

The 1856-1859 and the 1964-1970 Free Conferences
Similarities and Differences

To Professor E. Fredrich
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
May 4th, 1979

by
John Strackbein

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

I have entitled my paper, 1856-59/1964-70 Free Conferences-- Similarities and Differences. Naturally scores of similarities ~~and differences~~ could be found. I decided however to narrow the scope to three main points: 1) Similarities in the objectives and purposes 2) Similarities in fellowship practices and, 3) Similarities involving the results.

~~and Differences~~
SIMILARITIES^{and Differences} IN OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

In general, one could say of both Free Conferences that they were similar to each other in that both were attempts to strengthen the faith of the ^eseemingly faithful few. Both were attempts to seek unity and fellowship among Lutherans. In order to understand this one has to review the events leading up to the conferences. In the 1850's this is what happened. Many pastors in various synods who belonged to the General Council were unhappy. There was a large trend to tolerate practices which were inconsistent with the Lutheran Confessions. To solve this problem, Walther, only a few months after the definite platform had been circulated, issued an open invitation to 'Free Conferences'. Here is what he wrote, "So we venture openly to inquire: would not meetings held at intervals-- by such members of churches as call themselves Lutheran and acknowledge and confess without reservation that the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 is the pure and true statement of the doctrine of sacred Scripture and is also their own belief-- promote and advance the efforts towards the final establishment of one single

Lutheran Church of America? We for our part would be ready with all our heart to take part in such a conference of truly believing Lutherans whenever and wherever such a conference would be held."¹ Walther saw a lot of people who were one in faith groping and fighting against what could be the liberalism of his day involving attacks on the UAC. He wanted to unify those who stood for truth, on the basis of Scripture and the confessions. Here is a difference in the 1850 conferences and the 1960 conferences: The 1960 conferences had no intention of trying to unify all the Lutheran Synods into one Lutheran Church of America. In the invitation sent to all in the Wisconsin Synod in 1963, some questions and answers were given about the purpose and objectives of these free conferences. "Question: 'Why is this conference being called?' Answer: 'Many pastors and laymen in various Lutheran synods are concerned with liberalism which marks much Lutheran thought today. Many of these are especially concerned about the dilution of the doctrine of inspiration by neo-orthodox influence and by accomodation to current scientific theories.' Question: 'What is the purpose of the conference?' Answer: 'The immediate purpose is to provide a forum for mutual strengthening of all those who are concerned about an uncompromising confession of doctrines currently being jeopardized in the Lutheran Church. The ultimate objective is to obtain full unity in the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions and in their application in practical church life.'"²

Notice how both conferences strove for unity on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions. Walther's conferences went on to study the Augsburg Confession, article by article, since the confessions

as nothing else than a solemn oath-like promise to the church by the person who is entering its service, that he considers the doctrinal content itself of the confessions (but this without exception) as differing in no single instance (either in a primary or secondary point, and for that reason believes in it as in God's Word itself and thus intends to preach that doctrine without falsification. Therefore whatever position a teaching occupies in the doctrinal structure of the symbols and in whatever form it is presented, be it that of a matter specifically treated or that of an incidental statement, the unqualified subscription applies to all of them... clinging to the principle that the symbols are confessions of faith and doctrine, the church, on the other hand, must necessarily exclude all that which does not pertain to doctrine from the material by which the subscriber is bound."³

Walther appealed for a Free Lutheran Conference hoping that a united Lutheran church might be formed. However this united church was not to be united in name only but also in doctrine and practice of that doctrine. When the pastors gathered for the free Conference there was evidence that all of them were united in that doctrine. Listen to some of the statements Walther makes at the Free Conferences. "The more this strengthens the faith and the courage of all true Lutherans here, the more compelling is the challenge therein contained to nurture through these free Conferences with supreme faithfulness and greatest diligence the Unity which God through His marvelous grace has already wrought among us."⁴ Here is another interesting quote: "We are convinced that after a time in which the various local churches lapsed into a deep and

general decay in matters of doctrine and practice (as occurred in the last century,) there is no way more fitting for awakened individuals within the various church bodies to strengthen and advance the church unity which has become appanent. (It became apparent when most synods rejected the Definite Platform put out by the Wittenberg Synod, which tried to ain a large union of synods by t throwing out postions of the U.A.C.)"⁵

As long as we are discussing the practice of prayer fellow-ship at Free Conferences, we should also answer this question, "How could orthodox pastors belong to unorthodox church bodies?" This question was answered in this way, "We acknowledge such as brethren as long as they testify with vigor against the prevailing errors and for the truth. If was also stated that we consider it their duty to continue membership in their respective church bodies as long as there still is a basis for hepe of improvement." (Lutheraner, 1856 p.50).) What can we conclude then about Walther's joint prayer at the 1850 conferences? The answer to this question is best stated in the pamphlet called, Fellowship Then and Now. "Since the Free Conferences consisted of men who confessed unreserved acceptance of the Unalter Augsburg Confession, there was present a fundamental unity. Whatever errors one or the other may have had, was a matter of weakness and not of persistence. To refuse joint prayer under such circumstances would have been a violation of the brotherhood."⁶

Now that we have seen why Walther could have joint prayers and hymns, let us see why those in the 1960 free conferences could not in good conscience begin the meeting with joint prayer. First of all the situation was entirely different. In the 1800's the following synods appeared at the conferences: LCMS, Ohio, New York, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, Norwegian, and Pennsylvania.⁷ Since the

Definite Platform had just caused a lot of controversy, there was much confusion in these synods. Non of them however had closed their ears to admonition when they went astray. In contrast, many of the synods represented in the 1960 free conferences had totally rejected any further admonion in false doctrine. Here is a list of those who attended the 1964-70 free conferences: Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, ALC, Church of the Lutheran Conference, Concordia Lutheran Conference, ELs, LCA, LCMS, LCR and WELS⁸. A second reason for not beginning the meeting with prayer even though the Arrangements Committee defined a Free Conference as, "A meeting of individuals who meet as free agents, not representing their church bodies as such," was because there was an apparent lack of unity in doctrine among those present at the conference.

In the 1850 Free Conferences Walther said this, "The spirit which permeated the Conference was the spirit of truth, love, of peace... It became apparent in the clearest possible way that no one present would not have been ready to conform to recognized truth... No free utterance which followed on a frank assertion produced a lasting false note. One surpassed the other in showing deference according to God's Word. The result of this was that the longer they dealt with one another... the more firmly the members of the Conference were united in the ever growing consciousness of standing in one faith, and in true brotherly love."⁹

Compare this with what Pastor Norman Berg, the moderator at each of the 1963-70 Free Conferences, had to say. "Gathered as laymen and pastors dedicated to the service of the Savior, we seek a unity worked solely by the Holy Spirit. His guiding dare not be ignored. His guidance however, is not to be fo nd in mere human

desire for unity. It is to be found only in His means of grace through which He works. The Spirit inspired teachings of Scripture alone can be the judge as to whether unity exists and therefore should be recognized...As individuals committed publicly to confessional groupings which disagree in doctrine we will not by joint opening worship devotions proclaim a confessional fellowship which does not exist publicly. We therefore now as before each session offer time and opportunity during a time of silence for our personal petitions for an added measure of the Holy Spirit's gifts."¹⁰ Here it seems as if Pastor Berg is giving two reasons for not praying together. 1) Because of the various synods that people were dedicated to and 2) because of a lack of unity among themselves in certain doctrines. I see this implication when he says, "We seek a unity," and when he warns against seeing a unity when there is only, "a mere human desire for unity." To back up my point about a lack of unity in all doctrine at this conference, I would like to quote a layman who attended the Conference. "The unpleasant experience was the protracted debate over the seat of authority in the church, whether the congregation, or where two or three are gathered together.' The one group insisted upon the congregation only, and departed the Free Conferences when unable to win its point." (see point 8 under Mr. Ralph C. Lohrengels letter) In reading the floor discussions on the 'doctrine of justification' there also seemed to be a lack of unity on the part of some.

To briefly conclude this section I will say that Walther could allow prayer fellowship because a unity of faith already existed. Those at the 1964-1970 Conferences could not pray jointly because a unity in doctrine was not there.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE FREE CONFERENCE RESULTS

What were the results of the 1850 Free Conferences? Walther had this to say when the sessions broke up after the first conference. "Each conference member joyfully went his way convinced that our meeting had, by the grace of God, attained the desired goal, namely that a good foundation had been laid on which we could now continue to build...Many premature judgments had been laid aside, much misunderstanding had been removed; many a wall which formerly separated them had crumbled."¹¹

Previous to these conferences the various synods, "Instead of emphasizing their common relationship and serving one another with the special gifts which each possessed, they separated, step by step farther and farther from each other, and this fell into a divided state of jealousy...If one single Evangelical Lutheran Church, strong in unity, is to arise here, it can arise only through the unity of faith, through the awakening of the consciousness of the presence of such unity and through rallying around one Confession, as a treasure which must be mutually defended and preserved. The General Conference was to serve this purpose, and the result of that conference is that the first step in that direction has been taken...Unity in faith and their mutual relationship was in part aroused and in part enlivened and strengthened."¹²

As far as long term results, many historians feel that the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872 had its original germ in these four Conferences of 1856 - 59. Now lets compare these results with some of the results of the 1964-70 Free Conferences. In order to do that I wrote six letters to pastors and two to laymen who attended the Free Conferences and have since that time joined our Synod. The letter I wrote and the answers I received are attached at the end of this paper. On the letter I wrote, I

ents one man's thoughts. Obviously the 1964 Free Conferences had some positive results.⁴ If these results were not apparent among the twohundredfifty or so people that came each time, they were apparent at least among those who answered my letter. Frankly, I feel it wouldn't be wrong to draw this conclusion. Namely that if some of those who answered my letter were benefited spiritually and also saw the WELS and ELS in a different light, than it is possible that many others also were helped in a similar way.

One other possible result might have been possible although I have no time to pursue it. I am wondering to what extent the Free Conferences influenced members who very shortly afterwards formed into the church body known as FAL.

Let us now in conclusion compare again the Free Conferences under discussion. Actually the purpose Walther had in mind, and the purpose the organizers of the 1960 Conferences had in mind, are very similar; namely to obtain full unity in the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions and in their application in practical church life.

The results of both these Conferences are also very similar. In Walther's case full unity was not achieved permanently. The Ohio Synod eventually refused to come because of a disagreement in fellowship practices with the LCMS.¹³ In the 1960's Free Conference, full unity wasn't established either. Most of the conservatives from liberal bodies went back to their synods to contend for the faith some more. The Conference did however draw some of the people attending closer together in many of the doctrines discussed. Evidence of that fact comes from the letters I received and which

at the back of this paper. Actually even though nine years have passed since the last Conference, the final results may not yet be fully obvious. Maybe history in future years will look back and point to the Free Conferences of 1964-1970 as deciding influences in events which are still far in the future. After all, today historians credit the beginning influence or the germ of the Synodical Conference to the 1856 Conferences. It took 18 years or so for that germ to grow and sprout into reality.

FOOTNOTES

1. Vorwort Zu Jahrgang 1856, Lehre und Wehre 2 (Jan. 1856): 4
Translation by Ervin L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran
Conferences," Concordia Theological Monthly 15 (Aug. 1944):
529
2. 1960 Free Conference Invitation.
3. C.T.M. Vol. 15 Aug. 1944 p. 544.
4. Ibid. p. 534
5. Ibid.
6. Fellowship then and now p. 9 (a pamphlet put out by the WELS
advisory committee on doctrinal matters.)
7. C.T.M. P. 448.
8. Notes taken by my Dad who attended most of the Free Conferences.
9. C.T.M. Vol. 15 p. 550-551
10. Journal for the sixth Lutheran Free Conference written by
Melvin Smith.
11. C.T.M. Vol. 15 p. 551.
12. Ibid., pp. 552 and 553.
13. Ibid., p. 563.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Lueker, Ervin. "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences,"
Concordia Theological Monthly 15 (Aug. 1944): 529-63.

Smith, Melvin Journal for the sixth Lutheran Free Conferences.

Strackbein, Rev. Lee. Free Conference Notes

Wisconsin Synod, Advisory committee on doctrinal matters; a
pamphlet Fellowship then and Now.

Letters compiled and sorted on the margin.

March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackosin
4912 Hwy 69
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 free conferences. At my request, President Schmetze gave me a list of people that attended the free conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and E.L.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.M.S. when he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

What I would like to know is, how many other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or E.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

no influence
none
|||

partial influence
|||

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in?

influenced
|||

not influenced
||

2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or a sister synod?

3. How did this happen?

correct doctrine
|||

not sure
||

no change in feelings
|||

more certain
|||

less certain
|||

no change in feelings
|||

4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position before the conferences?

After the conferences?

5. What were your impressions about the friendliness of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences?

Good
||

bad
|||

Good
|||

bad
|||

(one answer was not clear and one did not answer the question.)
letter

6. Which conference that you attended, impressed you the most?

early ones	later ones	first	second	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th

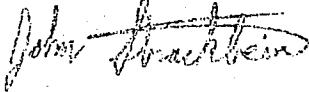
none any more than others

at lectures | at mtgs | Both
afterwards |
|||

7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?
8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences?

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours



John Strackbein

March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strachan
1912 Hwy 60
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Pastor Kauffeld

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, in Wausau, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 Free conferences. At my request, President Lindholm gave me a list of people that attended the free conferences and later joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the Free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and W.L.S. synods. Because of the Free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.M.S. when he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

What I would like to know is, are there other people like there who you are either in the Wisconsin or L.C.M.S. synod, who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? If not, we consider this point very important. I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the Free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in? *They were an encouragement but I would have left anyway because I had no other option.*
2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or a sister synod? *I was well acquainted with both synods. They were not the cause of my joining W.L.S.*
3. How did this happen? *I joined W.L.S. because it was the safest place for my people & family spiritually. The Mission Program of W.L.S. was of such a nature that only W.L.S. could absorb it. I was President of W.L.S. I had to see the program safely settled.*
4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's spiritual position before the conferences? *I felt that they had a correct doctrinal position, one that was compatible with the old W.M.S. Synod.*
5. What were your impressions about the relationship of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences? *The same.*
6. What were your impressions about the relationship of the Wisconsin Synod and other synods before and after the conferences? *When you are about to fight a battle & during the fight there is naturally much interest & encouragement. When the battle is over, you become a part of the security & friendliness has always been present. To become a "part" of the synodical pastorate is another matter, especially at my age.*

The early ones because the lines were forming & allies were being sought. People were seeking help & encouragement. The later conferences drew fewer new faces, & people had solidified their positions & the battle was joined.

7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards? *I learned more and I became a part of the W.S.S.*

8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences? *The pleasant moments were those in which you found companionship in concern, faith & hope. The unpleasant experiences were those in which controversy arose because of error in doctrine on the part of inquirers or participants.*

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours

John Strackueln

John Strackueln

I hope this is of help to you.

Rev. E. P. Kaufeld

Mr. U. S. 111
2035 N. 77th Avenue
Elmwood Park, Ill. 60635
April 19, 1979

Mr. John Strackbein
4912 Hwy 60
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Mr. Strackbein:

I hope my answers to your questions will help you in your research.

I was on the verge of leaving LCMS in 1965 but was prevailed upon by Pastor Ernest Kavasch of Westmont, Ill. to remain and join a group of nine laymen who organized as the "Concerned Lutheran Laymen" to expose the false teachings in Missouri. Three of this group are now in Wisconsin Synod and three are in ELS. Pastor Kavasch took about half of his congregation into Wisconsin Synod several years ago. Outside of myself none of these laymen and Pastor Kavasch attended a free conference. Several other laymen who are still in Missouri did attend one or two Free Conferences.

Following are the answers to your eight questions:

- (1) The Free Conferences made me more aware of Wisconsin Synod's strict doctrinal position so that when my wife and I decided to leave Missouri Synod our logical move was into WELS.
- (2) We were not really influenced by the Free Conferences. We wanted a church that allowed no false teachings.
- (3) One Sunday in July 1968 we attended Jerusalem Church, Morton Grove, Ill. We wanted to meet members of Jerusalem who had registered for the '68 Minneapolis Free Conference. We liked the Church and Pastor as well as members we met.

When we left LCMS the following year we started to attend Jerusalem Church regularly in October. We resigned from the LCMS church in January 1970 and joined Jerusalem Church.

- (4) I always knew that WELS was doctrinally very sound. I was especially aware of this when WELS withdrew fellowship with LCMS in 1961 because the LCMS synodical officials did nothing about those who denied Biblical inerrancy, claimed the Bible contained contradictions, etc.

After the conferences we were more convinced that the Wisconsin Synod was truly Lutheran according to the Lutheran Confessions.

- (5) We attended Wisconsin Synod churches occasionally before the Free Conferences. The friendliness always impressed us.

After we joined the Wisconsin Synod we were especially impressed with the friendliness at the Synod conventions even though we were known by very few individuals.

we

- (6) My wife and I attended five of the seven Free Conferences. The last one at Rockford, Ill. in 1970 left some lasting impressions. It dealt with "Ways to Lutheran Unity".

The impossibility of ever having Lutheran Unity on the basis of doctrine was brought out during the discussions after the lectures.

- (7) During informal discussions we learned more about WELS because we could speak directly with members of WELS.
- (8) Among pleasant experiences were meeting individuals as Dr. Henry Koch and Mrs. Koch. Meeting like minded Lutherans of other synods and the friendly discussions with so many. I remember no unpleasant experiences while attending the conferences.

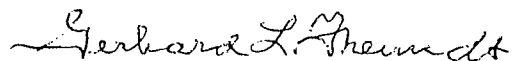
It will interest you to know that I was personally acquainted with the sainted Prof. August Pieper and the sainted Prof. Arthur Voss. The latter I knew when he was still Pastor of St. James Church at 60th & Lloyd Sts. in Milwaukee.

I sat in Pastor Voss' study one day in the 1930's. We were discussing trends in the church. In the course of our discussion he made this statement "Within 25 years the Lutheran Church as we know it now will not be recognizable". The changes he referred to were then only beginning in Missouri.

The high church movement, neo orthodoxy, etc. were just starting to show up.

In the late fifties and early sixties, however, the promoters of false doctrine in LCMS became more bold which resulted in Wisconsin Synod leaving the Synodical Conference and withdrawing fellowship with Missouri Synod.

Sincerely yours,



Gerhard L. Freundt

It has been a hectic & happy time these last weeks & I
 want always feeling my best but that seems to be
 leveling off. - Have a federal. wed - part of conf the next week.
 lunch conv (study club) tonight. - Have been invited to preach
 Maunon 7 estab at Waukesha to D at St. Matthews Day. Am
 planning to go - Have a lot of catching up to do after Lent
 so all just make this good! Thank you for the loving
 card John - so much appreciated - D O A

Mr. John Strackheim
 4912 Hwy 60
 Marquette, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Dad

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, I am currently involved
 in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 free
 conferences. At my request, President Schuetz gave me a list of people that
 attended the free conferences and then later ex-joined our synod. That is
 how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences
 when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences
 he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and W.L.S. synods. Because
 of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the
 W.L.S. than he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was
 easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

What I would like to know is, how many other people are there who now are
 either in the Wisconsin or W.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar
 manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly
 I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave
 the synod you were in? *The F.C. did not influence me to leave Mo. at all. It
 was the situation in M.D. which I knew independently of the F.C.*
2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or
 a sister synod? *They had much to do with my choosing W.L.S.
 because they helped me to see in a practical way
 how did this happen? It happened in that it brought me to
 question and discuss doctrine & practice with a number of men
 without extensive travel from all the W.L.S. see some of them
 one by one*
3. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position before
 the conferences? *I was not much aware of the W.L.S. except that some of the
 men at the time were W.L.S. and that there was a problem with my friend
 and the Army Chaplainry both of which were common places in M.D.
 I had become much more aware that the W.L.S. position was the same as mine.*
4. What were your impressions about the friendliness of the Wisconsin Synod
 before and after the conferences? *Before the conf. I thought they were very
 negative and had had some experience of that, but mostly
 the men I met at the conference were
 which influenced me to go. I had, however, you the most, the 3rd day
 because the conference among the smaller synods
 became most apparent to me and helped me to see
 at least on the doctrine of the church and more by word of
 their way of expressing it that I would not just have*

I probably would have left even if I had
 seen Mr. Free Conf.

Schuetz
Lawrence
Gerber + other profs
Otto + G. Leigen (ELG - Gen)
several Dist preslts
numerous pastors etc

7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards? Both were helpful. The informal person to person discussions with + also sitting in on discussions & the men of other synods were really the more helpful on specifics.

8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conference? Very pleasant was the experience of seeing such an unusual board. Love for the Word among WELS & ELG men. - something I was missing among many in the past.

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours

John Strackbein

John Strackbein

18346 Beverly Road
Birmingham, Michigan 48009

April 23, 1979

Mr. John Strackbein
4912 Hwy 60
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Mr. Strackbein,

Please pardon my tardy reply to your Free Conference letter of March 30. My answers to your questions are as follows, by your numbering sequence:

1. The Free Conferences gave me a theological basis for comparison with the Missouri Synod teaching and practice. At the least, it gave me a basis for witnessing in my own congregation, to others in LCMS, and to liberals in general. I had little or no thought of leaving LCMS until LCMS declared fellowship with TALC.
2. Once LCMS declared fellowship with TALC, I began to think about leaving the LCMS. Then, through the knowledge which I had obtained about WELS/ELS, at the Free Conferences, it became easy to decide in which direction to turn.
3. Because I was personally acquainted with WELS and ELS leaders and their theological doctrine and practice, I knew that either Synod would be spiritually satisfying.
4. My LCMS ~~pastor~~ pastor spoke of them (WELS) as being ultra-conservative and rather standoffish (horns grew out of their heads). After the conferences, I knew that WELS people were quite friendly and had well thought out, biblical, doctrinal positions.
5. As mentioned in 4, above, the "horns" soon disappeared and very human, friendly people appeared.
6. The conference which impressed me the most was the Fifth, held in Minneapolis. The essays were generally outstanding. One, in particular, Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah, by Pastor Eugene P. Kauffeld, brought Christ alive in the Old Testament! I was so impressed with this essay that I refer to it to this day.
7. I learned most about WELS/ELS from informal gatherings afterwards. Here was the opportunity to meet the men and learn of their struggle to try to return LCMS to a sound doctrinal position.
8. The unpleasant experience was the protracted debate over the seat of authority in the church, whether the congregation, or "where two or three are gathered together." The one group ~~xxx~~ insisted upon the congregation only, and departed the Free Conferences when unable to win its point.

A pleasant experience always was the Arrangements Committee meetings at the Mequon Sem. All of the men there had risked material security for sound doctrine, in separating from LCMS. The WELS/ELS people did not know if their synods would remain intact after the break. It was predicted by some that WELS and ELS would collapse, but just the opposite occurred - they grew. The men on the Arrangements Committee had that mien of seasoned Christian warriors.

I hope this fills your need. Please write if I can be of further assistance. The Lord's richest blessings in your studies.

Sincerely,

Ralph C. Lorenz ed

March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackheim
4912 Hwy 80
Crafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Pastor Pfothenauer

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 Free conferences. At my request, President Schmetze gave me a list of people that attended the Free conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and W.L.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.M.S. when he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

What I would like to know is, how many other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or W.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in? *The conference confirmed what was already known by me regarding liberalism in the LCMS.*
2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or a sister synod? *They gave me confidence in the orthodoxy and integrity of the WELS.*
3. How did this happen? *Through listening to the essays and speaking with the WELS pastors*
4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position before the conferences? *Out of focus.*
After the conferences? *In focus*
5. What were your impressions about the friendliness of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences? *Same as #4*
6. Which conference did you attend, impressed you the most?

I don't recall that any one conference impressed me more or less than any other.

7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?

Both ways proved helpful.
8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences?

It was unpleasant to note that many of the LCMS theologians shunned these meetings.
I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

T.C.P.

Sincerely yours

John Strickland

John Strickland

March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackbain
4912 Hwy 60
Crafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear *Pastor Zeeb*

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Maquon, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 free conferences. At my request, President Schuster gave me a list of people that attended the free conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and E.L.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.M.S. when he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

What I would like to know is, how many other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or E.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in? They gave me a clearer picture of the issues, and the Wisconsin Synod position on those issues.
2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or a sister synod? They improved the picture I had of the WELS
3. How did this happen? Mainly through the men I met and listened to. They were not legalistic, as I had been led to believe, but evangelical and doctrinally knowledgable and uncompromising.
4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position before the conferences? That they still held to the same doctrinal position which Missouri had forsaken.
After the conferences? All the more so. I was reassured that the WELS still had doctrinal discipline whereas Missouri's had broken down.
5. What were your impressions about the friendliness of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences? I had a much better impression, because I was fortunate to meet some top-notch WELS pastors.
6. Which conference that you attended, impressed you the most? They
The one in, I believe it was, Columbus, Ohio. That may be mainly because at the one I attended (in Chicago, I believe), too many retired and almost-retired ministers from various synods got up 'ad nauseam' during the discussion period and droned on about some pet word or phrase that was dear to their heart.

- 7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?
- 8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences?

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours

John Strachtein

John Strachtein

April 19, 1979

Dear John:
 Perhaps you have noticed this is coming from Florida, where I'm taking a 2 week vacation with my family—which also explains somewhat my slow response.

Please give my regards to your folks.

As to your questionaire: After the suspension of relations between the constituents of the Syn. Conference came in 1961, I took a wait-and-see attitude: if the W.S. Synod did not soon return to its former position, I should return to the A.S. Synod (I am hostile to that Synod, you may know).

The Lutheran Free Conference that started in 1964 only confirmed my conviction about the orthodoxy of the W.S. position. (I do not say that the free conference, in any case, had any more influence than that of confirming conviction, already held.)

My answer to your question is I think it was the first one, because it had a solid foundation in the Scripture (that conference probably taught me more about the truth of Holy Scripture than any other meeting!).

I think you will agree that my personal situation changed at the time of the free conference and that I cannot do much of anything else. I am, however, still interested in the

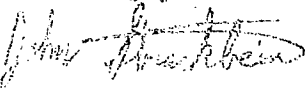
Any letter here may be of some value to you. Best wishes on your project. You're truly in Christ, Roland H. Nelson

7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?
8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences?

For the unpleasant, see point 6. For the pleasant, the down-to-earth friendly sincerity of the WELS men was pleasant.

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours



John Strachan

P.S. I went to Springfield, and we had WELS students in class. When I graduated, one could get a call either to the WELS or Missouri, it didn't matter. That's how close the two synods were.

One summer before I graduated I served in a WELS congregation in which the pastor was sick. There I met the girl who became my wife.

One of my first pastorates was in Wisconsin, where I periodically played golf with 3 other WELS pastors, and we got along just fine. At Lent we exchanged pulpits. No problem whatsoever.

However, I have known, and still know, some WELS pastors who are legalistic. They have given, and still give, our synod a bad name. Too bad!

On the other hand, all the WELS men I have met who have come here to the East are the finest, personable, evangelical pastors one could want.

My son will be enrolling at Northwestern in August and he intends to enter the WELS ministry.