- 5.) We submit the following Scripture passages as examples to consider in deciding on matters of fellowship. (This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but only a sampling.):
John 8:31-32; Romans 16:17; Galatians 5:7-10; Jude 3, 4;
Revelation 3:14-22; II Corinthians 11:12-15; Galatians 1:6-10;
Titus 1:9-11; I John 4:1-3; II Timothy 2:16-18; Matthew 7:15-20;
Matthew 16:6; John 7:43; II John 9-11; Matthew 28:19-20;
Romans 15:5-6.
- 6.) The inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures is being doubted or denied in various publications of The American Lutheran Church, e.g.:
 - a) "The infallibility of the Scriptures is the infallibility of Jesus Christ and not the infallibility of the written text." (THE BIBLE: BOOK OF FAITH, Page 148, 1964)
 - b) In THE BIBLE: BOOK OF FAITH (officially approved by TALC Second General Convention in 1964), note these teachings:
 1. Pauline authorship of I & II Timothy, Titus, and Petrine authorship of II Peter impugned (pp. 126, 127)
 2. Isaiah didn't write Isaiah, Chapters 40-66 (pp. 43, 62, 76)
 3. Daniel didn't write book of Daniel (pp. 46, 77, 78)
 4. Mosaic authorship of first five books of the Bible impugned (pp. 67-79)
 5. Historical factualness of Genesis 1-11 made doubtful (pp. 54, 153)
 - c) Evolution is being taught in some TALC circles in preference to creation.
 - d) Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotez, TALC President, in his essay, THE CHURCH'S CONFSSIONAL STAND RELATIVE TO THE SCRIPTURES: "The ALC holds that the inerrancy referred to here" (TALC constitution) "does not apply to the text but to the truths revealed for our faith, doctrine and life." (June 9, 1966)
 - e) THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES, Department of Religion, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. (pp. 17, 18, 43, 44, 56)
 - f) THE REFORMATION, THEN AND NOW, Charles S. Anderson, Tower Book, Augsburg Publishing House, 1966 (p. 104).
 - g) WHEN GOD SPEAKS, Philip A. Quanbeck, Tower Book, Augsburg, 1968.
- 7.) The matter of lodge members is still an unsolved issue between the LCMS and TALC. The Missouri Synod does not permit lodge

(continued)

members to join the church without first leaving their lodge. To hold membership in a Christian church and a lodge at the same time is to deny the Gospel of Christ. This is a matter of doctrine, and involves the central doctrine of the Christian faith: Justification by grace through faith in Christ. The ALC allows lodge members to join their churches, and encourages their pastors to deal with such members by alerting them to the lodge evil and thereby encouraging them to leave their lodge. TALC pastors frankly admit that such efforts are often unsuccessful. In general, ALC pastors treat the lodge matter as just one among many pastoral problems, with the emphasis on sanctification rather than justification. The LCMS constitution outlines definite procedures for dealing with lodge members; TALC constitution does not have such provisions.

- 8.) We object to altar and pulpit fellowship with TALC also because of TALC's membership in the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Both the LWF and WCC are unionistic organizations of mixed confession. Fellowship with TALC brings pressure to bear on LCMS to eventually join one or both of these organizations. Membership in LWF and/or WCC would almost certainly lead the LCMS into the doctrinal chaos of the modern ecumenical movement, in which doctrine becomes less important than organizational structure.
- 9.) TALC is in full fellowship with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), a synod which has often had the reputation for being the most doctrinally liberal of all the major Lutheran bodies. TALC declared fellowship with LCA in October, 1968, at the same time that TALC declared fellowship with LCMS. This becomes an almost impossible triangle, with doctrinal error in all three synods, and with no apparent attempt at doctrinal discipline, and little concern for true Scriptural unity in doctrine.
- 10.) We do not believe this is the proper time to have altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church (TALC), for all the above reasons. We believe an honest effort should be made in all three major Lutheran synods (including the LCMS) to restore complete loyalty to the Scriptures as God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word. This means a restoration of doctrinal discipline on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. It means a correct understanding and distinction between the Invisible Church and the visible churches, between the unity of faith and the unity of confession. It means, finally, that true, God-pleasing fellowship can be established only where two church bodies have discovered complete doctrinal unity on the basis of the Scriptures and directed by the Holy Spirit.

We pledge ourselves anew to proclaiming and defending the Holy Scriptures as God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word. We promise, with God's help, to continue to pray for true, Scripture-based, God-pleasing unity. And we pledge ourselves to a more zealous concern for the mission command of our Lord, Who said: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you."

DECLARATION OF OUR POSITION

Whereas The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has declared itself in fellowship with The American Lutheran Church (Denver, July 1969), and

Whereas this fellowship was declared without complete doctrinal agreement between The LC-MS and TALC, and

Whereas the Constitution of our Synod, Article VI, Point 2, and the Brief Statement of our Synod (Page 13, No. 28), have made it obligatory that there be full agreement in doctrine and practice before declaring fellowship, and

Whereas Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Oshkosh has already declared its opposition to altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church by formal resolution to the Denver Convention (Convention Workbook, Pages 160-161), and

Whereas fellowship with The American Lutheran Church would involve us with such fellowship commitments of TALC as Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, as well as fellowship with The Lutheran Church in America, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that we continue to give a clear and uncompromising testimony of The Faith to the members of The American Lutheran Church, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we stand firmly on the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and declare ourselves not in fellowship with The American Lutheran Church, and thus refrain from practicing altar and pulpit fellowship, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we stand united with those sister congregations of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod who are of like mind and declaration with us, and be it finally

RESOLVED, that in genuine Christian love we continue to pray for all people, and rededicate ourselves to carry out the mission command of our Lord Jesus Christ to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Bethlehem Lutheran Church of
Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Inc.

Adopted July 23, 1969

RESOLUTION

To be submitted for discussion: October 1970 Voters Assembly.
 To be submitted for action: January 1971 Annual Congregation Meeting.

Whereas, there is evidence that the doctrinal split in the Missouri Synod will not be healed as long as present conditions continue (e.g. Fellowship with TALC, Woman Suffrage, absence of noticeable discipline against doctrinal error, further involvement with the LCA, and membership in LCUSA), and

Whereas, we as a congregation have in the past submitted resolutions to the South Wisconsin District and The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, stating that we uphold the BRIEF STATEMENT, and stating our opposition to TALC fellowship and the Synod's contemplated membership in the Lutheran World Federation, and

Whereas, we as a congregation have entered a state of confessional protest as of July 23, 1969 (resolution: Declaration of Our Position) against the declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church (TALC) which was approved by a small majority (522 "for" and 438 "against") at the 1969 Denver Convention of Synod, and

Whereas, we have made public our "state of confession," and have informed our Synod and District presidents, and have made available a "Documentation of Our Position" so that others will know our reasons for confessional protest, and

Whereas, it is our conviction that to continue in a synodical body which is so divided will only bring more confusion, internal dissension, and discouragement, and

Whereas, we believe that to continue in the Synod under these conditions would violate God's words pertaining to separation and genuine union (Romans 16:17, Ephesians 4:3-6, and other passages of the Holy Scriptures),

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we encourage our congregation to greater faithfulness to the Word of God through regular worship and Bible study, and be it further

RESOLVED that we endeavor to keep ourselves and our congregation properly informed about conditions in the church and Synod, and be it further

RESOLVED that if the 1971 Convention of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod does not rescind fellowship with The American Lutheran Church, and does not terminate our Synod's membership in LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.), then we as a congregation shall withdraw our membership in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, and be it finally

RESOLVED that we as a congregation shall apply for membership in a Lutheran church body which adheres to the Biblical and Confessional standards of historic Lutheran Christianity.

TWO TRAINS ON DIFFERENT TRACKS

To help clarify the problems that have beset the Missouri Synod in recent years, the Rev. Willard Koch of Pipestone, Minnesota, has identified in simple terms the two opposing theologies which are found in our Synod today. He says: "The two trains have been traveling around in the world for a long time. Sometimes they were labeled 'Revelation' and 'Reason'. What is relatively new is that they are now both found running within the boundaries of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Obviously, no one can travel on both trains at the same time. He must choose one or the other."

The reader will note that "Theology I" is the historic position of the Missouri Synod, upheld by the Synod's constitution. "Theology II" is the "new theology" which is threatening to engulf our Synod. If "Theology II" wins out, it will not be just an academic victory; but the very faith of our children and grandchildren will be at stake because "Theology II" undermines the Bible. After reading this comparison, I'm sure every member will realize how urgent it is for us to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3-4).

Note that "Theology I" is what the Bible teaches and what we must teach. "Theology II" is the "new theology" which attacks the Bible; we must stay away from that.

.... Pastor Moll

THEOLOGY I

1. True religion deals with objective truth.
2. The Bible is the Word of God.
3. The Bible is the written speech of God.
4. The Bible is propositional truth; that is, factual statements that must be believed because God said them.
5. God is supreme and judges man.
6. Right is determined by God, that is, morality standards are fixed.
7. Truth is absolute, that is, as unchangeable as the multiplication table.
8. History is absolute and therefore applicable to the present and recorded for our learning.

THEOLOGY II

1. Religion is a subjective system of thought.
2. The Bible contains the Word of God.
3. The Bible is human speech about God, although it may be divinely guided.
4. Religion is non-propositional, that is, Scriptural statements may not necessarily be accurate in detail.
5. Man is supreme and even judges God.
6. Right is determined by popular opinion, that is, morality standards are in a state of flux.
7. Truth is relative, that is, applicable only under certain conditions.
8. History is relative and therefore not necessarily applicable to the present.

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TWO TRAINS ON DIFFERENT TRACKS (Continued)

THEOLOGY I

THEOLOGY II

9. The Bible is literally true, that is, true in the sense in which the common reader would understand it.

9. The Bible is allegory, myth, legend, saga, folk lore, etc., which may have suffered many changes in the process of transmission.

(Note: Literal does not mean literalistic. For example: "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust," literally is a promise of God's protection. It is not to be understood in the literalistic sense that God is a winged being with feathers. Or: "the four corners of the earth" literally means the four major points of the compass. Literalistically it would mean that the earth is square. The simple reader understands this. Only the facetious have trouble.)

10. The Bible is a permanent norm for all times.

10. The Bible needs constant updating.

11. Precise doctrine is important.

11. Precise doctrine is unimportant.

12. Man must adjust to the will of God.

12. Religion must be adapted to the times.

13. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the message of forgiveness through Christ's atonement.

13. The mission of the Church is to better social conditions on earth.

14. Christ is the vicarious Redeemer, that is, He substituted for us and took our place under the Law.

14. Christ is the Master, the Leader, the Pattern, whose example we must imitate and follow.

15. The chief concern of the Gospel is a blissful hereafter.

15. The chief concern of the Gospel is happiness now.

16. Salvation is from the torments of hell.

16. Salvation is from earthly woes.

17. Salvation is only through Jesus Christ.

17. Salvation is for all "good" people.

18. Welfare work is the handmaid of the Gospel.

18. Welfarism and humanitarianism are synonymous with the Gospel.

19. Evil comes from within, "Out of the heart" of the individual

19. Evil comes from the environment and victimizes the individual.

20. Man is instinctively evil.

20. Man is instinctively good.

21. The natural evil in man must be inhibited and replaced by good.

21. The natural goodness of man must be allowed to develop without inhibition.

22. Education involves non-permissiveness of evil and the development of high ideals and wholesome goals.

22. Education involves granting ample opportunity for permissive self-expression.

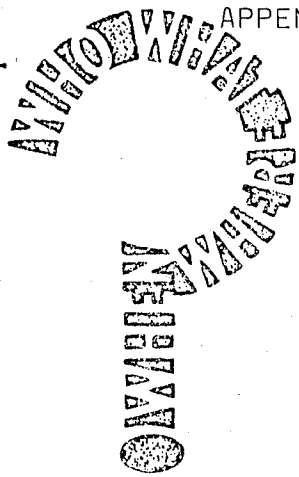
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TWO TRAINS ON DIFFERENT TRACKS (Continued)

THEOLOGY I

THEOLOGY II

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|--|---|
| 23. Man was created perfect and fell into sin and degeneration. | 23. Man evolved from the primitive and is gradually rising to maturity. |
| 24. Evil involves individual guilt. | 24. Evil involves little or no individual guilt but only immaturity. |
| 25. Regeneration of the individual is necessary. | 25. Regeneration is unnecessary. Rather, higher levels of maturity need to be achieved. |
| 26. Christ came to bring personal salvation. | 26. Christ came to regenerate the masses. |
| 27. Baptism is a means of adoption into the family of God and therefore is highly important. | 27. Baptism is a symbol or badge of the acceptance of Christianity and is therefore relatively unimportant. (This point is not common among Lutherans.) |
| 28. The Lord's Supper is primarily a reassurance of the reality of forgiveness. (Note the emphasis.) | 28. The Lord's Supper is primarily a eucharistic (thanksgiving) fellowship observance. (Note emphasis.) |
| 29. Forgiveness, while offered to all, is received only by the penitent. | 29. Forgiveness is based on the universal love of God and is automatic, requiring no repentance. |
| 30. Christians are free people, but their liberty does not include license. | 30. Liberty is defined to include a certain amount of license. (Note: Liberty is the right to do right; license is the supposed right to do what one pleases and to demand the satisfaction of every whim.) |
| 31. Morality is a matter of the heart and cannot be legislated into existence. | 31. Morality must be legislated in conformity to such legislation. |
| 32. The organized church trains individual consciences and teaches principle which is motivated by the Gospel. | 32. The organized church must concern itself with just legislation. |
| 33. The Holy Christian Church is invisible, consisting of genuine believers only and is not an organized body. | 33. The Church is visible only and consists of all who confess to be Christians. |
| 34. Individual members of the Church are a salt in the earth. | 34. The Church is a pressure group. |
| 35. Fellowship can be properly practiced only on the basis of confessional agreement, because faith itself is invisible. | 35. Fellowship must be practiced on the basis of a confessed adherence to Christianity and at times even on basis of the general brotherhood of man. |



WHAT ERRORS TO WATCH OUT FOR? By Pastor Moll

In one of our "Meetings for Concerns," the question was asked, "How do we know what to watch out for?" In other words, How do we recognize error and false doctrine when we see it?

This is such a good question that I thought it would merit space in the Newsletter, with some answers that can help all of us. I'd like to give the answer in two parts: A) Know what the Bible says; and B) Be familiar with at least some terms and statements which are being promoted by false teachers today.

There is no shortcut to knowing what the Bible says. We must read the Bible, study it in prayerful meditation, ask the Holy Spirit's guidance as we read.

All other teachings that we hear or read in this world must be tested under the bright light of Biblical truth. See I John 4:1-3. Use Luther's Small Catechism to help you understand the teachings (doctrines) of the Bible. Remember, the Catechism is still one of the finest short explanations of Christian doctrine that you will find anywhere. For other books on Bible doctrine, consult our church library.

But now for the second part of our answer: Be familiar with at least some terms and statements which are being used and promoted by false teachers today. Here we intend to give our readers a few samples of false doctrine, so they will know what to watch out for.

1. Watch out for the person or book that says "Jesus Christ, not the Bible, is the Word of God." The Bible does call Jesus Christ "the Word" in John 1, but the Bible makes a distinction between Jesus Christ "the living Word," and the Bible as "the written Word" of God. Those who want to limit the "Word of God" to Jesus Christ are usually the same people who will not accept the Bible as God's Word but only a human book that contains mistakes and myths.
2. Watch out for the person or writing that says "The Bible contains the Word of God." That implies that the Bible is not entirely God's Word but has God's Word in it. That line of reasoning allows man to tamper with the Bible and take out the parts he doesn't agree with. The Bible itself and true Christianity have always taught that "The Bible IS the Word of God." In other words, all of the Bible is God's Word. Look at what the Catechism says about Scripture; this will show what we must believe.
3. Watch out for those who want to eliminate the first chapters of Genesis by calling them "a story, a myth, a legend, or non-history." By doing that, they eliminate creation, the fall into sin, and the Flood. And they also eliminate Jesus Christ, Who took part in creation and is promised in Gen. 3:15. And when they have gone that far, where will they stop? By doing that, they are closing the very door of heaven to themselves.
4. Watch out for the person or writing that says "everything pertaining to theology in the Bible must be God's Word, but facts about history and science and geography are not necessarily God's Word." By saying that, they leave it up to man to decide how much of the Bible is God's Word and how much they want to believe. Again, they are risking their own salvation. Where will their "process of elimination" ever stop?

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WHAT ERRORS TO WATCH OUT FOR? (Continued)

5. Watch out for the person who says you don't have to believe in the Virgin Birth of Christ to be a Christian. But look what happens to such a person: He denies the Virgin Birth; then he has to deny that Jesus is true God; if Jesus is not true God, then He couldn't have been the Savior; and if we have no Savior, God is lying and we are eternally lost.
6. Watch out for the person who says "You can trust Jesus Christ but you can't tell for sure if all the words of the Bible are true." But notice how dangerous that statement is. Jesus Christ is revealed in the Bible; He equates His Words with His Father's Words. So if we can't trust the words of the Bible, then we're in pretty sad shape because how then can we trust Jesus Christ, Who is revealed in those words and Who speaks to us in those words?
7. Watch out for the person who says "The Bible might contain factual errors." The Bible does contain difficult passages which our finite minds may never understand. But never errors! Otherwise, how could Jesus have said, "The Scripture cannot be broken."? Or how could St. Paul have testified that "All Scripture is inspired by God"? A God-breathed Bible, which is what we have, could not possibly be in error; if it were, we wouldn't have a perfect God.
8. Watch out for the person who says that "God created the world, but He probably did it by evolution." But the very idea of evolution rules out creation. True science supports creation much more than evolution. The major evidence is all on the side of creation, not evolution. Evolution rules out God entirely, and makes man just another animal. Evolution is based on many presuppositions and opinions, which makes it only a theory and a questionable one at that! On the other hand, God speaks clearly in Genesis and many other places in the Bible about how He created all things; and God's statements even have the support of scientific facts.
9. Watch out for the person who tries to make the miracles of the Bible appear as natural phenomena and not the special work of God. Such unbelief will finally weed out the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Ascension, yes the Savior Himself. True Christians accept the miracles of the Bible the same way they accept the whole Bible as God's Word without error.
10. Watch out for the person who calls sin "outdated," and the Ten Commandments "good enough for Bible times but too strict for today." Such people operate with what they call the concept of "love," by which they mean "you can do anything you want to do and find a way to call it good." Called the "new morality," it's nothing more nor less than plain immorality. Whoever rules out sin must also rule out salvation. Such people are eternally lost. See I John 1:8-10.
11. Watch out for the so-called "honest questions" which some clergymen are posing: questions like "Was Jesus really God?" or "Did Jesus really know in advance what would happen to Him on the cross?" These are not "honest questions"; they are plainly dishonest. The Bible speaks very clearly about these things; there is no reason for anyone to ask such questions. In Lutheran theology, there has never been any room for such questions, since they are usually asked by scoffers; and the obvious result is that they weaken faith and create doubts. We can understand it if a person honestly searching for the Truth would ask such a question; but then he would also be satisfied with the Bible's answer. But when such a question is

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WHAT ERRORS TO WATCH OUT FOR? (Continued)

11. asked by a Christian clergyman, without ever giving the clear answer of the Bible, then it is misleading and destructive to faith.

We have given a brief sampling of false teachings to watch out for. More detailed explanations of false teachings will be found in the excellent book, BAAL OR GOD, by Herman Otten. There the author explains the various false teachings that threaten the Church today. Copies of BAAL OR GOD are available from the church office free. Ask for one. Many who attended our last Bethlehem Forum program received a copy.

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Summary of "Meetings for Concerns"

Since you were not with us for any of our "Meetings for Concerns," we are sending you this brief summary of our meetings so that you will be familiar with these concerns. Even in families where one member came, we are sending this summary of concerns to each member who was not with us for a meeting.

Dennis Crowe, President
Robert Kriegel
Pastor Walter Moll

1. Opening Devotion: II Corinthians 4.
2. The spirit of our concerns: Love for the Lord, for His Word, for His Church, for our congregation, for our children. (The future of our children's faith is at stake if the present liberal trends away from the Bible are allowed to continue in our Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. For a description of what these liberal trends are, see the March Newsletter, the article titled, "Two Trains on Different Tracks.")
3. The Missouri Synod today is divided between (1) those who want to uphold, defend, and teach the Bible as God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word (this is our position at Bethlehem; we support the traditional position of Missouri Synod and its constitution); and (2) those who want our Missouri Synod to be "free" to allow pastors and teachers to criticize the Bible, deny it, and accept or reject whatever parts of the Bible do not agree with "human reason." (Some of this strange thinking is found in a liberal document issued by some men in our Synod, called "A Call to Openness and Trust." This document has been condemned by Synod President Dr. Preus and the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations.)
4. Our Synod's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis is currently under investigation by Synod President Dr. Preus and a fact-finding committee which includes our own District President Barth, to determine for the Synod whether or not false doctrine is being taught at the Seminary by any of the professors. For many years pastors and laymen in the Synod have been bringing charges and evidence of false doctrine against certain professors at the Seminary, but little has been done by officials to deal with such problems. This investigation should prove helpful to the Synod, since for the future of the church, it is necessary to know if our future pastors are being trained in loyalty to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, as our Synod's Constitution requires.
5. To complicate the internal problems of our Missouri Synod, the Synod declared fellowship with The American Lutheran Church in 1969, a decision which violates Article VI of our Synod's own constitution. Congregations like ours, across the nation, are not practicing this fellowship because we believe it is contrary to the Bible, our Lutheran Confessions, the Brief Statement, and our Synod constitution. In doctrine, our Synod and the ALC are really not in agreement, as we documented many times before and since our Synod's 1969 convention.
6. Our Synod's Brief Statement (official doctrinal position) sets down definite guidelines for church fellowship in paragraphs 28 & 29, with which all our members should be familiar. "Church fellowship" means the privilege of communing in other churches, and pastors being able to exchange pulpits. The Bible, Lutheran Confessions, Brief Statement, and Synod's constitution all make it plain that church fellowship can only take place where there is complete agreement in doctrine and practice between churches.
7. Our concern is also for our children and grandchildren. We do not want to endanger their faith by remaining in a synod which may be gradually engulfed by unBiblical teachings. We adults may be able to withstand the liberalism and fight it off, but can our children?

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8. What can we do? (1) We must pray that our Missouri Synod will return to its former strong confessional position in faithfulness to the Bible; (2) many congregations, including our own, have requested the 1971 Synod Convention in Milwaukee to rescind or suspend the ALC fellowship and get us out of LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.) LCUSA has involved our Synod in compromising situations in doctrine, such as the LCUSA booklet about Christ, titled "Who Can This Be?", which casts doubts upon our Savior's deity. While our Synod cut its mission staff in New Guinea by 21 workers, for lack of funds, the Synod still paid \$688,000.00 to LCUSA in 1970 as our Synod's share of LCUSA's expenses. The LCA and ALC are also paying members of LCUSA.

If the Milwaukee Convention this summer is successful in rescinding or suspending the ALC fellowship and getting our Synod out of LCUSA, then it is a good sign that our Synod may be able to correct its problems and restore a true, Bible-based unity.

9. If these actions are not successful at the 1971 Convention, then there are several alternatives open to congregations: (1) stay in the Synod and continue to defend God's Word and fight the false doctrines that arise; (2) leave the Synod in order to obey what God's Word says in Romans 16:17, I Cor. 1:10, etc. If we leave the Synod, there are several alternatives: Remain independent for a time, join with other congregations that leave at the same time, join the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, or join the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. (The last two church bodies mentioned are the two leading church bodies in confessional Lutheranism today.)

10. As you can see, our concerns are based on a sincere desire to remain faithful to God's Word, the Bible, and to preserve the teaching and preaching of God's pure Word here in our congregation. We pray earnestly for our Synod and for the whole Christian Church on earth. Won't you join us in prayer?

11. Our meetings closed with the reading of Jude 3 & 4, and stanzas of our Confirmation hymn, #335 in The Lutheran Hymnal.

My Maker, be Thou nigh
The light of life to give
And guide me with Thine eye
While here on earth I live.
To Thee my heart I tender
And all my powers surrender;
Make it my one endeavor
To love and serve Thee ever.

Upon Thy promise I rely;
My Maker, be Thou nigh. Amen.

TO TERMINATE LCMS MEMBERSHIP IN LCUSA

Whereas, membership in LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.) has brought the LCMS into compromising situations with The ALC and the LCA which involve doctrine and conscience, and

Whereas, the constituent bodies of LCUSA (LCA, TALC, LCMS, SELC) are obviously divided on the doctrine of Scripture, and

Whereas, LCUSA has become involved in the area of politics, where we in the LCMS are convinced from Scripture that the Church does not belong, and

Whereas, the excessive membership costs of belonging to LCUSA (ca. \$500,000.00 per year or more) have seriously hampered our mission outreach to the world for lack of mission funds, a situation which we cannot justify on the basis of Scripture, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, in convention assembled at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in July 1971, withdraw its membership in LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.).

Respectfully Submitted by

Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Oshkosh, Inc.
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

TO REQUEST SYNOD TO RESCIND OR SUSPEND FELLOWSHIP WITH T.A.L.C.

Whereas, the altar and pulpit fellowship declared at the 1969 Denver Convention with The American Lutheran Church (TALC) has brought divisions, disturbances, and disharmony into The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS), and

Whereas, genuine differences in public doctrine and practice do still exist between the LCMS and TALC, without any apparent solution, differences which the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Brief Statement consider divisive of church fellowship, and

Whereas, membership of TALC in the Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Churches causes concern and alarm to many in the LCMS because of the unionistic nature of those organizations and the repeated efforts to bring the LCMS into their membership, and

Whereas, the unscriptural practice of TALC in ordaining women to the office of the ministry has become an issue of major concern to many in the LCMS since its adoption by the 1970 TALC convention, and

Whereas, the disunity in the LCMS over the fellowship with TALC is becoming increasingly more serious, to the extent that some pastors and congregations have left the LCMS while others are considering such action in the near future, and

Whereas, we have in our hearts a deep love and respect for the LCMS, and earnestly pray for a return to the unity of doctrine and confession which the LCMS once held, truly evangelical and with a zeal for missions; Therefore, be it

RESOLVED that we respectfully request The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, in convention at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in July 1971, to rescind or suspend fellowship with The American Lutheran Church, and be it further

RESOLVED that no further declarations of fellowship be made until the differences in doctrine and practice between the two synods can be resolved so that a true and God-pleasing unity can exist on the basis of the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Respectfully submitted by

Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Oshkosh, Inc.
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

AN EVALUATION OF THE SYNOD CONVENTION .. by Pastor Moll

After reading and hearing many news reports and several in-depth evaluations, as well as some personal observations, of the Milwaukee Convention of the Missouri Synod (July 9 - 16, at the Milwaukee Arena), we'd like to look at the Convention issue-by-issue, and see what is really behind the various decisions. Most impartial observers have indicated that, even though the outcome of the Convention is a puzzle to many, it appears to be a clear-cut victory for the liberals (or "moderates," as they like to call themselves) in most of the issues. We have read what some of the liberals thought about the Convention, and it appears that they are quite satisfied with the outcome; and they openly hope for more liberal gains in the future.

1. Fellowship with The ALC. The fellowship with the ALC was continued "by a landslide vote." (quoted from the official Synod public relations release.) A move to suspend the ALC fellowship was "decisively defeated." At the same time, the Synod registered "strong regret" over the ALC's decision to ordain women, and asked the ALC to reconsider its action. The Synod voted to "defer new implementation" of fellowship until the ALC has had an opportunity to respond. ALC President Kent Knutson has already stated that the ALC considers women's ordination a closed issue, and the ALC is genuinely puzzled at Missouri's action, as their own LUTHERAN STANDARD of August 17 said: "We suspect that the ALC is in no mood to delay further cooperative efforts with other Christians while we search for beams in each others' eyes." Missouri's decision is an example of theological confusion: it exhibits indifference to doctrine and does not uphold the Bible commands about fellowship and separation.
2. Membership in LCUSA. Synod did not withdraw from LCUSA as it should have done in order not to prolong its unionistic involvements. Missouri did not vote to leave LCUSA, although it expressed some concerns about the activities of LCUSA. A conservative amendment to counteract false ecumenism was defeated. The Synod decided only to ask for studies of LCUSA's operations and theological stance, and to continue belonging to LCUSA "as a means of promoting unity in doctrine and practice." (quote from LCUSA's INTERCHANGE)

The fact that the Missouri Synod did not end its ties with the ALC and LCUSA is a clear indication that liberalism has gained a strong foothold in Missouri and will grow stronger. The hope of bringing Missouri back to its Scriptural foundation appears to be a lost hope. The non-denominational journal CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Aug. 6) says: "Regrettably, Preus appears to have been stymied - at least for now - in his bid to steer the three-million-member church back into a snug harbor of theological conservatism (a feat, incidentally, so far not accomplished by any major denomination)."

Other decisions of the Convention indicate the same downhill trend in doctrine, as we shall see.

3. Doctrinal Discipline. Dr. Preus had hoped to persuade the Synod to adopt a resolution which would give him some power to discipline pastors and professors who do not teach and uphold the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. The final result is a hybrid decision which sounds a note of concern but then does nothing to provide for effective doctrinal discipline. Dr. Preus stepped from the podium

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9. The St. Louis Seminary Investigation. Inaugurated by Dr. Preus and carried out by a very capable committee, the results of this investigation have now been placed into the hands of the Seminary (Concordia Seminary) board of control. This could mean that effective discipline will be brought to bear against those professors guilty of teaching false doctrine. Two factors, however, concern us: 1) the Convention elections resulted in a Seminary board of control of 8 liberals and 3 conservatives; and 2) Seminary President Dr. John Tietjen said: "I don't think any faculty member is in jeopardy." (quote from CHRISTIANITY TODAY)
10. Social Action & Welfare. A series of eight social ministry affirmations passed by the Convention are carefully evaluated in the July-August issue of SOLA SCRIPTURA. Summary of that evaluation is that the social ministry affirmations "showed much theological deterioration and particularly great confusion in the concept of the Church, its character and its task in the world. An increasingly socialized Gospel appears, basing itself on a rather fuzzy Jesus-enthusiasm, which no longer has a clear, doctrinally well-defined understanding of His person and the nature of His work."
11. We realize that there were some decisions made at the Convention (e.g. the evangelism thrust, the refusal to put campus work and Armed Services Commission into LCUSA, abolition of the office of Executive Director, etc.) which might well be called victories for the conservatives. But the vast majority of decisions of major importance gave clear evidence of the doctrinal erosion of the Synod, apparently beyond the point of any return.
12. One seemingly minor decision may have far-reaching effects: "the resolution declaring that those who are in a state of protest against false trends continue to have full rights of membership. This means that those who remain for the time being within LCMS can practice selective fellowship without being deprived of their rights." (quote from SOLA SCRIPTURA) This would seem to approve of groups in confessional protest within the Synod. Though they may not be deprived of their synodical rights, they often meet with intolerance by those who confuse loyalty to Synod with loyalty to God and His Word. And we also wonder how long such confessional protesting groups and individuals will be tolerated once the liberals officially take over the Synod.

IN CONCLUSION

It might be edifying to let others summarize the Milwaukee Convention:

CHRISTIANITY TODAY, the non-Lutheran, non-denominational journal of evangelical theology said: "The church may have moved a shade to the right from its position at Denver two years ago. But overall, the important victories went to the theological moderates." (the liberals, who often call themselves moderates)

THE NEW YORK TIMES: "Most observers do not expect the intervening period (between Milwaukee and New Orleans) to be pleasant, and it is quite possible that two more years of wasteful in-fighting will effectively eliminate the Missouri Synod as a serious force in American Protestantism."

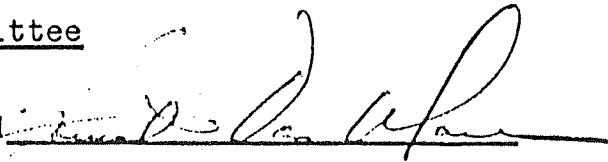
The Committee, appointed to study and report on the opportunities for joining another Lutheran synod, unanimously recommends the following:

We recommend that Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Oshkosh, Incorporated, apply for membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), for the following reasons.

- 1) The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, together with its sister synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, are the recognized leaders of true confessional Lutheranism in our day.
- 2) As a member congregation of the ELS, we would be in full altar and pulpit fellowship with the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod and the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, which means that we have the joy and privilege of intercommunion with these sister synods as well as the privilege of exchanging pulpits among their pastors and ours.
- 3) The representation of Lutheran churches in Oshkosh is such that having an ELS congregation in the city would be a distinct advantage in giving people a choice of churches and assisting the Wisconsin Synod to uphold and promote sound, confessional Lutheranism in this area.
- 4) The ELS, being a small synod, affords every congregation the opportunity to be fully represented by the pastor and two lay delegates at every ELS convention; ELS conventions are held every year.
- 5) The ELS could benefit greatly by our membership and support, since the ELS has opportunities at the present time to expand their mission work in Peru, as well as opportunities to enter new areas of the country with new congregations. A congregation like ours, coming into the ELS, would enable them to broaden their base of support.
- 6) The ELS exhibits a wonderfully positive attitude toward the Lord's work. At the same time the ELS is keenly aware of the growing liberalism in American Lutheranism today, and has made it clear that they welcome individuals and congregations who have left other synods for reasons of doctrine and conscience to come with the ELS. The ELS maintains a carefully disciplined ministerium; this is an advantage which a small synod has.
- 7) The ELS knows what it means to stand firmly in defense of God's Word, since their forefathers left a much larger Lutheran synod in 1917 for the same reasons many today are leaving the Missouri Synod and other large church bodies.
- 8) With its unique history, its firm stand on Holy Scripture, and its warm enthusiasm for the Lord's work, it would seem that we would have more opportunities to make our own unique contributions in the ELS than we might have in a larger synod.

It is our earnest recommendation, therefore, that Bethlehem Lutheran Church apply for membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We want to assure our brethren of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism that we rejoice to be able to stand in full fellowship with them in the proclamation and defense of God's pure Word.

The Committee

Signed 

Signed William T. Kuegel

Signed Walter C. Pollex

Signed 

Signed CW Eggers

Signed Edward Hadi 3rd

Signed Edmund L. Baucke

Signed Rev. Walter Hummel
ex officio

Signed Dennis T. Corne Jr.
ex officio

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Oshkosh, Wisconsin
January 17, 1972

Dear Members of Bethlehem:

With joy and praise to God for His grace and guidance I want to share with you the good news that our congregation is now a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This decision was made at the Voters' Assembly annual meeting on Sunday, January 16.

We rejoice in this decision. This means that we are in the same Synod now with Grace Lutheran (Nebraska Street), Martin Luther Lutheran (Algoma Boulevard), Faith Lutheran (Ohio Street), and Immanuel Lutheran (Eagle Street). We remain in fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, which are our two sister synods.

What does this mean for our congregation and our people? I have attached to this letter a little series of questions and answers that will help to explain our new synod affiliation.

Our hearts overflow with joy and thanksgiving to God, Who has brought us through many a decision for the glory of His Name. Just as we have delighted to follow His Word through the years, may He keep us faithful and obedient to His Word throughout all the years of our lives.

Now, in the years that lie ahead, may He grant us the zeal and courage and happy hearts to carry on His work and do His will in worship, education, missions, stewardship, evangelism, and every other avenue of service that He provides for His Church.

As a congregation, let us now gather beneath our Savior's cross, and work together with new joy and determination for His Kingdom. Perhaps the words of a hymn will best express our love for the Lord and our unity of faith and confession as we do His work:

Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.

How wonderful to read God's definition of true unity in First Corinthians 1:10: "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."

May we daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him belongs all the glory!

In Jesus' saving name,

Pastor Walter H. Moll