

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF REV. JOHN O. LANG

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the life and ministry of Rev. John O. Lang (1949–1974), highlighting how his commitment to the inerrant Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions shaped his pastoral practice and leadership at St. Paul’s, Columbus. Drawing on archival sources—including sermons, letters, and educational materials—it traces Lang’s theological reaction toward liberalizing trends in mid-20th-century American Lutheranism. The study demonstrates how Lang’s confessional faithfulness guided his pastoral decisions, offering an example for contemporary WELS pastors and congregations that doctrinal integrity can coexist with effective pastoral care and leadership. Serving as both a historical account and a confessional case study, this work underscores the ongoing relevance of confessional commitment in guiding congregational life.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who visited St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, for their anniversary service in 1965, would have heard the sermon conclude with these words:

"Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." That is a description of what St. Paul's has endeavored to do during her 144 years as a congregation and during her 47 years in this church building. I hope that you will learn to appreciate that you belong to a congregation which through the years has kept an even keel amid the various storms in the field of religion and has continued to preach the Word in season and out of season, amid the religious turmoil of the 19th century, amid the hysteria of World War I, amid the Modernism of the 20s, amid the pacifism of the 30s, amid the religious revival of the late 40s and the 50s, and now amid the new theology and ecumenical movement of the 60s.

*My Church, my Church, I love my Church,
For she exalts my Lord;
She breathes, she speaks, she teaches not
But from His written Word.*

Amen.¹

First-time visitors may have thought, "This poor church has faced trials for the last fifty years.

Could continued preaching of the Word really be its reason for survival?" Loren Lucht's essay,

St. Paul's Continual Stance for Confessional Lutheranism, gives a resounding "Yes!":

"Throughout the years the congregation has grown to be more and more dedicated to the

1. John O. Lang, *In Christ Jesus, Dear Friends* (Columbus, OH: St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1975), 159.

preservation of God's Word in its truth and purity."² Lucht attributed St. Paul's survival to its "continual stand for confessional Lutheranism" and its "faithful pastors."³

Central to St. Paul's continual stand for confessional Lutheranism was the ministry of one faithful pastor in particular: Rev. John O. Lang, who served the congregation in Columbus from 1949 until he died in 1974. When he entered the pulpit, Lang was a pastor associated with the American Lutheran Church (ALC); when he exited, he was associated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). What happened during his ministry? In his own words: "Liberalism, the new theology, neo-orthodoxy, ecumenism and the social gospel struck and struck hard. The inerrancy of the Bible was questioned."⁴ Following a merger with several other synods, the ALC became infected with this "new theology." Lang, who had been educated by the ALC to uphold the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, now had to educate *his* congregation that the ALC had changed its view of Scripture, considering it potentially fallible.

Because Rev. Lang joined the Wisconsin Synod later in his ministry, the WELS archives contain only a note card with his birth and death dates. This paper seeks to serve as a biographical record, preserving the story of a pastor whose ministry was both courageous and faithful. It will demonstrate that Rev. John O. Lang's theological convictions—especially his unwavering commitment to the inerrant Word and the Lutheran Confessions—directly shaped his

2. Loren L. Lucht, *St. Paul's Continuing Stand for Confessional Lutheranism*, Senior Church History Essay, May 19, 1977, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay Files, Mequon, WI, <https://essays.wls.wels.net:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3170/LuchtStPaulConfessionalLutheranism.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 38.

3. Lucht, *St. Paul's Continuing Stand for Confessional Lutheranism*, 38-39.

4. John O. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, May 23, 1969, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay Files, Mequon, WI, <https://essays.wls.wels.net:8080/handle/123456789/2883>, 8.

ministry at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, and equipped him to lead his congregation faithfully amid the liberalizing trends of American Lutheranism.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LUTHERANISM IN OHIO

If you ever rode on a roller coaster, you know that the trip up that first hill is a long, slow steady process, but once you reach the top of that first hill and start coasting downward, you go down ever so much faster than you went up, and though there are a few more ups and downs, you never reach that high point again where you found yourself at the top of that first hill. So it was with the old Joint Synod of Ohio.⁵

Using this analogy, Lang framed the history of the Joint Synod of Ohio as a movement from early confessional strength into a doctrinal descent, with only occasional rises that never regained its original glory.

The Theological Rollercoaster of the Ohio Synod

Every roller coaster starts at the bottom. In 1813, a Lutheran missionary, Jacob Sherer, toured Ohio and reported: “The spiritual condition of Ohio is dark; the people of all denominations are intermixed, and although they may have many preachers among them, there appears to be a want of such who have sound doctrine and are of good repute.”⁶ Despite the unstable religious status of Ohio, Sherer perceived an opportunity for confessional Lutheranism.⁷

The Ohio Synod emerged more out of necessity than design. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania sent a batch of pioneer pastors over the Allegheny Mountains into the Ohio valley.

5. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

6. G. D. Bernheim, *History of the Ev. Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States* (Philadelphia, 1898), 390.

7. Confessional Lutheranism refers to the commitment of a Lutheran congregation or pastor to the full teaching of Scripture as summarized in the *Book of Concord* (1580). This approach emphasizes that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority, while the Confessions provide a faithful, historically grounded summary of biblical doctrine. Just as an accurate map guides a traveler through unfamiliar terrain, the Confessions guide pastors and congregations in preaching and teaching, helping them stay on the path of sound doctrine and avoid error.

These pastors were quite isolated from their brethren in the east. Since the journey to the “Mother Synod” was too long and too costly, the Ohio Conference petitioned for permission to form a ministerium of its own, which the Ministerium of Pennsylvania rather reluctantly granted, and on September 14, 1818 at Somerset, Ohio, “The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Adjacent States” was organized with 14 pastors.⁸

Every synod has its beginnings, and for Ohio, that beginning was a modest group of fourteen pastors.

However, Ohio began at the bottom not because of its modest number of pastors but because its leadership operated according to Pietistic principles.⁹ The first president of the synod was John Stough, who promoted practical, experiential Christianity, even if it meant compromising doctrinal standards. “For example, at the Synod Convention of 1826 a Methodist minister by the name of Plimpton was made an honorary member of the convention and was allowed to preach to the convention in English.”¹⁰ Such cooperation with a Methodist minister reflected a disregard for theological distinctions.

Despite starting at the bottom, Ohio would ultimately rise to its firmest doctrinal position. In 1836, special attention was drawn to a clause in the Synod’s constitution stipulating “that no one was to be recognized as a member of a district who denied the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession.”¹¹ Through the influence of the Missouri Synod leaders and a resurgence

8. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 1.

9. Pietism was a movement within Lutheranism that emphasized personal religious experience and strict moral behavior over the church’s historic emphasis on pure doctrine and the means of grace. One assessment notes that “all the good work in education of children and adults, all the mission activity and works of mercy, all the involvement of the laity in church life and government was finally tainted by the tyranny over souls that resulted from Pietism’s fundamental legalism,” Paul E. Balge, “Pietism: Past and Present,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, accessed January 2025, <http://essays.wls.edu:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/214/BalgePietism.pdf>, 9. In other words, despite its good intentions, Pietism often made the Christian life feel burdensome rather than freeing by shifting the focus from Christ’s finished work to the believer’s spiritual performance.

10. Lucht, *St. Paul’s Continuing Stand for Confessional Lutheranism*, 4.

11. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 4.

of pastors and laypeople studying the Lutheran Confessions, “the Joint Synod of Ohio officially accepted the entire Book of Concord and bound its members and clergy to the doctrines found therein.”¹²¹³

Two tests verified Ohio was at its peak of doctrinal standing. The first test was its response to S.S. Schmucker’s *Definite Platform*. Schmucker offered a list of errors contained in the Confessions:

1. The Approval of the Ceremonies of the Mass
2. Private Confession and Absolution
3. Denial to the Divine Obligation of the Christian Sabbath
4. Baptismal Regeneration
5. The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of the Savior in the Eucharist

With these few exceptions, we retain the entire Augsburg Confession, with all the great doctrines of the Reformation.¹⁴

Removing these so-called “errors” from the Augsburg Confession would be to undermine the very core of Confessional Lutheran identity. The Ohio Synod refused to subscribe to

12. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 4.

13. One of those Missouri synod voices was Wilhelm Sihler, who published an article: “Again, a part of these synods pledges itself outwardly to the entire confessions of the Lutheran church, yet does not require firm subscription to them at ordination, adheres to a Reformed and United formula for the administration of the Lord’s Supper, distributes also the Lord’s Supper without discretion to Reformed and Evangelicals and thus promotes the shameful unionism and church mixing [Unirerei und Kirchenmengerei] of our day. But the worst thing is that they [the unionistic synods] reject the earnest pleas of some of their members for correction of the problem and for the preservation and aid of the church even in the most desperate state, and thus in any case will remain in confessional indifference and indolence. Wilhelm Sihler, “Welches sind die leitenden Grundsätze zur Bildung rechtgläubiger Synoden der luth. Kirche in hiesigen Landen?” *Der Lutheraner* 2, no. 8 (1845): 29.

14. S. S. Schmucker, *Definite Synodical Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinary*, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods (Philadelphia: Miller & Burlock, 1855).

Schmucker's alterations. "The very fact that the Ohio Synod held out on these points very definitely stamps that Synod as a sound confession Lutheran body."¹⁵¹⁶

The second test to confirm it's confessional peak was Ohio's initial involvement with the Synodical Conference in 1872. The Missouri Synod convened the Synodical Conference with representatives from the Missouri, Wisconsin, Norwegian, and Ohio synods. There they proposed a fellowship grounded in doctrinal unity, coordinated mission work, and mutual support in the training of called workers. "The Joint Synod of Ohio gladly went along, and for ten years there was full fellowship between the Ohio Synod, the Missouri Synod and the other synods within the Synodical conference."¹⁷

However, Ohio, Iowa and others published a book almost two inches thick called "The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development, and Refutation." In it they challenged the Missouri synod's view of election:

[Missourians] doctrine of a particular yet unconditional election unto salvation subverts the entire stem of Gospel truth and deprives every doctrinal member of that system of its saving power and comfort. Professing to believe with us that God by his mercy would have all men to be saved, they at the same time contend for the doctrine that God has decreed to save only a few by giving to them—for reasons no man can know—the faith adequate to that end.¹⁸

15. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 4.

16. Reading the Ohio Synod's history through Lang's own writings highlights his commitment to confessional Lutheranism. His constant concern for, and evaluation of, the Synod's doctrinal stance, as reflected in statements like this one, makes that commitment clear.

17. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 4.

18. George H. Schodde et al., *The Error of Modern Missouri: Its Inception, Development, and Refutation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1897), iii.

In Ohio's judgment, Missouri spoke of God wanting all people to be saved, yet simultaneously claimed that God had secretly decided to give saving faith only to some. For Ohio, this made Missouri's theology rationally inconsistent and a threat to the universal promises of the gospel.

Unfortunately for Ohio, this critique was their first slip away from the Lutheran Confessions and Scripture. Missouri and the Confessions carefully held these two truths from God's Word: God wills that all people be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) and God elects certain individuals to salvation (Eph. 1:4–5; Rom. 8:29–30). Ohio, however, sought to rationally connect the two: "God in his infinite mercy determined to give eternal salvation to all those, and only to those, of whom He foresaw that they would believe in Christ till the end."¹⁹ Ohio's error lay in insisting that God's election depended *in some way* on foreseen human faith, making faith appear a condition for salvation rather than God's grace alone. In contrast, the Lutheran Confessions emphasize that God's election is entirely by grace and never contingent on any human response. They explicitly reject any teaching that portrays God as unwilling to save those who perish.²⁰ They affirm that election is always "in Christ" and never a hidden decree that withholds faith from some; rather, God's gracious will is revealed through the Word and Sacraments, where he genuinely calls all people to salvation.²¹

The Ohio Synod withdrew from Missouri and the Synodical Conference in 1882. Rev. Lang notes that although they "split over predestination ... the Joint Synod of Ohio continued to

19. Schodde et al., *The Error of Modern Missouri*, 167.

20. FC, SD XI: 27. Every reference from the Book of Concord is from the Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis (Minn.): Fortress press, 2000).

21. FC Ep, XI, 2.

be a conservative confessional Lutheran synod.”²² In light of what would come in Ohio’s future, Lang lamented: “Would to God that the Joint Synod of Ohio had remained what it was at the close of the nineteenth century and had gotten the predestination questions settled with Missouri!”²³

As the Joint Synod of Ohio stood independent, there was a push to merge with like-minded synods. Lang describes the theological roller coast as taking it’s “first little dip” during this period: “Sometimes the first dip on the roller coaster is just a little one, just enough to get around the corner, and then comes the real one. The little dip came in 1917–1918 when the Joint Synod of Ohio joined the National Lutheran Council.”²⁴

A group of Lutheran synods, such as Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, drafted a constitution which affirmed the canonical Scriptures as the “‘inspired and inerrant Word of God and the only source, norm, and guide for all matter of faith and life,’ but the Iowa Synod leaders insisted that the word ‘inerrant’ be moved from its place before the ‘Word of God’ and be inserted ahead of ‘source, norm, and guide.’”²⁵ Ohio leaders quickly refuted.

They said that deleting the word “inerrant” from “inspired word of God” and merely speaking of an “inerrant source, norm, and guide for all matters of faith and life” would imply that the Bible was not inerrant in its entirety but only in matters of faith and life and that man’s judgment would then be required to say which were matters of faith and life and which were not.

Iowa’s proposed edit precipitated a controversy over the Scriptures. “This was the first little dip, and it was not such a steep one, just enough to get around the corner for the big one.”²⁶

22. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 5.

23. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 5.

24. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

25. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

26. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

“Now comes the big dip at the close of the fifties or beginning of the sixties. Liberalism, the new theology, neo-orthodoxy, ecumenism and the social gospel struck and struck hard.”

Before this new theology influenced Lutheranism in Ohio, other denominations were already wrestling with its claims. John Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian minister and scholar, addressed this in his 1923 work *Christianity and Liberalism*. He asked:

What is the relationship between Christianity and the modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age? It is this problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve. Two lines of criticism, then, are possible with respect to the liberal attempt at reconciling science and Christianity. Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the ground that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific. We shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology and modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religion.²⁷

For Machen, the danger was not merely doctrinal drift but a complete replacement of the gospel with something that looked Christian but was not.

The rise of liberal theology challenged Lutherans' devotion to *sola Scriptura* and their confidence in the authority of God's Word. The issue was no longer what Scripture said, but who had the authority to decide what in Scripture could be believed. The authority was no longer the Bible, but the one interpreting the Bible. Lang offered several examples to illustrate how serious this shift was:

The inerrancy of the Bible was questioned; it was asserted that the first eleven chapters of Genesis could well have been poetic myth, and that the story of Jonah was a parable. Devil possession was just another name for mental illness which people in that day did not understand as we understand it today. Man could well have been the product of evolution. The rules of unionism were thrown to the winds and ecumenism became the order of the day.²⁸

27. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 395–387.

28. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 9.

Lang's concern was that once human judgment becomes the final authority over Scripture, the heart of the gospel itself becomes vulnerable to being redefined or discarded.

Lang notes that although this liberal shift coincided with Ohio's merger with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church to form a new American Lutheran Church (ALC), "the merger may have had nothing to do with it because the same dip started in Missouri about that time and there was no merger in prospect."²⁹

Because Lang experienced this "big dip" during his ministry, and refuting it became such a central part of his ministry, he offered this warning:

The early history of the Joint Synod of Ohio so closely resembled the early history of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synod now merged into the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod. It all should serve as a warning to Wisconsin not to go and do likewise, but rather pray God that in His mercy he would keep Wisconsin steadfast in His Word during these turbulent days of Lutheranism in America.³⁰

Capital University / Trinity Seminary During Lang's Tenure

In 1827, it was suggested at the annual convention that the Ohio Synod should have its own consistent source of pastors. Everyone agreed, but there were insufficient funds. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of New York wrote to the Ohio Synod, suggesting that their theological students prepare at Hartwick Seminary in New York. Ohio, however, had concerns:

It is the special desire of the Church in the West to have an institution for the education of our students of ministry within her own borders where her interest might generally concentrate and from whence, as from a fountain head, the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession of Faith might be promulgated literally, purely and unadulteratedly, and the mild and tolerant spirit of our discipline send abroad its benign influence; and where the

29. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

30. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 9.

characteristics of Lutheranism, which neither malice, nor art can destroy, nor time efface, might be preserved.³¹

Although New York offered a solution to their financial problem, Ohio had concerns about both New York's confessional stance and the geographical distance. In 1831, the Ohio Synod established its own seminary as a conservative institution. Its constitution was explicit:

It is the object of this institution to teach in courses of theology, the doctrines of our church as they are contained in the Augsburg Confession and in the other symbolic books of our church, purely and without any adulterations.³²

On East Town Street in Columbus, Ohio stood the humble grammar preparatory school and theological seminary. Twenty-six-year-old Wilhelm Schmidt volunteered to serve as the institution's only instructor and administrator. After nine years of service, he died suddenly, leaving some thirty students without a professor by the middle of the nineteenth century.

What might have been a setback for Ohio's hopes of securing its own supply of pastors instead became an opportunity to dream even bigger.

It was at that time that the Ohio Synod dreamed a wonderful dream and decided to make this little school into a full-fledged university after the pattern of the great universities of Germany, with a college of arts, a college of theology, a college of law, and a college of medicine. The little grammar school was to grow up into a full-fledged arts college, and the theological seminar was there.³³

With a "full-fledged" university in mind, the financial barrier remained. However, since the town of Columbus was seeking a new university, "it was suggested that the citizens of Columbus be given the opportunity to help pay for it, and that a number of citizens ... chosen with an eye to

31. Lucht, *St. Paul's Continuing Stand for Confessional Lutheranism*, 8, (quoting minutes of the 1930 convention).

32. Lucht, *St. Paul's Continuing Stand for Confessional Lutheranism*, 8, (quoting the Ohio Synod's Seminary's Constitution).

33. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 2.

their bank accounts ... should be on its Board of Directors.”³⁴ Being the first University in Ohio’s capital, it took on the name “Capital University.” Operation began in 1850 with over a hundred students and five or six professors.

Unfortunately, several donors backed out, local institutions refused to assimilate, and “the Lutheran pastors on the Board did not see eye to eye with the citizens of Columbus, most of them were not Lutheran.”³⁵ By 1854, the “university” had been reduced to some thirty young men preparing for the ministry. In 1876, the board decided the boys “should be removed from the evil influence of the traveling men, and the school was removed to the corn fields on the east bank of the Alum Creek.”³⁶ Today, those corn fields have disappeared, and the school is located in the Columbus suburb of Bexley.

Capital University steadily grew into a well-respected college of arts and sciences while continuing to train schoolteachers and pastors supported primarily by local Lutheran congregations. By 1919, enrollment had reached several thousand students, and the university’s facilities had expanded to include schools of music and law.³⁷

In *A Short History of the Lutheran Church*, Lang identified “two giants” who both served at Capital University.

Two names seem to stand out above all the rest in the history of the Joint Synod of Ohio, the two “L’s” - Loy and Lenski. Dr. Mathias Loy was a great champion of conservatism in the Ohio Synod and its recognized leader. Loy held the office of president of Capital University, dean of the seminary, professor in the college, professor in the seminary, president of the Joint Synod of Ohio, president of the Western District, editor of the

34. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 3.

35. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 3.

36. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 3.

37. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 3.

Lutheran Standard, and acting pastor of Grace Luther Church of Columbus, nearly all at the same time, and when he had nothing to do and time hung heavy over him, he wrote books and composed hymns and translated hymns from the German. They named the old gymnasium the Loy Auditorium! He was no athlete. I do not think that he ever even plated a game of marbles.

The second giant ... was Dr. Richard Charles Henry Lenski. After serving in the active ministry for 24 years, he was called to be professor of theology at the Columbus Seminary. He never spoke of faith without the object of that faith, Jesus Christ, and he used to tell his students that faith was merely the cup, but that the cup was never empty; its contents were the merits of Jesus Christ. He always stressed faith as “die nehmende Hand”, the hand that receives and what was received was Christ’s merit. Lenski was a staunch defender of verbal inspiration, a foe of liberalism, evolution, and the lodge. Lenski was not only an able professor; he was also a prolific writer.³⁸

Lang’s praise for these two “giants” of the Ohio Synod clearly depended on both their hard, faithful work and their uncompromising confessional stance. Based on this criteria, I would suggest Lang humbly forgot a third “giant”: himself.³⁹

John O. Lang valued high-level education. He attended Capital University graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in 1926. A local Columbus newspaper recognized Lang as one of the city’s two “Columbus boys,” celebrating his achievement as a local honor student and expressing excitement for his upcoming enrollment at the Capital Seminary that fall.⁴⁰ In 1929, he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree and immediately secured a position as a professor at Capital University. Lang served in both part-time and full-time teaching roles there for twenty-seven years.

1929–1930 Instructor in History

38. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 7.

39. While this is my assessment, based on the research presented in this paper, Lang’s ministry aligns with his description of the two Ohio Synod “giants”: a pastor who combined diligent, faithful work with a steadfast commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. This is not intended to exclude other faithful, hard-working confessional pastors from Ohio, as I have not conducted an exhaustive study of all ministers from the synod.

40. “Honor Students of Capital University,” *unknown newspaper*, Thursday, June 17, 1926, accessed via Ancestry.com.

1931–1936	Part-time Instructor in German
1936–1940	Instructor in German and History
1940–1947	Assistant Professor of History
1947–1949	Associate Professor of History, Art History and Hymnology
1948–1956	Lecturer in Liturgics at the Seminary ⁴¹

Many of his full-time teaching positions transitioned to part-time when he also took on pastoral duties at the following congregations.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, New Rome, Ohio	1931–1937	Pastor
St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio	1940–1947	Asst. to Pastor
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio	1949–1974	Pastor ⁴²

All the while, Lang earned a Master of Arts degree in History from Ohio State University in 1930, a Master of Sacred Theology from Capital University Theological Seminary in 1936, and pursued additional courses in education from Ohio University from 1958–1959. These academic achievements, combined with his extensive teaching and pastoral experience, equipped Lang to be a deeply knowledgeable and faithful pastor and scholar.

Unfortunately, Lang's tenure at Capital concluded on a somber note. While deliberating a call to St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Columbus, it appears that Lang grew uncertain about Capital's plans for his future role as a history professor. This is suggested by a letter he received from the university's president, Dr. Harold L. Yochum:

Dear Professor Lang:

No definite decisions have been made regarding the History position in the Seminary and that I cannot hold out any promise or hope of your being elected to succeed Dr. Buehring. In conclusion, let me state it as my measured judgment that the prospect of you being placed on the Seminary faculty would unquestionably be less if you were to leave Capital University and return to parish work. Your specialized training and your teaching ability can be utilized more effectively here than in the parish ministry, with all due respect to the glorious field of service which the parish ministry represents. There is additional

41. St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, "Biographical Sketch of John O. Lang," Columbus, OH.

42. St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, "Biographical Sketch of John O. Lang," Columbus, OH.

consideration that unless the call to St. Paul Congregation in Columbus offers a compelling challenge to you who would justify your decision to devote some years of your future career to the service of that congregation. God's guidance to you!⁴³⁴⁴

Although Yochum could not guarantee Lang a future position at the seminary, his evangelical guidance and institutional pressure led Lang to return the call to St. Paul's.

Dear Members of St. Paul's Congregation:

What I am about to say will perhaps be a disappointment to some of you, but after an inner conflict of over a month...I have finally decided to decline the call which you extended. My career at Capital has been in many respects a disappointment, especially since it did not lead, as I hoped it would, to a professorship of Religion in the college or to a professorship in the Theological Seminary. My Missouri background has been the chief reason why I have never attained that hoped for professorship of Religion or Theology at Capital University. The decision to decline the call was arrived at solely on the basis of whether or not I would fit into St. Paul's congregation, and the decision, I assure you, was not an easy one to make. In the meanwhile I shall continue to serve as supply pastor if you so desire, and after your pastor has been installed, I shall be glad at any time to supply your pulpit during any sickness or absence of your pastor.⁴⁵⁴⁶⁴⁷

Lang was candid about his disappointment at not being offered a professorship in Religion or Theology at the Seminary. His letters reveal a deep passion for serving God's Word rather than focusing on secular instruction.

Tension between him and Capital lingered, and three months later, this letter from Professor Lang would arrive on President Yochum's desk:

Dear Dr. Yochum:

43. H. L. Yochum, letter to Professor John O. Lang, April 20, 1949, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

44. Little did President Yochum realize that St. Paul's would soon present "a compelling challenge" that would utilize Lang's "specialized training" and "teaching ability" as he guided the congregation in its departure from the American Lutheran Church.

45. John O. Lang, *Call Return Letter to the Members of St. Paul's Congregation*, April 24, 1949, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

46. I was unable to locate any verifiable information regarding Lang's purported "Missouri background."

47. Clearly, they were much more comfortable including personal information in publicly read call-return letters than we are today.

This morning I decided to accept the pastorate of St. Paul's Church of Columbus, and therefore I am hereby resigning my position as Associate Professor of History at Capital University, effective September first.⁴⁸

In Lang's letter of resignation, he offered five reasons for resignation that "weighed heavily upon [his] heart." His reasons were specific examples of Capital restricting Lang to secular historic subjects and a pattern of excuses for refusing to allow him to teach religion courses. He continued:

In spite of my disappointments, I'm not assuming an antagonistic attitude toward Capital University. I'm still a member of the American Lutheran Church, and Capital University is a part of that church, and I shall continue to pray and work for its welfare and urge my congregation to do likewise. I enjoy teaching, and if at some future date, Capital University should see fit to call me to a teaching position of religion (in its own right) in the college, or to some professorship in the seminary in the fields of my interests and specialization, I should be glad to give such a call, my serious consideration. I hope that you will understand that this decision to assume the pastorate of St. Paul's was a carefully thought out decision, and that you will not think unkindly of me because of it. It is my hope that some truly spiritual man will be found to succeed me in the History Department.⁴⁹

President Yochum responded promptly:

Dear Brother Lang:

Your letter was forwarded to me at Hessel and I was quite startled at its contents. Frankly, I thought the issue was settled when you returned this call. I do not feel that it is advisable for me to comment further on that phase of your decision. What disturbs me somewhat is the series of reasons which you have given for your decision.⁵⁰

48. John O. Lang, *Resignation Letter to Dr. Harold L. Yochum*, July 10, 1949, Department of History, Capital University, Columbus, OH.

49. John O. Lang, *Resignation Letter to Dr. Harold L. Yochum*, July 10, 1949, Department of History, Capital University, Columbus, OH.

50. Harold L. Yochum, *Letter to John O. Lang*, July 27, 1949, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

Yochum proceeded to address each point in Lang's resignation letter, characterizing some concerns as "misinterpreted" and "false impressions." He offered explanations for each reason, acknowledging that some misunderstandings may have arisen. He concluded his letter:

Since you have made a definite decision, and there is no use debating the issue further, let us go from there. I appreciate your willingness to continue with some teaching at Capital University provided this has the approval of the church council. Believe it or not, I should like to see you have a successful and happy ministry at St. Paul Church. I assure you that we will welcome your continued service to Capital University by this part-time teaching arrangement and by your goodwill and assistance as a pastor of the city and this district and the American Lutheran Church. There's no reason why we should not continue to be good friends, both of us are sincerely devoted to the welfare of God's kingdom and to the work which in God's providence we are trying to do. Cordial greetings!⁵¹

With Lang's resignation officially accepted by the university, he became the ninth pastor at St. Paul's in its 129-year history.

At the 2005 Academic Excellence Luncheon Celebration at Capital University, Capital University inducted Rev. Lang into its Professors Hall of Honor. His bio read:

John O. Lang, professor of German and history, was one of the most popular members of the Capital faculty. His humor and witty anecdotes of history made his lectures interesting and enjoyable as well as informative. Lang was born in Columbus, Ohio, and attended Central High School. From 1931–1937, he was a pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Rome, Ohio. When asked how he spent his vacations Lang said that, "As a minister of the gospel, I have little vacation." One of his favorite topics and the one upon which he was an authority, was church hymnology, although he had studied a wide range of other topics. Lang died April 6, 1974.^{52,53}

51. Harold L. Yochum, *Letter to John O. Lang*, July 27, 1949, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

52. *Academic Excellence Luncheon Celebration Program*, Capital University, 2005, Capital University Archives, Columbus, OH.

53. Judy Moehl, letter to author, October 18, 2025, regarding *Academic Excellence Luncheon Celebration Program*, Capital University, 2005. Moehl, who attended the luncheon as a guest of Catherine Lang, noted: "You will note in the bio that they do not mention that he was the pastor at our St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. This 'oversight,' I am sure, was due to his conservative biblical beliefs and the liberalism of the American Lutheran Church, of which Capital University was a part. Katie was very proud that Capital University finally gave Rev. Lang this recognition."

Despite Lang's resignation as a full-time professor for personal reasons, in 1957 he resigned entirely from any teaching position because the University and Seminary followed the Ohio Synod's theological rollercoaster and its "big dip" into liberalism. Today, at Wisconsin and Missouri synod seminaries, statues of Martin Luther stand with inscriptions such as, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word. Otherwise I did nothing: the Word did everything," serving as testaments to their confessional Lutheran stance. In contrast, at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Ohio, a "Promise for Life" sculpture commemorates the Holocaust with the words, "Out of the flames of human hate comes the ashes of death. Out of the flame of God's love comes the promise for life," reflecting its embrace of a new theology. This aligns with John Gresham Machen's observation regarding liberalism: while it may use traditional phraseology, it represents a religion distinct from historic Christianity, attempting to reconcile faith with modern liberalism, and ultimately belongs to a "totally different class of religion."⁵⁴

54. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 395–387.

PASTORAL MINISTRY AT ST. PAUL'S

Rev. John Lang's installation made local headlines.

Never has a new ministry known his congregation and church as the Rev. John O. Lang. He wrote *The Story of St. Paul's...and Oldest Lutheran Congregation in Columbus*. A native of Columbus and student of local folk-lore, the Rev. Mr. Lang was graduated from Capital University in 1926 and received his B.D. degree from theological seminary at the Bexley school in 1929. Lang has resigned at Capital University to accept the full-time pastorate of the 129-year-old congregation.⁵⁵

On Sunday, August 14, 1949, Lang officially became pastor of St. Paul's. "Under his leadership church attendance grew rapidly and two services were held each Sunday."⁵⁶

Just as the newspaper acknowledged his installation, during his pastorate he took every opportunity to inform local newspapers what St. Paul's believed and what activities were happening at the church.

St. Paul's To Celebrate 129 Years

The pastor, Rev. John O. Lang, will speak on, "The Heritage of Those Who Fear the Lord" taking his theme from Psalm 61:5. The celebration will also commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Capital University and the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Theological Seminary. ... A potluck congregational dinner honoring the 74 members into the congregation during the last two years, will be held after the service.⁵⁷

Pastors Give Comfort At Time of Sickness

In times of sickness, as in most crises, you can expect your minister to offer sturdy support. Rev. John O. Lang, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, said he averages 15 to 20 sick calls a week. That number includes some chronically ill and four patients in the State Hospital. The Rev. Mr. Lang said he turns over a list of illnesses to the women of

55. "St. Paul's to Install Rev. John Lang," Columbus Dispatch, August 1949.

56. *Historical Highlights in the Life of Our Congregation*, compiled by members of the congregation, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

57. "St. Paul's to Celebrate 129 Years," unknown Columbus newspaper, 1950. Clipping in St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

the Altar Guild, who take care of the flowers for the altar, and who, after the services, take the flowers to the sick members on the list.⁵⁸

Ideas For Sermons

Masterpieces of sacred art are bases of sermons by Rev. John O. Lang, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Soord's "The Lost Sheep" will be the focus of the sermon for April 16. Each member of the congregation receives a miniature copy of the masterpiece. Lang has found that this type of sermon interests his listeners. He also tries to have a copy of the masterpiece in each church classroom.⁵⁹

This small collection of newspaper clippings shows how intentional Lang was about communicating with the wider community—whether announcing major milestones like anniversaries or something as simple as a hospital visit. Taken together, they convey a consistent message: St. Paul's saw itself as a church for the whole Columbus community.

Lutheran Day School Development

St. Paul's Lutheran to Open Kindergarten

A kindergarten with sessions Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. will be open at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. The school will include all the usual activities associated with kindergartens plus positive Bible-based and Christ-centered religious instruction. The school will be open to both member of and non-member children. For non-member children there will be a nominal charge of \$10 per semester tuition plus the \$5 per semester for supplies. The enrollment is limited to 20 or 25 children. The pastor of St. Paul's, Rev. John O. Lang, is convinced that if each religious group feels justified in operating denominational colleges where only a few of the young people have the advantage of an education under Christian influence, individual churches ought to establish Christian Day Schools where all the children have the advantage of such Christian influence.⁶⁰

58. "Pastors Give Comfort At Time of Sickness," *unknown Columbus newspaper*. Clipping in St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

59. *Citizen-Journal* (Columbus, OH), April 8, 1961, "Ideas for Sermons." Clipping in St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

60. "St. Paul's Lutheran To Open Kindergarten," *South Side Booster—Your Community's Newspaper* (Columbus, OH), July 26, 1951. Clipping in St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

Coming from his professorship at Capital University, Lang carried a strong commitment to Christian education. His desire for “all the children [to] have the advantage of such Christian influence” becomes clear in the fact that, under his leadership, St. Paul’s opened a kindergarten only two years into his ministry in 1951.

Lang took a hands-on approach to the kindergarten. Although he was not the main teacher—that call belonged to Mrs. C. Paul Broast—he regularly took an active role. One article, “Lutherans Establish a Pre-School,” depicts him standing before a group of kindergarteners teaching the biblical account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.⁶¹ Another piece, “Two ALC Churches Graduate Classes from Kindergarten,” shows him standing beside thirteen graduates in caps and gowns at the front of the church.⁶²

This was St. Paul’s second attempt at establishing a Christian day school. The first effort began in 1899, with grades 7 and 8 held in the church basement. Seven years later, grades 5 and 6 were added. But after another eight years, the school was discontinued due to a lack of students.⁶³ “Since the Christian day school at the turn of the century, beginning at the top (Grades 7 & 8) had folded, Pastor Lang decided to start at the bottom with a kindergarten.”⁶⁴

St. Paul’s second attempt proved successful. After a close vote (30–21), the congregation began raising funds for an Education Unit, which would include classrooms and an auditorium.

61. Charlotte Curtis, “Lutherans Establish a Pre-School,” *Life Starts at 5*, 1951, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

62. “Two ALC Churches Graduate Classes from Kindergarten,” *Lutheran Standard*, July 26, 1952, no. 30, vol. CX, 7, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

63. *Historical Highlights in the Life of Our Congregation*, compiled by members of the congregation, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

64. St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, *1821–2021: 200 Years of God’s Grace*, compiled by members of the congregation, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

Within seven years, they had raised enough to break ground in 1959. The groundbreaking day service generated great excitement, and the service folder announced:

This is ground breaking day! It is a historic day in the history of St. Paul's! The first major building program in 41 years! We shall have a ceremony after both the 8 & 10 a.m. service. Come out to the back of the church and witness it. Lift a shovel full of earth yourself if you so desire, so that you can tell your grandchildren that you helped break ground. By next Sunday, you will see a large hole in the ground in back of the church, indicating the size and shape of the new building.⁶⁵

A little over a year later, in 1960, the Educational Unit was complete, with grades added in subsequent years up to grade six by 1963. Until 1970, Pastor Lang served as principal averaging over one hundred students. He told a reporter for the *South Side Leader*,

This is a fulfillment of a dream of many years to be pastor of a church that has a day school, where not only religion is taught as a subject but where the other subjects are integrated with Christian religion. I am happy that the day is now past in which we must hold Sunday School classes in choir lofts, kitchens, and other nooks and crannies.⁶⁶

He carried the responsibilities of principal but regarded himself first as a "pastor of a church," suggesting he believed a pastor should be closely involved with the students in a Christian day school.

This philosophy was not just theoretical; it was evident in the ways he interacted with the children of the congregation, making each one feel valued and included. A great example of Lang's love for children, and of how he included them as part of the congregation, comes from the experiences of St. Paul's member Judy Moehl.

Rev. Lang loved children. I think he was a big kid at heart. It is my recollection from conversation with his wife, Katie, that she may have miscarried a baby early in their

65. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, *Bulletin Announcement*, August 23, 1959, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

66. *South Side Leader*, vol. IX, no. 26 (Sept. 8, 1960): 21, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

marriage and could no longer have children. I think this is one of the many reasons he was fond of the congregation's children and loved to teach them and make them laugh. [A] unique gift (in my opinion) that Rev. Lang had was that he recognized the importance of making the Sunday School children feel they are an important part of the church. On Sunday mornings ... children who were celebrating ... their birthday during the week were asked to come forward and place their birthday offering into a small wood church shaped bank. The money collected during the year was sent to the Apache Children Mission project in Arizona. We always received a letter back from them thanking us for our offering gift. I remember ... how proud I felt that I was a small part of helping these children.⁶⁷

Lang's attention to the children's spiritual growth proves his pastoral care extended beyond the pulpit, creating a culture in which even the youngest members felt they had a role in the church's mission and ministry. Lang left such an impact that she should go onto say, "His love for God's Word and our Lord Jesus Christ, his integrity, his teachings, his sermons, his love of our hymns, his sense of humor and his overall love for St. Paul's and its congregation is etched in my heart. I could not be more blessed that he was part of my life."⁶⁸

St. Paul's Lutheran Elementary School continues to operate today, providing instruction grounded in God's Word for students in grades K–8. Enrolling approximately 100 students, the school still occupies the classrooms and auditorium that the congregation enthusiastically established over six decades ago.

67. Judy Moehl, letter to the author, September 12, 2025.

68. Judy Moehl included in her letter, "Please believe me when I say that Rev. Lang was not perfect ... I witnessed and only recall him being angry or upset a couple of times ... he just wanted everyone to seek and find the truth as well." Judy Moehl, letter to the author, September 12, 2025.

Leadership During Denominational Crisis

When Lang left Capital University, President Yochum wrote, “Your specialized training and your teaching ability can be utilized more effectively here than in the parish ministry ... unless the call to St. Paul Congregation in Columbus offers a compelling challenge to you who would justify your decision to devote some years of your future career to the service of that congregation.”⁶⁹ That “compelling challenge” arose a decade into his pastorate at St. Paul’s, as the denomination with which they were in fellowship, the ALC, embraced liberal and non-biblical teachings.

From 1962–1964, Lang and the Church Council worked to keep the congregation informed about developments in the ALC. In a letter to the congregation titled *Can St. Paul’s Congregation Conscientiously Remain in the American Lutheran Church?*, Lang explained the situation in accessible terms for lay members. He included letters from other pastors expressing similar concerns:

Pastor from Western Ohio

Just keep on yelling about some of the things that are going on these days. Many of us do not like them. The trend is toward being more liberal and I don’t like it.

Pastor from New York

This ALC outfit is becoming so liberal that a person shudders to think what the position will be in another generation. We are going to go our own way and do as we please. They (Minneapolis) have already written and wanted to know why. We didn’t hesitate to tell them.

Pastor from California

A young man who had just completed the Junior year at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. confided in me that one of his professors spent an entire period of 50 minutes to prove that it was not necessary for the way of salvation to believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus.

Pastor from Illinois

69. H. L. Yochum, letter to Professor John O. Lang, April 20, 1949, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

Pastor X asked how we can get at the bottom of things when our students come back and tell us what their teachers teach in Religion classes. We write to the professors, and they do not answer or say that we misunderstood. Pastor Y told how he even sent a questionnaire to the religion professor invoking the things that the students brought back and explained how disturbed they were. He got no answer. Pastor Z who is even on the Board of Regents of _____ College told its problem to his face that we cannot teach one thing in our ALC pulpits and constitution and then teach another in our college.

These letters demonstrated that St. Paul's concerns were shared by other congregations and highlighted a recurring problem: students returning from ALC seminaries were bringing troubling teachings back to their home congregations. The pattern suggests that some professors in ALC-affiliated seminaries were a primary source of these doctrinal shifts.

Lang continued in his letter by explaining the main concerns of this development to his members.

What Is All the Fuss About?

In recent years, "a new approach to the Scriptures: has been in evidence among some theological professors of TALC and has filtered down into congregational life through interns from the seminaries and through recent graduates from the seminaries. This new approach questions the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures, reduces to parables or myths many Bible stories formerly regarded as historical facts.

Is There a Real Problem?

Some would like to say that there is no real controversy in TALC and that all are united in a common faith and in a beautiful fellowship, and that your pastor is becoming fussed up over nothing, fighting "a bogymen" or "a straw man" who does not really exist.⁷⁰

Anyone who doubted whether an ecumenical movement was truly at work within the ALC needed only to look at the evidence Lang compiled. To demonstrate the shift he saw taking place, he pointed members to several articles from *The Lutheran Standard*—encouraging them to read and evaluate the material for themselves. One example came from an article written in dialogue

70. John O. Lang, "Can St. Paul's Congregation Conscientiously Remain in the American Lutheran Church?" (essay, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH, ca. 1963–64), St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

form, illustrating the new way some leaders were attempting to reconcile Scripture with modern scientific theories:

Bill: Pastor if the Bible is inspired, we should be able to use it in other ways than for purely religious purposes, shouldn't we?

Pastor: In what ways, for instance?

Bill: Well take history, or geology, or biology, or astronomy. There are lots of things that science is not at all sure about, that are set forth in the Bible as gospel fact. The origin of life, for example.

Pastor: Now, Bill, you have to remember that the purpose of the Bible is to reveal something that is not discoverable by human means. Why would the Holy Spirit inspire anyone to invent the multiplication table, or to describe the solar system? This is the business of the mathematicians and astronomers who do quite well at it.

Bill: Yes, pastor, but there are a lot of references to scientific things in the Bible. Isn't this information just as dependable as the religious message of the Bible?

Pastor: No, Bill, I wouldn't say that this information is just as dependable. Not because it isn't true, but simply because of the way in which it is given. It is given incidentally, in order that another story might be told.⁷¹

This example served Lang's purpose by showing how ALC publications were reinterpreting the authority and purpose of Scripture in ways that aligned with broader ecumenical and modernist trends.

Lang included in his newsletter several actions that the congregation would need to take because of the "big dip" in the ALC.

What Is in Order at a Congregation Meeting?

If we wish to remain in TALC, no motion is necessary. We are now in and we stay in until we vote to withdraw. Any motion to stay in TALC would be out of order. Any motion to remain permanently in TALC would be unconstitutional since our St. Paul's constitution states that St. Paul's shall remain in the American Lutheran Church only as long as the ALC remains true to Lutheran doctrine and practice ... A motion to withdraw from Synod

71. Christian Preus, "How About Science, Pastor?" *The Lutheran Standard* 3, no. 12 (June 4, 1963): 11.

would be the only motion in order. Any person in a Christian congregation who makes a motion should be sincere about his own motion and believe in it when he makes it.⁷²

As Lang guided the congregation according to the Lutheran Confessions—which affirm that “the only rule according to which all teachings and teachers are to be judged is the Holy Scriptures”⁷³—he concluded that there was only one faithful course for St. Paul’s: depart from the ALC because their departure from “Lutheran doctrine and practice.”

Finally, Lang concluded his letter with twenty-five practical questions and answers designed to help members thoughtfully consider the congregation’s impending stand for the inerrancy of God’s Word. These questions—ranging from “Did St. Paul’s congregation always belong to a Synod?” to “Are there Lutheran congregations today which do not belong to a Synod?” to “Why not join the Missouri or Wisconsin Synod?” and “Have any TALC congregations recently withdrawn?”—reflect a distinctly pastoral instinct. They reveal a leader intent on guiding his people patiently and clearly through a complex ecclesiastical decision.

Perhaps the most fascinating question and answer is number twenty-one on Lang’s list:

Q: If St. Paul’s withdrew from TALC, what would happen to the pastor’s retirement fund?

A: The pastor is not in the Pension Fund of TALC. When that fund was begun in the early 1940’s he even then foresaw the day when the liberalism of the ALC would prove too much for him and he might feel constrained to withdraw, and so he never went into the fund. Synodical connection does not affect his Social Security payments.⁷⁴

This response offers a rare glimpse into Lang’s long-standing concerns about the theological trajectory of the ALC. Concerns he evidently held even before arriving at St. Paul’s. It raises

72. Lang, “Can St. Paul’s Congregation Conscientiously Remain...?”

73. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 660.

74. Lang, “Can St. Paul’s Congregation Conscientiously Remain...?”

intriguing questions about his earlier tensions with the religion department at Capital University and his motivations for pursuing theological education and teaching.⁷⁵ While the precise nature of those internal conflicts may remain unknown, one fact is clear: Lang's decision decades earlier to decline participation in the ALC pension fund stemmed from a deliberate anticipation of the doctrinal developments he later led his congregation to confront.

Lang's anticipation of these doctrinal developments is evident not only in his administrative decisions but also in his preaching. In the year preceding the congregation's vote to leave the ALC, he took to the pulpit with a sermon titled "An Authoritative Bible" which concluded:

We have an authoritative Bible; authoritative on whence we came, on what we are, on the way of salvation, on the question of right and wrong, and authoritative on any other subject which it treats. The Bible was primarily given "to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" but that does not mean that the Bible is authoritative only on way of salvation. Since the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and since it was given "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth", it is true no matter on what subject it speaks... We true Lutherans lift our Bibles and say:

Holy Bible, book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came,
Mine to teach me what I am.⁷⁶

With sermons which contradicted liberal teachings, his pastoral essay, monthly messengers, and Sunday bulletins, Lang took multiple opportunities in helping his congregation think biblically about the claims the ALC was promoting in publications such as *The Lutheran Standard*.

75. Did Lang seek a position in the Religion Department in hopes of reforming the curriculum toward a more confessional Lutheran stance? Were Lang's reasons for suddenly accepting the call to St. Paul's connected to confessional concerns he foresaw at Capital University?

76. Lang, *In Christ Jesus*, 183.

After Lang's extensive teaching, a congregational letter of protest to the ALC signed by 322 members, and a visit from ALC President Dr. Fredrik Schiolz—who could offer no assurance that anything was being done to reverse the Synod's liberal tendencies—St. Paul's proceeded to vote on a motion to withdraw formally from the ALC.⁷⁷ A 1964 St. Paul's Sunday bulletin read:

PLEASE BE PATIENT! After our vote of 158–39 on April 15 to withdraw from TALC, it will take a little time to get various matters adjusted. For the most part, our program goes on as usual, the preaching and teaching of the pure Word of God as confessed by the Lutheran Church.⁷⁸

Severing ties with the ALC, St. Paul's officially became an independent congregation. Though their synodical affiliation changed, their commitment to "preaching and teaching the pure Word of God as confessed by the Lutheran Church" remained unchanged.

The ALC considered St. Paul's withdrawal as an act against their congregational constitution. A local newspaper reported on the annual ALC meeting as they discussed St. Paul's:

The executive committee statement pointed out that St. Paul's congregation had acted contrary to its own constitution in voting to withdraw, since synodical connection remain inviolate as long as the synod remains faithful to the confessions and practice of the Lutheran Church. ... The contention that the American Lutheran Church is "not faithful to the confessions and practice of the Lutheran Church" was rejected as an unproved allegation. ... The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life. However, the document of the Church reject all rationalizing processes which would explain away either the divine or the human factor in the Bible.⁷⁹

77. St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, *200 Years of God's Grace*, 15.

78. St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, "Bulletin for Trinity Sunday, May 24, 1964," St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

79. "Accept Resignation of St. Paul's Church," *Unknown newspaper*, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

While explaining St. Paul's fault, they exposed their own error which Lang was emphatic about:

"Deleting the Word 'inerrant' from 'inspired Word of God' ... would imply that the Bible was not inerrant in its entirety but only in matters of faith and life and that human judgment would then be required to say which were matters of faith and life and which were not."⁸⁰

The newspaper would continue to report: "Pastor John Lang, having freely chosen to remit the ministry of the ALC, be requested to return his ordination certificate to the president of The American Lutheran Church."⁸¹ Evidently, Rev. Lang did not comply, since the Ohio District's president, Rev. Paul Moeller, contacted the Columbus courthouse, stating:

The Reverend John O. Lang of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Columbus, was officially requested ... to turn in his ordination papers. He has so far refused to comply with this request and so we would notify your Court that in the official judgment of the American Lutheran Church John O. Lang is no longer an authorized ordained clergyman.⁸²

Lang did not refuse to hand in his ordination because he forgot, but because he was bound in conscience by what the Lutheran Confessions taught. His ordination certificate concluded, "Ordained to the Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the ordained having vowed fidelity to all her Confessions." His vow had not been to any synod or Lutheran organization, but to the "Evangelical Lutheran Church" and "all her Confessions." Lang was striving to remain faithful to those Confessions in a time when his synod was not. He wrote back to Moeller, "I surrendered the only evidence in my possession which would designate me as a

80. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 8.

81. *Accept Resignation of St. Paul's Church*.

82. Paul Moeller, letter to Probate Court, South High and East Mount Street, Columbus, OH, August 20, 1964, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

member of the clergy of TALC, and the only document which I felt morally obligated to surrender. My ordination certificate does not identify me as a clergyman of TALC.”⁸³

To offer an additional Lutheran perspective for the Columbus judge, Lang requested that Norman W. Berg, President of the Wisconsin Synod’s Michigan District, respond to the courthouse on his behalf:

Dear Judge Can Hyde:

The Rev. Mr. John O. Lang has requested that I write to you relative to his status as the properly ordained and called pastor of St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio. Since the status of Pastor Lang as a properly ordained and called minister is being challenged by the Ohio District officials of The American Lutheran Church, I wish to state the traditional position of the Lutheran Church on the matter of ordination and the status of a pastor.⁸⁴

First, Berg explained that the ALC’s demand for Lang’s ordination certificate represented a departure from the traditional manner in which such situations had been handled. He continued:

We believe that the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments rests with the individual Christian since Christ Himself gave every Christian this authority. We also believe that the authority to administer these rights publicly is transferred or given to a man through the call of a group of Christians to be their pastor. (Cf. the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV; “...no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”) In other words, the first calling of a man by a properly constituted group of Christians make him a pastor in the eyes of the Church. His ordination is the official recognition of this fact by a larger church grouping which has attested to his qualifications to be called.⁸⁵

Secondly, Berg appealed to the Lutheran Confessions, which Rev. Lang had vowed to uphold, affirming that the authority to call a man into the public ministry resides with the local Christian congregation. Since the congregation Lang now served had extended him a legitimate call, even

83. John O. Lang, letter to Rev. Paul Moeller, August 28, 1964, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

84. Norman W. Berg, letter to Judge Joseph Can Hyde, Probate Court of Franklin County, Columbus, OH, August 28, 1964, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

85. Berg, letter to Hyde, August 28, 1964.

apart from any synodical affiliation, Berg argued that Lang remained a rightly called and functioning minister of the gospel. He ended his letter to the judge with:

There can be no question that John O. Lang is a properly ordained pastor and minister of the Gospel. Although no longer clergyman of The American Lutheran Church, he remains a pastor of an independent Lutheran congregation. Our church body recognizes him as such. Should Pastor Lang apply for membership in our body after finding himself in confessional agreement with our body we would not feel the necessity of a re-ordination since he is a properly ordained minister of the Gospel and rightly called Lutheran pastor.⁸⁶

Berg's final assertion provided Judge Van Hyde with the perspective of another synod on the matter, illustrating how the Wisconsin Synod would handle such a situation. This letter appears to have been decisive, as no further court correspondence is preserved in St. Paul's Archives, and Pastor Lang retained his ordination certificate.

Lang not only had the support of the Wisconsin Synod, but also of his own St. Paul's congregation. During this period of both corporate and personal difficulty, the Church Council wrote to ALC District President Moeller to express their support for their pastor:

We are writing in regard to your letter to our pastor ... requesting him to meet with you ... [and in regard to] your second letter insisting that he come alone and his second letter refusing to meet with you if the elders are not permitted to attend with him. These arguments should be put in writing and sent to Reverend Lang. ... We are completely opposed to any meetings to which Reverend Lang cannot bring at least two elders.⁸⁷

The Church Council emphasized that Lang should not be forced into meetings without the support of his elected church leadership. In their firm response, they also expressed both appreciation for and concern about Pastor Lang:

⁸⁶ Berg, letter to Hyde, August 28, 1964.

⁸⁷ St. Paul's Lutheran Church Council, letter to District President Dr. Paul Moeller, April 1, 1964, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

We find it difficult to sufficiently express our very high regard for Reverend Lang, his service to our church, his extreme devotion to his duty, the sound, conservative, Bible-based Lutheran doctrine he preaches, and his willingness to stand up and oppose any attacks on that doctrine. Reverend Lang has had one heart attack and we will go to great lengths to see to it that he is not placed in any situation which might precipitate a second such attack. Reverend Lang preaches the Word of God according to the Lutheran doctrine as he was taught it, and we wholeheartedly agree with him.⁸⁸

This strong affirmation from the Church Council underscores how deeply Lang's teaching had shaped his congregation and how firmly they stood with him. It also reveals their serious concern for his health. Having already endured a heart attack, Lang's well-being was a matter of urgent importance to the congregation, and their letter reflects the protective care they felt for their pastor during a time of intense conflict.

Given the seriousness of Lang's health issues, he entered fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1964, motivated in part by a desire to ensure that the independent St. Paul's congregation would be well cared for when the Lord brought his earthly life to a close. In the decades that followed, that desire was realized: St. Paul's was served by five WELS pastors before the congregation was formally received into membership on June 12, 2007 with the Wisconsin Synod.⁸⁹

88. St. Paul's Church Council, letter to Moeller, April 1, 1964.

89. St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, *200 Years of God's Grace*, 24.

LEGACY AND LASTING INFLUENCE

It is difficult to quantify the full scope of Rev. John O. Lang's ministry at St. Paul's. Yet at the service held on February 2, 1969, marking the twentieth anniversary of his pastorate, the congregation sought to articulate the depth and significance of his work as they presented him with a commemorative plaque:

In the twenty years Reverend Lang has been our pastor he has baptized several hundred children and adults; he has taught thousands of catechetical classes and confirmed hundred of children and adults; he has given hundreds of addresses before church groups and has made many thousands of pastoral calls. Since his installation twenty years ago he has prepared and delivered approximately 2100 sermons. Each of these sermons has been different and yet each has been, in one way, the same ... [the] theme is the atoning Christ upon whom our hopes of eternal life are entirely dependent. We as Christians, come to St. Paul's for that message and that message alone. We always depend upon being lead to Christ and His cross and the way to salvation in Him. As a congregation, and as individuals, we should daily give thanks to God for Reverend Lang.⁹⁰

The congregation's words attest to Lang's influence as their shepherd at St. Paul's, faithfully and relentlessly proclaiming Christ crucified. Yet they could not speak of his ministry without also acknowledging the greatest challenge he faced—guiding the congregation through the rise of liberal theology that threatened its confessional foundations.

Pastor Lang and St. Paul's Lutheran Church have a history of conservative Lutheranism, believing that the Bible is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and that we are saved, not by our own works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Pastor Lang and St. Paul's withdrew from The American Lutheran Church because, in their opinion, that body had become too liberal in its theology. Pastor Lang is now a member of the Wisconsin Synod, while St. Paul's continues as an independent congregation. The Reverend Lang is St. Paul's ninth pastor in its 148-year history.⁹¹

90. "Presentation of a Plaque to Rev. John O. Lang at the 8:00 a.m. Service Commemorating His Twentieth Anniversary as Pastor of St. Paul's," February 2, 1969, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

91. "Presentation of a Plaque to Rev. John O. Lang, February 2, 1969."

The congregation not only valued Lang's focus on Scripture and Christ, but also recognized and affirmed his unwavering commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. By connecting the church's long history of conservative Lutheranism—including its withdrawal from the increasingly liberal ALC—they were able to see how Lang's confessional stance was both beneficial and necessary for safeguarding God's Word from the distortions promoted by more liberal theological tendencies.

In 1971, Rev. Lang celebrated forty years in the ministry. Several letters from friends and colleagues were preserved from that occasion, and together they testify to the deep respect and high esteem in which he was held.

You have had the privilege of declaring that Good News with the voice of authority—the authority of the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost, the infallible Word, the verbally Spirit-superintended Word. What a fine gesture of good will, kindness and consideration it is on that part of the wonderful members of St. Paul's Congregation to set aside Sunday, February 14, as Pastor Lang Sunday. These good folks are to be commended. Pastor M. E. Hollensen⁹²

The main thing I want to stress, John, is that you have been a good minister of Jesus Christ. In an age of many opinions along religious lines, which contradict the plain truths of the Bible, your preaching and teaching has been Bible-based. The earnest soul can never be satisfied with mere human opinions. It wants the sure Word of God. It wants to know how to find peace with God through the forgiveness of sins. This the soul can know only through the Gospel which holds up Christ as the only Savior. You have been that kind of a minister preaching the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Christ. This is why I especially congratulate you. Paul B.⁹³

When we were ordained we were asked by the officiating minister: "Are you ready to take upon you this Holy Ministry and faithfully to serve in it? Will you preach and teach the pure Word of God in accordance with the confessions of the Lutheran Church?" To

92. M. E. Hollensen, letter to John O. Lang, February 9, 1971, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

93. Paul [last name illegible], letter to John O. Lang, February 9, 1971, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

this question we responded: Yes, with my whole heart, the Lord helping me through the power and grace of his Holy Spirit.” Over the past forty years the Christ who we serve has graciously supplied you with the needed courage, health, and strength to fulfill this promise in a most outstanding manner. Your faithfulness to this promise and love for the church of Jesus Christ has been deeply appreciated by your congregation, by the people of your community, and also by the church at large. Pastor Carlton Sutorius⁹⁴

A common thread in these letters is the recognition of Rev. Lang’s commitment to teaching the pure Word of God and adhering to the Lutheran Confessions. Together, these letters testify to the deep respect he earned during his ministry.

Rev. Lang remained steadfast in his devotion to God’s Word, the Lutheran Confessions, and the people entrusted to his care until April 6, 1974, when the Lord fulfilled his promise and called him home to heaven. On Palm Sunday at St. Paul’s, the back of the bulletin informed the congregation: “Early yesterday morning the Lord God in his gracious wisdom and mercy quietly called His faithful servant to his eternal rest and to enjoy the glorious inheritance gained for him by the Savior’s blood.”

In memory of John Lang, his wife, Catherine Lang, published a compilation of his sermons, supported by contributions from church members and the wider community. In the forward she wrote:

Before the reader gets too far along in the book, he will discover two things, we are certain. First, that the book title, *In Christ Jesus, dear friends*, is the salutation Pastor Lang usually used before each sermon. Second, that the theme of each sermon is that we are all sinners and the only way of Salvation is through the redemption purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ with His suffering and death, the shedding of His blood, on Calvary, and His glorious resurrection. Pastor Lang often said that the students were given a rule in the seminary—which he sometimes felt was more than man made—that a

94. Carlton J. Sutorius, letter to John O. Lang, February 11, 1971, St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

sermon should be so constructed, that if a person heard only one sermon and died the same night, he would have heard the way of Salvation.⁹⁵

It is therefore entirely appropriate that Pastor Lang opened every sermon with the name that constituted the core of his message and ministry: Jesus Christ. Catherine Lang notes two discoveries the reader will make when working through this collection of sermons, yet a third quickly becomes evident. One will be hard-pressed to find a single sermon that does not draw upon the rich theology of hymnody. This pattern becomes unmistakable when one notices how often his sermons introduced or concluded a point through the familiar language of the hymns: “The poet described it when he wrote ...” “If I may borrow from the words of your hymns ...” “We must learn to sing with the hymn writer ...” “What a burden is lifted when in faith we are able to say ...” “May the cross of Christ loom up before you as your only hope, as you cry in those familiar words ...”⁹⁶ In Catherine’s compilation, each sermon bears witness to Pastor Lang’s consistent engagement with the hymnal, a common companion to his preaching.

Because Lang taught hymnology at Capital University, the study and use of Christian song occupied a prominent place in his ministry. Beyond his frequent incorporation of hymn texts in sermons, the members of St. Paul’s later gathered Lang’s hymn-related materials into *A Collection of Stories of Hymns* (2005). This resource contains five sections:

1. The Gospels in Sacred Song: A series of articles appearing in the “Lutheran Standard” publication from December 1937 through November 1938. These articles tell the story of the Christian church year in song.
2. Stories of Hymns: Series of articles appearing in the Columbus Citizen Newspaper from July 1940 through May 1941.
3. Stories of Hymns Top 10 Favorite Hymns: A Series of 10 Articles appearing in the “Lutheran Standard’s” 1948 Hymn Poll.

95. Lang, *In Christ Jesus*, iv.

96. Lang, *In Christ Jesus*, 49, 65, 237, 252, 276.

4. “Minister Uses Hymns to Tell the Story of Christ’s Last Days:” [A] “Columbus Dispatch” newspaper article February 26, 1955.
5. Hymns: An explanation of how hymns are written and used in worship. Study sheet used in catechism classes 1960s.⁹⁷

This work served as a valuable resource for the devotional life of the congregation, helping readers recognize that the hymns they sang arose from experiences and struggles not unlike their own.

Lang produced other notable resources for his congregation and the wider church. For St. Paul’s 150th anniversary in 1971, he collaborated with several members to produce *The Story of St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church: From the Beginning to the Sesquicentennial*. In recounting the congregation’s history, Lang highlighted a recurring theme he regarded as essential to its identity: the development of “the growing Lutheran conscience.”⁹⁸

The pastor was committed to “the holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God, and the only rule and norm of faith and life,” and was also committed to the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord, as “the pure and unadulterated explanation and exposition of the divine Word.” The constitution of 1880 required the pastor to preach and teach “according to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.”⁹⁹

The centrality of God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions has long been a defining feature of St. Paul’s history. Despite the congregation’s ongoing financial challenges, Lang emphasized its true wealth: a confessional Lutheran church faithfully proclaiming the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

97. John O. Lang, *A Collection of Stories of Hymns Written by Rev. John O. Lang* (compiled materials, January 2005), St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

98. *The Story of St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church from the Beginning to the Sesquicentennial, 1821–1971*, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church Archives (Columbus, OH).

99. *Story of St. Paul’s, 1821–1971*, 7.

Another resource from Lang preserved by St. Paul's is the concise, one-page document *A Short Summary of Lutheran Doctrine*. In it, he presents seventeen points, each supported by Scripture, to clearly articulate core Lutheran beliefs. Of particular relevance during the congregation's separation from the ALC is point twelve:

Though we believe that there are true children of God in all church groups which teach enough of the truth of God to bring men to a knowledge of sin and faith in the Savior Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16), nevertheless, we ought to unite with that group which teaches the Word of God in its purest form. (Matt. 28:30, John 8:31.) If we are convinced that the Lutheran Church teaches the Word of God in its purest form and administers the Sacraments according to Christ's command. We ought to unite with and remain true to the Lutheran Church.¹⁰⁰

This passage provides yet another example of Lang's leadership in emphasizing the importance of confessional fidelity. He acknowledges that true Christians exist in other church bodies and that only God can know the heart of an individual, yet he underscores the necessity of adhering as faithfully as possible to God's Word. In this context, the Lutheran Confessions serve as a historically tested and reliable standard for guiding believers in the faithful interpretation and practice of Scripture.

To teach the origins of the Lutheran Confessions, Lang prepared *A Syllabus for History of the Reformation*, a resource intended to highlight the significance of the Reformation and address an essential question, "Why are we Lutheran?" Lang wrote in the forward:

The roots of the present are imbedded in the soil of the past, and there is no more effective way of learning to appreciate the Lutheran Church of today than by reviewing the Lutheran Church of four hundred years ago. ... If this syllabus will serve in some measure to lead our church workers to a deeper appreciation of their Lutheran Church

100. John O. Lang, *A Short Summary of Lutheran Doctrine* (Columbus, OH: St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church).

and that for which she stands and also to a deeper consciousness of and fidelity to the Lutheran faith, the efforts of the author will not have been in vain.¹⁰¹

In the final lesson, Lang offers a question for class discussion: “The Formula of Concord was the last official statement of Lutheran faith to be adopted. Can you name the other ones? All these together constitute the Book of Concord.” Lang saw an importance in teaching his congregation about the Lutheran Confessions. It was not simply something that pastors needed to know, but the people in the pews too.

The confessions ... are the official creeds or confessions of the Lutheran Church today to which Lutheran ministers and every Lutheran congregation subscribe. May we sing:

Faith of our fathers, handed down
From Augsburg's long remembered day;
Of all our symbols thou the crown,
A creed that ne'er shall pass away;
Faith of our fathers, Lutheran faith,
We will be true to thee till death.¹⁰²¹⁰³

Finally, the only resource by Rev. Lang held in the library of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*. In this work, Lang provides historical context for the rise and decline of confessional Lutheranism in the Ohio Synod. Part of his account serves both as a cautionary reminder to the Wisconsin Synod against the encroachment of liberalism and as an encouragement not to neglect Ohio as a ripe mission field.

Lutheranism in Ohio was to a great extent the Joint Synod of Ohio, but O to what depths is has fallen! It all should serve as a warning to Wisconsin not to go and do likewise, but rather pray God that in His mercy he would keep Wisconsin steadfast in His Word during these turbulent days of Lutheranism in America.¹⁰⁴

101. John O. Lang, *A Syllabus for History of the Reformation*, unpublished manuscript, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Archives, Columbus, OH.

102. Lang, *Syllabus for History of the Reformation*.

103. It would not be a Lang resource if it did not include a Lutheran hymn.

104. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 9.

WELS should have the opportunity of a lifetime in Ohio if they only make use of it wisely. So many thousands want what Wisconsin has. Ohio ... has millions of unchurched people, and all too many religious groups are offering them only the social gospel which can never save. We need to reach out into the masses of the unsaved, and though we shall not begin to win them all, we shall win some since the Gospel is never preached in vain. Lutheranism in Ohio does have a future, and much of that future could rest, to a great extent, with the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁰⁵

Lang's legacy and lasting influence rest in his unwavering commitment to the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Through his writings, historical work, doctrinal summaries, and pastoral leadership, he offered a confessional example to his congregation during times of uncertainty and change. These preserved resources continue to bear witness to the lasting impact of a faithful shepherd who consistently pointed his people to Christ and His cross.

105. Lang, *A Short History of the Lutheran Church in Ohio*, 15.

CONCLUSION

Rev. John O. Lang was a giant in his own right. His distinction as an Ohio Synod giant did not rest on an extensive list of publications or service as president on a university or synodical level, but on his faithful ministry at the congregational level. Remarkably early, Lang discerned the liberalizing tendencies within the American Lutheran Church, guiding St. Paul's to take a stand for confessional faithfulness. Through his commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and Scripture, he educated and led the congregation to understand the theological stakes and ultimately to vote to withdraw. St. Paul's remains a confessional Lutheran congregation today, and, since joining the synod in 2007, it stands as the oldest congregation in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The life and legacy of Rev. John O. Lang serves as an example for WELS pastors and congregations. His ministry demonstrates that holding to the Lutheran Confessions and the inerrancy of Scripture they teach, is useful for all Christians interested in sound doctrine. For pastors, Lang's determination to ensure members understood their Lutheran beliefs is inspiring. Sermons, Bible classes, and weekly newsletters serve as opportunities to communicate the importance of what it means to be Lutheran.

The "new theology" Lang battled in his ministry was not the last. Lutherans do well when they adhere to the Book of Concord, which holds at its center the Church's one foundation: Jesus Christ, her Lord.

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
She is his new creation by water and the Word.
From heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy bride;

With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord, to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end.
Tho' there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail,
Against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail.

Tho' with a scornful wonder the world sees her oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.¹⁰⁶

106. Samuel J. Stone, "The Church's One Foundation," in *Christian Worship: Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021), 855.

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