

Trinity Freistadt and David's Star:

Rough and Rocky Relationship

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"Let us walk together hand in hand!" These words perhaps best express the wishes of the early German Lutheran immigrants in Wisconsin - immigrants who traveled across an ocean to free themselves of religious persecution and remain united in solid confessional Lutheranism. And yet for the members of the two oldest Lutheran churches in Wisconsin, Trinity Freistadt and David's Star Ev. Lutheran of Kirchhayn, these words very quickly lost their meaning. Antagonism and legalistic authoritarianism quickly drove wedges between these two pioneer churches and various factions in the congregations themselves. In the following paper, I am going to trace the rough and rocky relationship these two congregations had - how the troubles and contentions between and in these two neighboring congregations resulted in the origin and growth of other Lutheran congregations in the area. The focus of the first part of this paper will naturally center on the early problems of the church founders, Rev. L.F.E. Krause and Rev. Gustof Adolf Kindermann, and the quarrels and strife they had with each other and with their own congregations because of Grabau's "Hirtenbrief" which resulted in the direction that congregation would take in future years. The second part of the paper will briefly trace the synodical stands of the two churches following this initial confrontation and the periods of fellowship they did enjoy during their history. This paper will not be an attempt to recount in depth the complete history of the Buffalo Synod of which both these congregations played an integral part, nor to develop fully the struggle between the Buffalo and Missouri Synods. Rather it will be an attempt to show the problems that individual congregations had with Buffalo Synod doctrine and their resulting defection - problems which could separate two congregations of

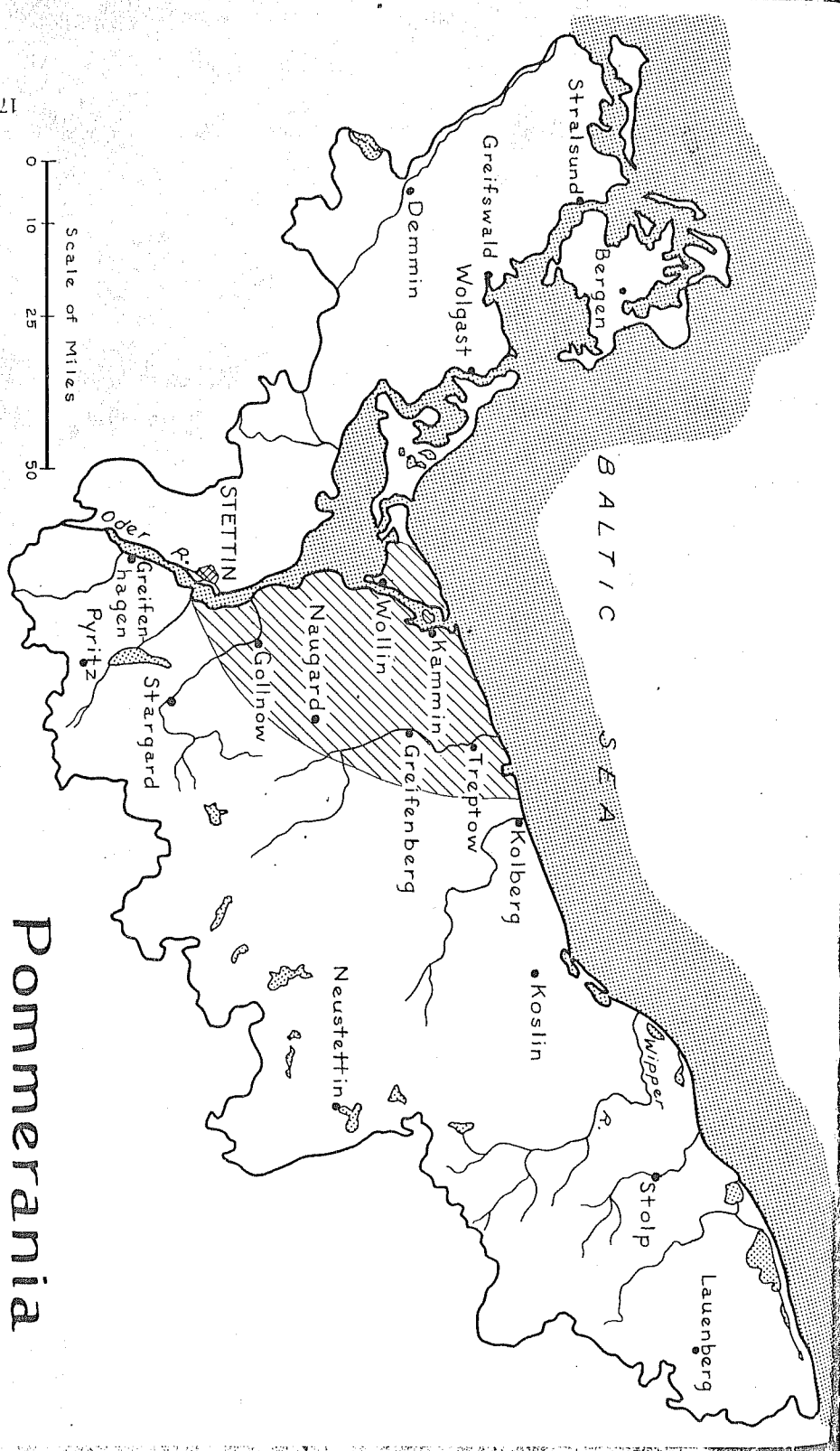
common ancestry up to this day.

Perhaps first it would be best to give some brief background on the immigration and founding of these two churches. The common ancestry of these two churches is traced back to Pomerania. Originally, they had been members of the Lutheran Territorial Church in the Kingdom of Prussia, Germany. However in 1835 the liberal ruler of Prussia, King Frederick William III undertook by royal decree to unite his subjects of Lutheran and Reformed persuasion into one large unionistic state church body. This was part of an appeasement policy which Frederick William III felt would benefit his subjects and eliminate the need for separation between Lutheran and Reformed. He forbade truly confessing Lutherans the use of their churches and ordered that Lutherans and Reformed should worship in one united church in Prussia, ignoring their differences in teaching and practice. He set up a compromise church, changing the liturgy - the Words of Institution - so that both groups could understand them in they way they believed and thus attend communion at the same altar.

And yet, confessional Lutherans who based their faith firmly on God's inerrant Word were offended at this, choosing to endure slander and persecution rather than to compromise their faith. This persecution soon came. Loss of property, imprisonment, even banishment soon fell upon those Lutheran pastors who based themselves firmly on God's Word in response to the edict of the king. As a result of this, Pastor Johann Grabau, pastor of St. Andrews Church in Magdeburg, together with the members of his congregation in Saxony, as well as many Lutherans living in Pomerania felt constrained to emigrate to the United States where religious freedom existed. Most of the "Old Lutherans" as these confessional Christians of Pastor Grabau's congregation called themselves

settled in the vicinity of Buffalo, New York. However the majority of the Confessional Lutherans from Pomerania traveled further west to Wisconsin, some settling in Milwaukee while others established their new homes in the former Town IX, founding the area called "Freistadt" to this day. 1

Similar reasons caused the founding of David's Star a couple of years later. Although after Frederick William III died in 1840 it seemed as if relative freedom of worship would exist in the land, yet because of the previous persecution much Reformed theology and practice had inbedded itself into the Lutheranism of that area. Although a "General Synod" of the the Lutheran Church in Prussia was formed, yet this synod was not willing to take a firm confessional stand. The false idea prevailed that it was not wrong for Lutherans to send their children to public schools which at the same time taught religion according to false reformed doctrine. Pastor Kindermann, of neighboring Stettin in Pomerania (see map insert 2) decided to take a stand for truly Lutheran and Christian education and felt constrained along with the Lutheran parochial school teacher, Mr. Carl Stiemke, and about 1000 confessional Lutherans to emigrate to North America for religious freedom. Following the way of Pastor Grabau, they arrived at Buffalo where a few decided to remain. The majority however chose to travel to Wisconsin. Although they suffered shipwreck in the Milwaukee harbor on October 1, 1843, they all arrived safely separating themselves into three groups - one group settling in the Cedar Creek area now called Cedarburg; another traveling to the Lebanon area near Watertown, Wisconsin; and the majority settling about twenty miles north of Milwaukee in Town X as it was then called. Here the first settlers named their new found home "Kirchhayn," "the church in the wildwoods" because of the dense forests in which the church and



Scale of Miles
 0 10 25 50

Area from which
 Freistadt families came

Pomerania

its school had been founded. 3

The first name that has to be considered in evaluating relations between these two congregations is L.F.E. Krause, first pastor of Trinity, Freistadt. Although he was instrumental in getting his Silesian congregation to come to Wisconsin, he himself returned to Germany until 1840 when he was again called by the Freistadt congregation to serve them.

It was during this period when Trinity did not have a pastor that the first bone of contention began to develop which would prove instrumental in the later split of the congregation. Some of the settlers wanted to have laymen distribute communion and perform baptisms, but Grabau objected to this in a document called the Hirtenbrief. In this he severely reprimanded this congregation for setting up an interim administrator of the pastoral office and denied them the right to act as an independent congregation. In this letter, Grabau claimed:

1. that a pastor who did not receive his call in accordance with all the established regulations of the church was not properly called;
2. that the ordination by other pastors was a divine regulation and was essential to the validity of the pastoral office;
3. that God dealt with the congregation only through validly called pastors;
4. that a pastor called by the congregation could not offer absolution, and that that, which he distributed during the Lord's Supper was not the body and blood of Christ but merely bread and wine;
5. that the church as a whole, through its synods, constitution, and symbolism, must sit in judgment over doctrine and heresy;
6. that not the congregation but the synod which represents the church as a whole had the superior authority in the church;
7. that the congregation did not have the right to excommunicate;
8. that Christians were bound in all things not contrary to God's Word to obey their pastor. 4

When Krause, a friend of Grabau, arrived and delivered his first sermon in Freistadt, he immediately insisted that the groups in Freistadt and Milwaukee subscribe to Grabau's Hirtenbrief and apologize for having agitated, during the absence of a pastor, to have a layman dispense the Sacraments. Most of the people conformed to these requirements on Krause's part, but some refused; and this was the beginning of various factions which split off from the original congregation. More will be said of this in a bit. 5

Shortly after this Pastor Kindermann and the settlers of Kirchhayn arrived in the area. It is at this time that we have recorded the first extensive Lutheran pulpit exchange in Wisconsin. During the first winter of 1843-1844, Pastor Kindermann remained in Milwaukee serving Krause's congregation there while Krause ministered to the needs of the church at Kirchhayn. 6

This wasn't the only instance of early cooperation between the two churches. Both congregations took an active part in the founding of the Buffalo Synod in 1845. In that year an invitation was issued to Orthodox Lutheran pastors in the United States to assemble in Kirchhayn to plan the organization of a true Lutheran Synod. Invitations were issued to Pastors Grabau, Brohm, Ehrenstroem, Krause, Kindermann and others. The members at Kirchhayn made extensive arrangements to welcome these distinguished guests, but Pastor L.F. Krause diverted the meeting to his Milwaukee church where the Buffalo Synod was organized instead. This shifty exchange caused many ill feelings between the members of David's Star and Pastor Krause. 7

But this was by no means the first time Pastor Krause created discord with the neighboring church at Kirchhayn. Krause continuously

tried to dominate his teacher at Freistadt, and also the teacher in Kirchhayn. He insisted that the Freistadt and Kirchhayn teachers be examined by the State of Wisconsin, bringing both schools under state rule and qualifying them for financial aid. The teacher at David's Star, Mr. Carl Stiemke, disagreed and stated, "The schools of the state are not confessional schools; we cannot bring our parochial schools under the jurisdiction of the state without giving up our heritage." 8 Pastor Krause insisted on blind obedience to his rule and ministry - an order that was quickly put to rest when Buffalo Synods Second Convention ruled in favor of Stiemke and the separation of church and state.

This authoritarian approach of Krause can perhaps be traced to Grabau, his Hirtenbrief, and the Buffalo Synod stand of which Grabau was the head. Grabau contended that the Lutheran Church was a visible one, outside of which no salvation was possible. He further contended that pastors constituted a peculiar profession superior to the common Christian status, and that therefore, they had authority to prescribe commandments and regulations which the Christians, for the sake of their conscience, had to obey. He set up pastors who were ordained by the Buffalo Synod as legal authority in all matters - that the congregation did not have authority to decide and judge matters of doctrine and heresy, but rather the pastor; and that the highest and final jurisdiction would not rest with the group constituting the local congregation, but with the group of apostles now represented by those holding the office of preachers. Thus Grabau set up his own hierarchy in church government in which the pastors of the Buffalo Synod had all power and the only power to issue valid sacraments and make congregational decisions. And Grabau as the head of this high and mighty pastoral hierarchy of the Buffalo Synod was actually setting himself up as a

pontifex maximus, that is a high-priest with all spiritual and temporal powers within his hands. 9

Krause fully agreed with the authoritarian principle of the ministry advocated in Grabau's Buffalo Synod which so closely resembled the Roman priesthood. It is hard to determine whether Pastor Kindermann of David's Star was in full compliance at first. Suelflow makes this observation:

It seems that at first Kindermann could hardly have been strongly in favor of Grabau's and Krause's centralized church government, since he had found fault with this very feature in the Breslau Synod, but possibly the almost total lack of social and ecclesiastical organization of the Wisconsin frontier persuaded him that more structure was necessary. At any rate, Kindermann soon associated himself more with the viewpoint of Grabau and Krause, as is indicated by the fact that the latter conducted a special public service in which he re-established the conservative orthodoxy of Kindermann. 10

This point is important because it is this attitude of complete authority which would divide both congregations, and result in their eventual separation in fellowship and their resignation from the Buffalo Synod. The instigator of the serious rupture was again Pastor Krause. His extreme authority already began to assert itself early in his ministry. In one of his earliest sermons Krause stated to his congregation that their physical blessings depended on his intercession to God. He also stated that anyone who did not agree with his teachings and authority in spiritual and temporal matters were heretics and subject to his excommunication. He demonstrated this early when in 1845 Grabau sent a letter about the suspected enthusiasm and apostasy of Pastor Ehrenstroem who had agitated Grabau. When Krause read this letter to his congregation and demanded their compliance, the school principal, Mr. Martin Krueger, could not accord the report full credence

and expressed himself to that effect, for which reason he was quickly placed under the ban by Krause. When some of the congregation questioned that justice of this ban and stated that they would no longer be able to accept Pastor Krause if he continued in this arbitrary excommunication, they were consigned to Satan as sectarians. Krause's despotic church discipline continued upon anyone who would stand in his way, fueling the fire of discontentment among his members.

The problem that finally caused the separation in the congregation occurred in 1845. When Krause had first come to Wisconsin, it had been decided to build his parsonage in Freistadt near the majority of his members rather than near his other congregation in Milwaukee where the cost of living was higher. So Krause would commute to Milwaukee every six weeks to serve the congregation. Whenever he would go to Milwaukee, he would have to trouble one of his members for a ride or hire a buggy for eight dollars. So Krause asked for a horse and buggy as a more reliable way of travel. However since the cost of one was an astronomical ninety dollars, the congregation felt they couldn't support this measure.

The matter rested for a while but in 1845 Krause demanded the congregation to buy him a wagon. The young congregation still could not afford such an expense and politely declined Krause's proposal that they each contribute a few pennies a week for a half a year to meet this expense, and chose rather to contribute as they could until the sum was raised. But this wasn't good enough for Krause. He immediately charged his members with selfishness, claiming that they made a begging friar out of him every six weeks. He even charged that they had dismissed him from the ministerial office and thought more of this trifling sum than of their own salvation. When the congregation

again respectfully stated their reasons and declined, he delivered a terrible castigatory sermon because they did not obey him. He called them "bloated pigs," "lazy swine" and other harsher names, announcing that all those that had concurred in this decision would not be permitted to receive Holy Communion until they had publically admitted their sin and begged for forgiveness! 12 He even declined a request from his congregation for a voter's meeting to discuss the problem.

These people thereupon turned to the other Buffalo Synod pastor in the area, Rev. Kindermann of David's Star, Kirchhayn. Kindermann suggested an investigation by the Ministerium of the Buffalo Synod since he had not been authorized to make such an investigation. But in lieu of an investigation, Kindermann offered to negotiate with Krause to try to solve the problem. This proved fruitless. Kindermann reported to the Trinity congregation that Krause refused to yield. He urged the congregation to examine themselves to see if they in any way dealt unjustly with Krause, but still could not see any way Krause had the right to ban members because of this contention saying: "I cannot imagine that Pastor Krause will be justified in this obviously unjust action in this matter." 13

Krause's Milwaukee congregation did appeal to the Buffalo Synod Ministerium. However Grabau was under the false impression (probably supplied by his good friend Krause) that the congregations first agreed to the purchase and then changed their mind. Although Grabau stated that he personally would have preferred to see a different approach on Krause's part, he stated that the congregations had a definite obligation which they unjustly violated. The other Buffalo Synod pastor, von Rohr, agreed with Grabau, but Kindermann who was closer to the situation and not quite so favorable to Grabau's idea of an authoritarian pastoral hierarchy

disagreed.

Because all four pastors of the Buffalo Synod (Krause was the fourth) could come to no agreement on this problem, Grabau, the Senior Ministerii, himself came to Wisconsin to settle the issue with Krause and Kindermann. Upon his arrival some members of Trinity immediately handed him a formal statement critical of Krause from the beginning. In spite of this and Kindermann's insistence that no promise had been issued as to the purchase of a horse, Grabau still believed Krause and ruled in his favor. A marathon negotiation meeting could produce no settlement although the next week a near settlement would have been reached if both sides would apologize for their actions in this matter and Grabau would allow Krause to be transferred to another congregation. But Grabau denied this action, causing a permanent impasse.

Because of this action, a sizeable part of the congregations soon after Grabau left stated in writing that they no longer accepted Krause's ministry and wished Kindermann of David's Star to serve them. Because Kindermann was a member of the Buffalo Synod, and this action would have been a conflict of interests, he declined. But in urging them not to separate from the Buffalo Synod, he gave them two options. They could appeal to a synodical convention of the Buffalo Synod or obtain an opinion of non-Buffalo Synod Lutheran pastors.

The splinter groups from both churches decided to ask the opinion of the Saxon Lutherans of the Missouri Synod. They sent delegates to the first Missouri Synod convention in Chicago and even invited Krause to defend himself. (He declined.) The convention in view of the evidence presented to them agreed that the congregations which had broken away and set up services of their own could and should call

another pastor. They called Rev. Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl of the Missouri Synod to minister to both churches at Freistadt and Milwaukee.

So began the Missouri Synod for the congregation at Freistadt. For a time, both groups worshipped side by side - the buildings being next to each other. The majority group who had separated from Krause procured the original church by court order; and gradually as the Buffalo Synod died out more and more members came back to the original, now Missouri Synod, church until the next door Buffalo Synod congregation was finally assimilated years later.

Kindermann's congregation, David's Star at Kirchhayn, however also suffered from this action of Krause. Some of the people were offended by Grabau's handling of the case and by the false principles of the Buffalo Synod. Because Pastor Kindermann was not yet ready to sever relations with the Buffalo Synod, these people left David's Star to form the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Immanuel of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. They built their church about two and a half miles from David's Star towards Jackson. This church like Trinity, Freistadt, joined the Missouri Synod and was served by Krause's Missouri Synod replacement, Rev. Keyl. Because of a dwindling congregation it closed its doors in 1974 and was turned into a historical museum for the Town of Jackson. 14

Because Krause was the cause of the initial strife and separation in both congregations, it would only be right to complete the story of his life. After the delegates went to the Missouri Synod convention to request a different pastor, the Synod issued a statement blasting the errors of Krause and defending their sending Pastor Keyl to Trinity, Freistadt. This statement in turn was contended by the Buffalo Synod in a nine page defense of Krause. (It is interesting to note that just a year later Krause was condemned by the Buffalo Synod for practically

the same reasons for which he was criticized by the Missouri Synod earlier) 15

Krause continued to serve his dwindling Buffalo Synod congregation in Freistadt and Milwaukee until May 1848 when he took a call to Martinsville, New York. It was there that he again got in trouble with his congregation, but this time also with his friend and the Buffalo Synod Senior Ministerii, Grabau. Because of these difficulties, he left the congregation in just two years and amazingly made application to the Missouri Synod. Before the Synod would even consider his application, he was required to return to Freistadt and Milwaukee and straighten out the difficulties resulting from his previous mistreatment. He also published a confession denouncing the Buffalo Synod and the errors of doctrine contained therein. After such a supposed drastic change of heart, the Missouri Synod called Krause to St. Peter's, East Detroit.

In just two years Krause created adversity in this congregation also and left in favor of returning to the Prussian Union in Germany and the perverted Lutheranism there. Although little is known of Krause during his German stay, he suddenly appears in America about three years later with a request to rejoin the Buffalo Synod. He even published another confession renouncing his previous Missouri Synod confession and the temporary blindness he must have suffered from in producing it. 16

Krause's "whichever way the wind is blowing" stand on Synods and doctrine does not end here. After receiving a call to St. Martin's church in Winona, Minnesota, he remained for only a year until he left to join the Illinois Synod. Right after his entrance into the Illinois Synod, he returned to Winona to serve the congregation for three years. At the end of this time he got together with a former Buffalo Synod pastor, Rev. F. W. Wier, who himself had also had arguments with Grabau

and von Rohr and organized the Concordia Synod of the West. Later on Krause joined the Ohio Synod and finally after some difficulty received a call to Australia. (It is interesting to note that after the congregation in Australia issued the call, they found out from someone in America about the man whom they had called, and tried to revoke it. However Krause was already on the way and it was too late) 17

After a troubled ministry, Pastor Krause died in 1885, supposedly "singing his own funeral hymns and delivering his own burial service address on his death bed." 18

This was the first Lutheran pastor in Wisconsin. It is truly an act of God's providence that Trinity in Freistadt did not suffer greater damage at the hands of this authoritarian pastor. This church remained a Missouri Synod church throughout its history.

This synodical stand separated them for a time from their brothers at David's Star in Kirchhayn who were still members of the Buffalo Synod. But this was not to last for long. After Pastor Kindermann died on Easter Sunday in 1856, he was succeeded a year later by Deacon Habel of Buffalo, New York. Shortly after he resumed his duties at David's Star an argument started in the congregation over the Buffalo Synod "mite box." Pastor Grabau demanded one cent per communicant for his support as "Senior Ministerius." Now also the problem concerning the relation of the individual congregations to the Synod began to arise at David's Star. Pastor Habel argued against the Buffalo Synod stating the the Buffalo Ministerium was not founded on divine command and that a local congregation's excommunication did not require the approval of the Synod's Ministerium.

Accordingly, Pastor Habel moved that the original constitution be

changed in the part that read: "that all property of David's Star Church remains with the Buffalo Synod as long as only ten members wish to remain with that Synod." 19 This was approved by unanimous resolution. Shortly after this the Buffalo Synod suspended Pastor Habel from his office. However a great majority of the congregation did not recognize this suspension as valid and chose to remain with Pastor Habel. A small group did not wish to leave the Buffalo Synod nor change the congregations constitution. They separated themselves from David's Star and started an opposition church located about one mile west. This church which is still in existence today was named St. John's Church. Because of its continued affiliation with the Buffalo Synod it is now an American Lutheran Church. (It is interesting to note that the widow of Rev. Kindermann as well as David's Star first teacher, Mr. Carl Stienke, chose to leave David's Star and join this Buffalo Synod congregation.) 20

Now the pastor and the congregation were without synodical connection. Pastor Habel tried to organize a synod of his own and even started a seminary to train students for the ministry. As far as can be determined three men were graduated and assigned to churches in the Iowa Synod. Pastor Habel even pioneered the "Bruderbund." Meetings of this society were held at David's Star, but the congregation never officially became a member. He also organized a new church near the Cedar Creek in Salter. This church later on joined the Missouri Synod but was served by David's Star pastors for a time. It still stands today under the name Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - quite a change from the original name: First German Ev. Lutheran Dreieinigkeits Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession at Cedar Creed. 21

In 1870 Pastor Habel received a call to one of David's Star's offshoot congregations in Cedarburg. This congregation had withdrawn from the Missouri Synod, and because of its lack of synod affiliation was being already served by Pastor Habel. He accepted the call and moved to Cedarburg; but continued to serve the Kirchhayn congregation until they got their new pastor - a Pastor Fredrich Eppling of Canada.

Pastor Eppling's ministry was instrumental in David's Star's application to the Wisconsin Synod and a reunion of fellowship with its Missouri Synod brothers at Freistadt. Eppling became a member of the Ohio Synod with the congregations consent, although the congregation itself remained without synodical connection. Because of this the congregation through its pastor came into close contact with the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America; for the Ohio Synod at that time was a member of that group. Consultations between David's Star and the neighboring Missouri Synod congregations (especially Trinity, Freistadt) began to take place which showed an agreement in doctrine and practice. Again steps were taken to establish a closer union and fellowship with the Freistadt brethren from whom they had been separated since the days of Krause.

Because Pastor Eppling was a member of the Ohio Synod, efforts were made during his ministry to affiliate the congregation with the Ohio and Wisconsin Synods. At this time there was a doctrinal controversy between the two synods regarding the Doctrine of Election. At first Pastor Eppling stood with the Ohio Synod contending that God calls "intuitu fidei;" and when the Ohio Synod severed its membership with the Synodical Conference, he followed them. The congregation itself went along with Pastor Eppling and sent him to the Ohio Synod Convention

There is hope that the Missouri Synod will realize its errors and turn again to the purity of God's revealed truth. There is hope that Trinity Freistadt will realize the importance of the plenary inspired Word of God and join itself again with a church body that teaches it. There is hope that these two congregations can once again enjoy the fellowship they had in their early days - that fellowship they expressed with the words: Let us walk together hand in hand!

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