

THE CONGREGATION WITHOUT A SYNOD--IMMANUEL, MANITOWOC, *WI.*

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The Lord has written nearly fifty-seven chapters in the Immanuel story at this writing. An easy fifty-seven years it wasn't. Immanuel was a maverick among churches from its inception in 1927, an ominous date in our Synod's history--the year the lid blew off the Protestant Controversy. The fledgling congregation was destined to become embroiled in this Controversy from day one, largely due to the tender conscience of its first pastor Theophil F. Uetzmann.

The past decade or so has seen much written about this troubled time in our Synod's history, so this paper will not attempt to rehash the general mind-set or events of the times. Rather it will spotlight one lone congregation, a fledgling one at that, which got caught up in the whirlwind of controversy, but yet managed to right itself and stand erect and alone until the winds of war blew over.

As was mentioned Immanuel was destined to wage this war while it was still in the womb. Her history is inevitably and inextricably bound up with her first pastor, a unique, conscientious, and talented man. Immanuel was still in the womb of her mother First German, even as Theophil Uetzmann was still in the warm confines of the Wauwatosa Seminary. Their emergence was nearly simultaneous, as Uetzmann was called as Assistant Pastor at First German on May 4, 1924 with the idea that he would spearhead the move for a new church on the northside of Manitowoc and eventually become its pastor.

The dormant seed of the Controversy had already been sown in Uetzmann as he sat at the feet of Professor G. Ruediger, who deplored the handling of the thievery case at Northwestern College in Watertown and made his views well-known to his students. As the events of the next few years unfolded Uetzmann took more than a casual interest in the developments as they broke.

Meanwhile the beginnings of a northside church were being made. For seventy years the German Lutherans of the city of Manitowoc and the surrounding area had been served by the pastors of First German Evangelical Lutheran Church. That church had been established as a separate congregation in 1855 after serving four years as a mission preaching station of the German Lutheran Congregation in Newtonburg.

Through those years, the congregation became a refuge for the many German immigrants, who made their home in the New World in the Manitowoc area. As the city grew the pastoral responsibilities became burdensome for Pastor Karl Machmiller, who served the First German Congregation for 37 years beginning 1891. One factor, which played largely into the founding of Immanuel, was that with few exceptions the children of northside members were denied the advantage of a Christian Day School training. Another thought that came into play was the fact that mission work could be increased should there be a northside church.

In 1923 (December 2, 1923), the congregation of First German decided to correct these shortcomings by sponsoring a northside church home, choosing to call an assistant pastor "who was to work primarily on the northside with the purpose in mind of organizing a daughter congregation."¹ Ironically it was at the instigation of the august August Pieper (who later was at loggerheads with Uetzmann) that candidate T.F. Uetzmann was called on May 4, 1924 and ordained and installed as assistant pastor on July 13, 1924.

That set the wheels in motion and things began to happen rapid-fire in the formation of the new congregation. Land was purchased, fund drives were initiated in 1925 and 1926, and on April 28, 1926 forty-nine men adopted a constitution, signed it, and selected the name Immanuel for the new congregation.

They wasted no time in drawing up plans and June 4, 1926 the congregation voted to build according to a plan sketched by Hugo Haeuser, the architect. In a meeting on September 3, 1926 the new congregation decided to build and awarded

the general contract for construction to the Schuette Construction Company for a total cost of \$85,383.36. On September 9, 1926 ground was broken, with Pastor Machmiller turning the first shovel. Five weeks later, on October 17, 1926 the cornerstone was laid.

Throughout the building program, while a constitution had been approved and signed, and officers selected to serve as a building committee, the group continued to be members of First German. Upon their request on March 6, 1927 one hundred forty-two families were given a peaceful release from First German to join the newly-founded congregation on the northside. Immanuel congregation was in existence as a separate entity as of that date. All church records for pastoral acts began as of that date.

On the following Sunday, the newly-independent congregation met and issued a Call to Reverend Theophil F. Uetzmann to serve as its pastor. July 10 of that year saw Uetzmann installed on the same day the new church was dedicated.

As a daughter congregation, Immanuel did not face some of the problems of many new congregations. On Dedication Sunday the church numbered 453 souls, 327 communicants, and represented 158 families--the size of many congregations only after several decades have passed. As the congregation became established, an average of twenty families joined the new church in each of the first five years.

In those early years services were conducted in both the English and German languages. The earliest records indicate that the German communion services had consistently more communicant guests than the English services. However, very shortly afterward, with the growth of the congregation including more younger families, the English service soon became predominant. By 1932, attendance at the English services was about three times as large as the German services. Even though the attendance continued to dwindle, German services were scheduled until 1952, when the need for two English services weekly forced a decision to reduce the German schedule. However all the way up until Pastor Uetzmann's retirement

in 1967 German services were held sporadically.

The congregation nearly doubled in its first ten years of existence, increasing from 453 souls to 808 and 327 communicants to 607 in 1937. However, while the congregation was growing, Pastor Uetzmann was growing too--growing wary of the Synod. The congregation was growing, but was really going nowhere as far as Synodical affiliation goes. The Controversy that was raging caused their status to stagnate, since Pastor Uetzmann's conscience bound him to defend his brothers, whom he felt were unjustly blackballed and suspended.

Uetzmann officially threw himself into the fray with the dismissal of his revered and admired Professor G. Ruediger on January 31, 1927, when he composed this letter to the Seminary Board:

Liebe Brueder,

Wir bitten Sie instaendigst, Ihr Handeln in der Sache Professor Ruedigers, bzw. seine Absetzung, ruckgaenzig zu machen, um des Friedens in der Synode willen.

Es ist uns nich erklaerlich, dasz von einer Erscheutterung des Vertrauens zu ihm in der Synode als Absetzungsgrund geredet werden kann, ohne dasz eine allgemeine Umfrage veranstaltet waere.

Achtungsvoll,
Theophil F. Uetzmann²

In so doing he tipped his hand and if nothing else at this point cleared his own conscience, while not yet going so far as throwing in his lot with those who had their necks on the chopping block, something for which he castigated himself later on. His associate Pastor K. Machmiller saw his junior partner in a different light when Uetzmann ventured his honest opinion on the 'Gutachten,' which followed on the heels of the Beitz paper.

However at this point in time he still for the most part lacked the courage of his convictions, which were still being formulated. While he was inclined to sympathize with those on the outs with the "Beamten," he wasn't yet ready to take his stand with them. However, as time went on his feathers became more and more ruffled as he saw "Synod officials violate precious justice and righteousness in order to get what they wanted"³ in his own words. More and more questions were

being raised in his mind as the numbers of those "ousted" continued to mount.

His personal pot came to a boil after the 1929 Kyrieleison Synod when he penned a stiff 'Protest Against a Synodical Action,' but squelched it after much mental hemming and hawing. Again he took pen in hand and wrote a scathing protest against the action taken to sideline Professor J.P. Koehler, going so far as to write: "The Synod has blood on its hands."⁴ Once again this protest never saw the light of day.

In a manner of speaking his protest finally came out of the closet at the Northern Wisconsin District meeting at Algoma in June of 1930. It was there that he came out foursquare behind the suspended Paul Hensel, concluding a lengthy protest letter with the words: "I can no longer play the part of a hypocrite without jeopardizing my spiritual life. Therefore I must, and will henceforth treat Hensel as my brother."⁵ Surely Pastor Uetzmann was not one to go off half-cocked. By this time he was fully convinced that something was rotten in the state of Denmark or Wauwatosa as the case may be, and his conscience forbade him to sit meekly and weakly by and watch his brothers seemingly to him get railroaded out by some high-handed political moves.

In 1930 Pastor Uetzmann wrote what amounted to be a beautiful interpretation of the Beitz paper, applying light to gray areas and evangelically putting the best construction on Beitz's ambiguous and unclear statements. Upon reading Uetzmann's "Position in Regard to the Disputed Points in Beitz's Paper," Pastor L. Koeninger remarked: "The way you interpret Beitz I can agree with you."⁶

He thought he had found a staunch ally in Pastor P. Kionka, who eloquently argued that the suspensions had no firm footing before the Peace Committee in 1931. However, as his dramatic appeal drew to a close he dropped a bombshell on Uetzmann's rising hopes when he declared: "We respect the suspensions not because they are right, but because the Protestants have separated themselves with the Elroy Declaration."⁷

Kionka thus neatly bridged the widening gulf between the pro-suspensionists and the anti-suspensionists, among whose ranks were numbered the majority of the members of the Manitowoc Conference, which took the lead in trying to restore peace to the Synod. Later on in 1937 Kionka would say: "We recognize the suspensions for the sake of peace."⁸

1932 rolled around and Uetzmann launched two more protests on behalf of Paul Hensel and Professor J.P. Koehler. His conscience was demanding some sort of action. He responded by claiming a misuse of the Ministry of the Keys in the Hensel case. His position was starting to crystalize as his inner struggle began to seek an outlet in carefully-worded protests.

From the vantagepoint of history it is easy to see that somewhere something had to give. A tender conscience can take only so many pricks before it cries out. Uetzmann finally had had enough and forced a showdown at the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference in 1934. Before that assembly he read, "An Explanation And Admonition To The Manitowoc Pastoral Conference Assembled at Kiel, Wisconsin on August 28, 1934." In it he defended his stand behind Paul Hensel and explained his rejection of the Hensel Case Committee's report. Some of his reasons for his veto follow:

- 1) I voted 'No' because I wish to get to heaven.⁹
(He could not sin against his conscience)
- 2) I voted 'No' because I am thereby repeating and confirming my stand against the sinful position and action of General Synod in its Districts in the suspension cases of past years.¹⁰
- 3) I voted 'No' because I need Hensel as my brother.¹¹

His closing words testify to the type of man Uetzmann was. Whether he was right or wrong, there is no question that the man was sincere: "Uprightness and honesty demands that I live what I believe and confess. Hence Hensel is my brother with whom I shall fraternize and commune. I expect you to be frank with me in telling me whether you consider me your brother, who this evening may receive the Lord's Supper with you."¹²

The gauntlet had been thrown down and all present but one picked it up and

refused to commune with Uetzmann "under present conditions." The break had been made. He had passed the point of no return. He now brought conviction and action into harmony. Now he felt no compunctions about preaching for Protestant pastors, pinch-hitting for Hensel at Liberty for Mission Festival that same year. May of 1935 saw him kneel at the same altar with J.P. Koehler at a Protestant conference.

Uetzmann took this controversial act before the Manitowoc Conference in August, 1935 and, in effect, challenged them to do something about it, at the same time also making the statement that the method which Synod was pursuing in handling the Controversy smacked of the way in which the Pharisees of Christ's age acted, which statement caused no small amount of consternation. The Conference responded by drawing the battle lines with what has become known as the Haven Resolutions. These stated:

- 1)The Protestant Conference is a complete body, a separate entity from Synod as any other body is, be it Missouri, Ohio, or any other body.
- 2)We are not fellowshiping with the Protestant Conference (not communing, not fraternizing in any way.)¹³

Two years later in an open letter to the members of Immanuel, Uetzmann took issue with those Haven Resolutions, refuting each one in turn:

Anyone who does not know the history of the Controversy can only receive the impression that two or three dozen of pastors came to a decision, that they are going to create a new Synod, such as Missouri and Ohio. But the facts presented before (in the letter) prove that the Synod put these men out, and officially declared that they, on account of false doctrine and slander, could no longer be members of the Wisconsin Synod. The men that are out have no organization except a treasurer, and the fact that they must meet by themselves for mutual edification and comfort and must publish their own paper in order to defend their position was forced upon them by suspensions of the Synod. If these suspensions are not correct according to God's Word, then the ousted pastors are still members of the Wisconsin Synod before God and must be treated as such by every Christian. I am bound by conscience to treat these ousted men as my brethren and members of the Wisconsin Synod, and I denounce the Haven Resolutions, which say that the Protestant Conference is an entity by itself, as a plain and dangerous lie.¹⁴

He summarily dismissed the second resolution as well:

The second point in the Haven Resolution declares that the Wisconsin Synod does not fellowship with the Protestants. As a statement of fact that is correct. But why? Can we answer it before God if we do not fellowship with those who have been wronged? Does not true Christianity and love for justice and truth demand that fellowship is upheld with a

person, who in any way has been wronged by officials or districts? Yes, and a thousand times yes. To leave a brother in the lurch when he is in trouble and has been wronged is to be a coward, a man-servant, a timeserver. To deny the brotherhood with one just in order to stay out of trouble or to keep a job, is a very low standard of Christianity, if it is Christianity at all. Therefore I denounce the Haven Resolutions as being a lie and injurious to all true Christianity.¹⁵

Uetzmann followed up on his Pharisee comparison with a paper at the 1936 early spring meeting of the Manitowoc Conference entitled:

"Take Heed And Beware Of The Leaven Of The Pharisees And Sadducees."
Mt.16:6

"Making The Word Of God Of None Effect Through Your Tradition, Which Ye Have Delivered; And Many Such Like Things Do Ye."
Mk.7:13

Uetzmann's basic premise in his paper was: "There is no false doctrine in the Beitz paper and since there is no false doctrine in the Beitz paper the suspensions of the West Wisconsin District should not be supported."¹⁶

It seems as though Pastor Uetzmann effectively shielded his congregation from the winds of war through the early years of the Controversy. He seemingly steered it through troubled waters, keeping it from getting bogged down in the unfavorable currents which were churning within himself. The congregation steadily grew to twice its size in those first ten years of its existence. The only real tangible effect the Controversy had on the congregation up until March of 1936 was the congregation's continuing independence, not joining the Synod from which it had sprung, yet still supporting it. Uetzmann graciously spared his members the spiritual conflict which he himself was waging. This is evidenced in his own words to the congregation in that open letter of March, 1937: "I have never told you the complete story, why I, in the interest of truth and righteousness, had to take this protesting position, because I did not wish to involve you in the trouble in which I have found myself."¹⁷

However it was inevitable that Immanuel would have to get involved sooner or later as the winds of war blew ever closer to the home front. In March of 1936 a committee of five members was appointed, whose duty it would be to attend the meeting of the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference at which Uetzmann's paper

would be considered, as well as to study the relationship of Uetzmann and the Wisconsin Synod. This committee met with Pastors Henry Koch, Kionka and Koeninger, and Schlueter in separate informational interviews. They even met with the Conference of Presidents. After hours and hours of deliberation and debate they submitted the following recommendations to the congregation in June of 1936:

- 1) That we continue our policy of sending mission monies to the Wisconsin Synod and to regard ourselves as in the same relation with that body as we have during the past 9 years.
- 2) That we as a congregation maintain the same cordial and devoted spirit toward our pastor Rev. Theo. Uetzmann that we have maintained during the past 9 years in our congregation.
- 3) That we avoid as much as possible further discussion of the chaotic affair in which Synod finds itself in our congregational meetings.
- 4) That we devote all energy as a congregation toward the work of reducing our church debt and toward the building of the Kingdom of God in our midst.¹⁸

In the face of subsequent events it soon became evident that Recommendation Three wouldn't hold much water. As much as they would have liked to carry on unaffected, deep down they themselves knew they were sailing into stormy seas. That is evidenced in their letter to the COP arranging a meeting with them:

It is our conviction that we today stand on the threshold of an uncertain future. Unless immediate peace can be restored within the ranks of the Wisconsin Synod we feel that the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran churches within our city and adjacent territory will have trying years ahead. We see a situation which can have only destructive consequences to souls, and since the Church has ever been most concerned with the salvation of souls, we trust that the prayer that we be spared the trial of discord and division within our ranks, will not remain unanswered.¹⁹

The Manitowoc Conference finally was desirous of ridding themselves of the cancer in their midst and on February 3, 1937 they passed the resolution: "We declare that we are separated from Pastor Uetzmann." In an explanatory letter to the congregation it was reported:

The reason for the resolution passed today lies in the fact that Pastor Uetzmann continues to fraternize with the Protestants who are separated from us, who, in spite of long dealings with them, have not shown a conciliatory attitude, which is borne out by statements of individuals, their actions and attitudes.

We know that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Thus after long deliberation and dealings with Pastor Uetzmann we finally found that he has separated himself from us, and declare this with a heavy heart.²⁰

So much for Recommendation Three. Immanuel was involved. Like it or not. The time had come for Uetzmann to educate his people about the Controversy, so on March 14, 1937 he wrote a seven page letter to his members outlining his position. He refuted the letter announcing his separation from the Synod point for point. His first point equated "separation" with suspension: "Pastor Koeninger has told your Church Council that the Conference has not suspended me. But common logic...demands that the action of the Manitowoc Conference must be the same and of identical import and value as that of the Western Wisconsin District, which declared the first separation of brotherhood...now it makes little difference whether the church now says: We excommunicate you, or we suspend you, or we are through with you, or you have separated yourself from us, or a separation exists..."²¹

He closed his letter to his flock with his reasons for following the course of action which he was taking, that being fellowshiping with those who are suspended by the Synod. Again they reflect a tender conscience, most sensitive to injustice:

- 1)The reasons given for suspension are not in keeping with God's Word and hence must fall.
- 2)As a result the suspensions are sinful and I cannot respect them because thereby I am respecting sin.
- 3)I today fellowship with the suspended men, because that is my most forceful way of protesting against sin.
- 4)I must live what I believe, otherwise I am a coward and harm my spiritual life
- 5)This strong form of protest, fellowshiping with those who are suspended, is furthermore an act of love. Love toward my own soul, for the act against conscience and convictions creates serious havoc in the soul. Love toward the Synod, trying the last means to convince it of its errors. Love toward those who were wronged.
- 6)I cannot break the brotherhood with such, who by faith in Christ are my brethren, for in denying them I would be denying Christ.
- 7)To be a Lutheran means to possess and defend liberty of conscience. The Manitowoc Conference denies me the privilege to believe and live what I know from the Bible to be correct. Such an action is nothing less than tyranny of conscience. Therefore the Lutheran principle of the Reformation is again at stake, and all those that love true Christianity and Lutheranism will fight for this precious gem: Liberty and freedom of conscience.²²

With this eloquent and emotional call to arms, Immanuel entered the fray with both fists flailing, initially "taking issue with the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference on the matter of the separation of Rev. Uetzmann from their group on the following points:

- 1) We take issue with the major premise on which the Haven Resolution is based, namely that the Protestant group is a separate entity.
- 2) We take issue with you on your statement that Rev. Uetzmann has separated himself from you. The Conference has declared the separation and must carry the responsibility.
- 3) We take issue with you on your stand toward the offending District whom you accused of unbrotherly conduct, yet have not shown by your action that you are sincere when you make accusations against them.
- 4) We take issue with you in the matter that your statement fails to show clear and unmistakable the fact that our pastor is no longer worthy of being our spiritual shepherd.
- 5) We take issue with you on the fact that your group should not have taken summary action while doubt still remained in the minds of some in your group.
- 6) We take issue with you concerning your right to separate yourself from Rev. Uetzmann, without having first taken up his paper in entirety, and submitting clear and unmistakable evidence of error.
- 7) We take issue with you when you attempt to demoralize and destroy our congregation on the basis of differences arising over opinions on a paper not fundamental to Christian faith.
- 8) Our church constitution contains three grounds for the dismissal of a pastor, namely: adherence to a false doctrine, willful neglect of duty, and persistence in leading an un-Christian life. There has not been included in our Constitution the demand that the pastor endorse every act of Synod (whether right or wrong) and that he sacrifice his conviction to please an official group.
- 9) We hold that it is the duty of a Congregation to be zealous in the work of building God's Kingdom. We hold that Rev. Uetzmann as our pastor has been as faithful and conscientious in his work as our pastor as any human can possibly be. He has inspired us through his preaching and teaching to become better Christians. He has guided the affairs of our Congregation along thoroughly Scriptural ways. He has given strength and comfort to the sick and troubled in spirit. He has been all that anyone (including your group) could expect of a faithful servant of the Word. We hold that these attributes are of eternal value, beside which all others fade into insignificance. Our congregation is hoping that the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference will reconsider the case of Rev. Uetzmann and that the summary action taken Feb. 3, 1937 be annulled.²³

Pastor Uetzmann was a man of unquestioned integrity, which perhaps helps to explain the implicit trust the majority of his members had in him, being ready and willing to follow him into self-imposed exile if need be.

Had there been more men, who thought along the mediating lines of Pastor

H. Koch, the Controversy may have died a slow death rather than raging on like an uncontrolled prairie fire. He took up Immanuel's appeal, conceding some points, refuting others, and finally concluding:

My firm conviction is that the suspension as it stands cannot be upheld, but should be retracted, because false teaching can not be upheld. The Protestants should then be invited and matters as to our institutions and accusations of our church be discussed in a brotherly way and thus come to a real peace. Both parties went too far and thereby have sinned...both parties regard each other as Christian. Both should in humility of heart turn to Him, who calls to all: Come unto me all that labor and are heavily laden, and then shake hands and forgive and work together. It is plain to me the church cannot go on this way before our Lord. It is also or should be self-evident that the way Faith-Life carries on its fight can not be tolerated without destroying and undermining all church discipline. ²⁴

The reply of the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference consisted of a history of the Controversy followed by an explanation of why they consider the Protestant Conference as separate from the Synod, pointing especially to the Elroy Declarations and Faith-Life's un-Christian attacks and practice of church discipline. They also explained their dealings with Pastor Uetzmann and then reaffirmed that a separation does exist between Pastor Uetzmann and the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference. ²⁵

Immanuel still wasn't satisfied, drafting yet another letter in August requesting that their case be taken to a higher court, stating the results of a June congregational meeting:

- 1) A motion was made, seconded, and carried that we inform the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference that sufficient Scriptural proof has not been found in their report to this congregation on June 29, concerning Reverend Uetzmann's suspension, on which we, as a congregation, can sever relationships with our pastor.
- 2) A motion was made, seconded, and carried that the church council (present and incoming) of this congregation be authorized to appeal the suspension of Reverend Uetzmann to the meeting of the North Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod in the summer of 1938, providing the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference do not annul the suspension in the meantime. ²⁵

The Pastoral Conference reaffirmed their separation with Uetzmann in their next meeting, but also authorized their appeal to the North Wisconsin District, which Immanuel promptly did in a November 12 letter to Rev. W. Pankow, President of North Wisconsin District. A committee was appointed by Pastor Arthur Gentz,

since Pankow felt some may consider him biased in the matter. Immanuel agreed to submit its case to the committee. Included in their appeal to the committee was a gallant, beautifully-worded, doctrinally-sound defense of its position. This writer was impressed with the deep theological insights and background of the God-fearing laymen, who prepared this heroic endorsement of their pastor's stand. With unflinching frankness they pointed out the inconsistencies among Synod officials in their words and actions. Admittedly they viewed events very much through the same eyes through which their pastor viewed them, yet because of their unique position as laymen it seems to this writer that they short-circuited some of the technical theological jargon and mincing of words and peripheral piffal and got to the very heart of the matter. Possibly because of their lack of a finer theological training they had the advantage of overlooking minor offending points, through which the theologians were wading and in which they were getting bogged down, and plunging right into the essence of the Controversy. Space does not permit a reproduction of the defense here, but it can be found in the September, 1943 issue of Faith-Life. An example of their bold stand behind their pastor is the conclusion to their appeal:

And now, in conclusion, we mention again for purpose of emphasis, Our ~~pastor~~^{Pastor} is NOT accused either of preaching false doctrine or supporting false doctrine. Our pastor still preaches the WORD in a manner thoroughly acceptable to anyone in the Wisconsin Synod. WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT? If you find something MORE IMPORTANT and you wish to say to us, "We can't use him to assist in the work of promoting God's kingdom," that is your affair and your responsibility. We are ready to carry on zealously in this great work of building God's kingdom in Manitowoc and in the world at large, irrespective of any action that you may take. If you agree that the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference has acted wisely and properly then we are willing to take our comfort in the words written by Luther when he said:

The Word they still shall let remain
And not a thank have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife;
Let these all be gone,
They yet have nothing won; 26
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

This dramatic, eloquent appeal seemingly fell on deaf ears as the North Wisconsin District followed an even harder line than the more conciliatory Manitowoc Conference, who even received a reprimand from the District for their wishy-washy (so they felt) stand in regards to the Protestants. These were the committee's findings, which they presented to the North Wisconsin District Convention of 1938:

- 1) That the Protestants have sinned against charity and brotherliness by their factionalism from the very beginning.
- 2) That they, and they alone, have brought on the whole controversy by their sinful defense of the erring girls in the Fort Atkinson case and by their aimless efforts to embarrass the Synod by their protests.
- 3) That they have aggravated their sin by supporting unreservedly the Beitz paper, even though they knew it was full of errors.
- 4) That they have made further dealing with them impossible through their high-handed and conclusive "Elroy Declaration."
- 5) That they are still waging bitter war against the Synod with slander, vituperation, and lies.
- 6) That they have shown absolutely no inclination to disavow any of their sinful acts.
- 7) That any one supporting them or practicing fellowship with them identifies himself with them in every respect, unless he openly disavows their sins.

On the basis of the foregoing conclusions we hold:

- 1) That the original West Wisconsin suspensions were justified and that the suspended ones together with all those who separated themselves from the Synod by fraternizing with them form a separate entity.
- 2) That since Pastor Theo. Uetzmann persists in fellowshiping with the above group, he has in fact severed the bonds of fellowship with the Synod.

On the basis of our dealings with Pastor Theo. Uetzmann through a sub-committee and from his writings, we hold that he not only identifies himself with the Protestants by his acts, but also is one with them in spirit.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT THE DISTRICT TAKE FORMAL CONGIZANCE OF PASTOR THEOPHIL UETZMANN'S SEPARATION FROM THE SYNOD.²⁷

The District adopted the recommendation of the Committee of Twelve to take formal action in this affair. In the ensuing letter to the congregation was included these words:

To their recommendation our Committee wishes to add the following explanation: Since we have been unable to convince Pastor Uetzmann of his sin and feel that further efforts in this direction are hopeless, we hold that this recommendation must be understood, not according to Mt. 18:17b: "But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican," but in the sense of Rom.16:17: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them."²⁸

Immanuel got in the last word, replying to the Report of the Committee of Twelve at a meeting of the North Wisconsin District in Oshkosh on June 23, 1938. Again it was a fiercely loyal plea that was made on behalf of what they felt was right, namely their pastor's position. The final paragraph characterizes the spirit of their final appeal:

We plead with you today to stop this sin of suspending pastors who dare to live what they believe, pastors who are one with us in faith, pastors whose work in the congregations is such that it commands the respect and draws the commendation of even an adversary. We plead with you today to resolve that this controversy which has had dire consequences to congregations and souls shall cease to be, that these wrongs shall be righted. Let us resolve today that peace shall return to the ranks of the Christians in the Wisconsin Synod, so that all can with renewed zeal and enthusiasm join hands in the work of giving to a benighted world that Gospel which alone can save souls from an eternity of torment and pain. Let us resolve today that we shall again bend every effort toward the work for which Christ instituted His church upon earth, rather than spending our time and energy in a discussion of the question, "Who is my brother?"²⁹

So Uetzmann was out. No ifs, ands, or buts. That left the status of the congregation pretty much up in the air. They weren't quite sure where they stood, so they sent out some feelers to several different Synods. Most notably was the reply of the Wisconsin Synod. They asked whether they could continue status quo--if they could remain affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod even if the congregation retained Uetzmann as its pastor. This was the reply they received from President Pankow:

Their (Conference Visitors and Vice-Presidents) answer to the question is "No." The representatives at this meeting adopted the following reasons for saying "no" to that question:

- 1) Since it has been established that Pastor Theophil Uetzmann has sinfully separated himself from the Synod, it behooves the congregation to abide by the direction found in Rom 16:17.
- 2) Since "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) is the constituting element of the Synod, and since Pastor Uetzmann has sinfully separated himself from the Synod, and has plainly stated that he is not in spirit with the Synod, to affiliate under such conditions would destroy this unity.
- 3) Since joining a Synod is an act of confession, a congregation cannot retain a pastor who has affiliated himself with a body not fellowshiping with the Synod without repudiating that act of confession.
- 4) Since the congregations in the Synod have also united themselves into one body for the purpose of watching over doctrine and practice of its constituents, and since Pastor Uetzmann is not a member of Synod, it is

impossible to watch over him who is the shepherd of the congregation, and we are thereby defeating the very purpose for which we are united in a body.³⁰

In response to Pankow's letter, Immanuel on its part cut the cord, which had rather loosely bound it to Synod. They made it official in a letter to North Wisconsin District on December 18, 1938:

On September 12, 1938 members of Immanuel's Congregation assembled at a quarterly meeting unanimously passed the following resolution: "That this congregation sever all bonds and connections with the Wisconsin Synod which it had heretofore, and to inform the North Wisconsin District accordingly, giving our reasons for such action."

Immanuel's congregation at Manitowoc takes the action referred to in the above resolution on the basis of the following:

- 1) It is a final protest on the part of the congregation against the misuse and misapplication of Holy Scriptures by the North Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod in the case of the district versus its pastor, the Rev. T.F. Uetzmann.
- 2) It is a final protest of the congregation against the manner in which the district declared that a separation existed between it and Pastor T.F. Uetzmann.³¹

Strangely enough in their search for a new Synod, Immanuel even made inquiry of the ALC in their search for Synodical affiliation. They asked Rev. K.A. Hoessel, the President of the ALC, the following questions:

- 1) What steps are necessary should this congregation decide and desire to become a member church of the American Church body?
- 2) What conditions must this congregation fulfill?
- 3) How does the American Church body differ from the Wisconsin or Missouri Synod bodies?³²

Hoessel's response is interesting to say the least. In effect he welcomed Immanuel into fellowship with open arms, saying concerning the Protestants: "We do not expect you to sever all connections with them. We do not even object to have them preach for you or you for them...You may even give the Protestants financial support."³³

A similar feeler went out to John Behnken, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, who neatly deflected their advance, writing: "President Brenner has directed your attention to the avenue of an appeal. Undoubtedly, that is the step which you should take if you're con-

vinced that the action of the North Wisconsin District is not right and proper."³⁴

A third feeler had gone out to the English District of the Missouri Synod, which seemed to be the most promising, and on Jan. 7, 1939 Immanuel made a formal application for membership among their numbers. However in a Jan. 20 letter Rev. W.E. Pankow admonished them for their Synod-shopping:

We had hoped for an invitation from the congregation to present our controversy with Pastor Uetzmann before the whole congregation...You are leaving our spiritual house by one door and now you desire to enter into communion with us through the Missouri Synod, which is of the same spiritual family...It is the Lord's will that a reconciliation take place between us first before we can properly commune together again at the same altar.³⁵

It almost came down to Immanuel's being just one step from signing on the dotted line, as it were, when the Wisconsin Synod wheeled in the big guns to shoot down this odd coupling. The English District informed Immanuel of the Wisconsin Synod's intervention in a Feb. 13, 1939 letter:

President Brenner of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin has sent a protest against our making any visit or investigation. This protest will, first of all, have to be considered by President J.W. Behnken, D.D., of the Missouri Synod and our own English District officials.³⁶

In September of that year 1939 it was official that the Wisconsin Synod had effectively put the kibosh on any affiliation with the English District of the Missouri Synod. Pastor R. Jesse explained it this way to Immanuel:

This protest (Brenner's) is based on an inter-synodical agreement binding the Synods to observe the rules agreed upon and accepted by them.

One of the provisions of agreement is that in a case of discipline... the congregation or Synod to which such a party applies for membership has no right to accept the party until the matter has been settled with the party's former brethren, and must refer the party back to the party's former brethren for such settlement. Under the above agreement we cannot act upon your application unless or until a peaceful dismissal is granted you by the honorable Wisconsin Synod.³⁷

Immanuel still wasn't about to rest or give up. Only a week after their rejection by the English District of the Missouri Synod they made overtures once again to the Wisconsin Synod. One thing led to another and finally invitations were sent out as directed by this March 10, 1940 congregational

resolution and amendments:

To have a committee of twelve from the North-Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod and a committee of twelve from the Protestant group come into our congregation.

- 1) To have an even number--at least six and more, if possible,--from each side represented.
- 2) To begin the discussion of this meeting with the congregation's final protest made against the North-Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod.³⁸

Well the Synod received the invitation they had hoped for, however it was really a day late and a dollar short, because it was more than a year after the fact and under less than ideal circumstances. Pankow expressed his concern with the set-up of the proposed meeting, recognizing the possibility that such a format could potentially be like throwing gasoline on fire because of the presence of the Protestants:

We believe that you should set up a definite mode of procedure in conducting this meeting. If you permit debate between the Protestants and the representatives of the District, it will defeat the purpose of the meeting. Debate is not permitted at public meetings for good and sound reasons. As Christians we have the greater reason to avoid such disturbance through the admonition of Scripture: "Let all things be done decently and in order." You want to learn the truth, the facts, and such knowledge is not gained by heated argument.³⁹

The other side was also less than happy with the invitation as well, but for different reasons. Pastor M.A. Zimmermann made a passionate appeal that the Synod be kept out and that no further dealings be made with them by Immanuel:

Just what do you intend and can you hope to accomplish by meeting with the representatives of a body which has ousted and branded your pastor and whom you on the basis of your pastor's unjust suspension have accused, before God and man, of misusing and misapplying the Holy Scriptures...

...Is this suspension a work of the Holy Spirit, or a work of Satan? That's the question, and none other, which is before you, and you need no outsiders to answer it. By severing bonds with the Synod you have declared that suspension to be Satan's lie. Now for your soul's salvation, do not vitiate your testimony by re-opening your dealing with men, who refuse to repent in their misuse of God's holy name!

Brethren, you are on trial, your faith, your spiritual insight, your inward character, whether or not you are willing to stand by the Truth, suffer for the Truth, and if necessary even go under with the Truth, even as your Savior did, when the Jewish Church excommunicated Him and nailed Him to the cross. I beseech you, reconsider your proposed meeting, and stand fast in your original protest, for we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against

spiritual wickedness in high places.⁴⁰

May 15th of 1940, the appointed time of the meeting came and went with no appreciable change of status for Immanuel, except for a renewed resolve to go it alone until the winds of war subsided and the troubled waters calmed on the Synodical scene.

However in avoiding the troubled waters of Synod, Immanuel sailed into some turbulence on the home front, where an ill wind was blowing among a faction of members, who wanted to sink or swim with the ship of Synod, and another faction who became disenchanted with the quibbling and dealings of both the Synod and the Protestants. Letters of resignation started to roll in by mid-1940. What follows are some excerpts from representative letters:

Owing to the fact that Immanuel's Ev. Luth. Congregation has decided to become part of the now existant group known as the Protestant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod, I hereby tender my resignation from the congregation and the various offices that I now hold...this action on my part is necessary because my conscience will not permit me to become affiliated with the afore-mentioned group.

As the Protestant cause is contrary to the faith I have been taught and believe in I am compelled to resign.

Christ forgave his enemies even on the cross, so if pastors can't forgive one another it is against our conscience to belong to either the Wisconsin or the Protestant Group.

We feel unable to receive communion from a protesting minister.

As one of the founders of this congregation, and continually active in promoting its welfare, it has naturally grieved me very much to see our congregation drawn into a controversy which apparently can not be solved. Factionalism has developed in our midst. Relatives and friends have broken with each other and the whole affair has become a disgrace to Christianity.⁴¹

While the great majority of the congregation continued to support their pastor, there could be no dispute that Immanuel was a house divided because of the Controversy. Many souls were bruised as consciences waged war on individuals, prompting some to turn away and some to turn off. As was mentioned two factions developed, which eventually split from the church: one group formed a new congre-

gation which received home mission status from the Wisconsin Synod and became Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church; the second group served as the nucleus for a congregation, which became affiliated with the Missouri Synod and became Redeemer Lutheran Church.

The majority of members, after much soul-searching, decided to ride the storm out and work from within to right the listing ship that was Immanuel. Squalls continued to rock the boat from time to time, but Immanuel plowed along becoming increasingly alone. Fifty-percent of the school's faculty was lost to the Controversy when Gertrude Gieschen tendered her resignation in 1938 stating: "It will be possible for me to continue only if the congregation decides to remain affiliated with the Synodical Conference."⁴² Immanuel's aloneness and independence was emphasized in her deteriorating relationship with her mother congregation First German. Trouble arose over First German's reluctance and refusal to transfer members to Immanuel and hesitancy to fellowship with them in other areas, which led Immanuel to accept members without the customary letter of transfer and then to lambast First German for its "tyrannical and papistic" practice, even accusing them of "interfering with the church's mission of saving souls," finally concluding that First German with its action has "broken the brotherhood with Immanuel, so that we are no longer bound by the law of Christian love to honor its letter of transfer."⁴³ Pastoral services to students and servicemen were more difficult to arrange as well, because of Immanuel's independent status.

For the thirty-year period from 1938-1967, the congregation functioned as an independent Lutheran congregation without the benefit of Synodical affiliations, while its pastor and teacher affiliated with the Protestant Conference. However, as the years went by Uetzmann became more and more disenchanted with the radical Protestants, rather choosing to follow a more moderate independence, avoiding the slanderous charges that characterized Faith-Life. One might be tempted to

call Pastor Uetzmann the quintessential Protestant, who chose to follow the dictates of his conscience, knowing full well the consequences his decision would have on his ministry. In conversations with his wife she attested that on more than one occasion they were prepared to "pack their bags" should the congregation withdraw its support. He couldn't live with the goings on in Synod with a clear conscience and so he protested in all sincerity, considering it an act of love to cause the Synod to do some pretty heavy thinking about its actions. However it soon became obvious that he didn't quite belong with the Protestants either, finding it difficult to condone the viscious barbs that proceeded from the pages of Faith-Life. So he steered a more or less independent course while continuing to commune with the Protestants and on occasion write for Faith-Life, which later would stab him in the back.

Some developments on the Synodical scene paved the way for Immanuel's and later Uetzmann's eventual return to Synodical fellowship. The Western Wisconsin District removed the suspensions of members of the subsequently formed Protestant Conference in 1962, and in 1966 this was found in the Proceedings of the Northern Wisconsin District:

WHEREAS, Pastor Theo. F. Uetzmann is no longer a member of the Protestant Conference and
WHEREAS, The conditions have changed so that the past can be forgotten, and
WHEREAS, We have reason to believe that both Pastor Uetzmann and Immanuel Congregation, Manitowoc, are in agreement with us in doctrine and practice.
THEREFORE, We urge the District through its officers to take the initiative by inviting both Pastor and Congregation to take steps to establish fellowship with our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.⁴⁴

Pastor Uetzmann was duly informed of the resolution with this letter:

We, the officers of the Northern Wisconsin District interpret the resolution... as removing all obstacles which stood in the way of reestablishing fellowship with Pastor Theo. F. Uetzmann and Immanuel Congregation, even the reference to Romans 16:17 in the resolution of the 1938 Oshkosh Convention of the Northern Wisconsin District.⁴⁵

After some deliberation Pastor Uetzmann still felt conscience-bound to reject the resolution and invitation to fellowship:

I could not otherwise but point out to my congregation the fact that none of the suspensions of the Northern Wisconsin District had been revoked,

but were still in effect...Not to respect a decision which the church felt constrained to adopt 28 years ago, supported by quoted Scriptures, would be dishonest, and to circumnavigate this travesty in history would be plain church politics. Therefore as long as there is no change of theology and spirit in the Northern Wisconsin District, I cannot come back into fellowship, as if I had run away from the fold and now were to be coaxed back. However, I am hoping and praying that the Lord will open a way for God-pleasing reconciliation.⁴⁶

However, having no means to perpetuate his independent position, he came to a crossroads in 1966 when he suffered an extended illness for the first time in his ministry. He knew he couldn't go on forever, so the time had come for a major policy decision--which direction to turn. As a daughter of First German, he felt obligated to return Immanuel to the organization that gave her birth and recommended that Immanuel follow the offer of being reconciled with the Wisconsin Synod, in order to solve the question of how to obtain future pastors and teachers. Faith-Life, true to form, uncharitably brandished the sword menacingly at Uetzmann:

The opportunity for re-absorption into the "church" external as represented by the synodical soviet seemed at that time to those men more tantalizing, if not more important, than salvation by grace alone...Immanuel and its original pastor, from the first, carried the cause of Faith-Life as the Philistine milch kine (I Sam 6:12) carried the Ark of the Covenant to Beth-shemesh--lowng for their abandoned calves as they went--but unlike those kine, when the hour of decision struck, they turned aside to right and left, and like rescued Israel, remembering the synodical fish, cucumbers, melons, leek, onions, and garlic, and despising the manna of Faith-Life (Numbers 11:5), they now find themselves once again in bondage to men and making obeisance to the golden calf of synod, thus worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25), all unaware of and indifferent to the reality that the price for such abandonment of our high calling is spiritual starvation, deterioration, ruin, and annihilation.⁴⁷

After his recovery, Pastor Uetzmann announced his intention to retire, with the effective date to be any time after the fortieth anniversary of the congregation. He preached his farewell sermon as pastor to the congregation on the morning of August 6, 1967. In preparation for that retirement, the congregation extended a Call to Pastor Glenn H. Unke, who had been serving Faith Lutheran Church and Immanuel Lutheran Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. After much deliberation and prayer Pastor Unke accepted this great challenge and on the evening of August 6, 1967 he was installed as the second pastor of Immanuel.

And so on one day, August 6, the transition was neatly made. The old order gave way to the new and a new era was ushered in at Immanuel. The next three years were transition years for the congregation. The new pastor faced the ultimate challenge of his career. In order to turn the ship around it would take time for it to slow down and grind to a halt before it could reverse directions. It was a time that called for much patience and diplomacy on the part of Pastor Unke as he applied salve to old wounds, bridged breeches, mended rifts, and slowly rebuilt and restored confidence in the Wisconsin Synod, which for so many years had been portrayed as the bully and the villain. His approach was to put the past behind them, drawing valuable lessons from it, but dispelling the shadows cast by it. It was a fine line that needed to be walked in those potentially explosive first three years, as the old order, bolstered by Pastor Uetzmann's continued presence in the congregation as a worshipper, bucked the necessary changes to right the listing ship. Some feathers were ruffled when Pastor Unke deemed it necessary to ease out the presence of Faith-Life in the congregation in keeping with his policy of breaking with the past. This move drew a letter of protest from Uetzmann, which was mailed to every member of the congregation, deploring the new course that Immanuel had embarked upon and encouraging the keeping of that divisive link with the past. Surprisingly nothing came of that letter except a beautifully worded letter to Pastor Uetzmann by one of the God-fearing laymen, who expressed his appreciation for the many years of faithful service of Pastor Uetzmann; but pointed out that now it was time to move on and help shoulder the burden of training pastors and teachers and to "engage more actively in mission work outside our immediate confines." He thoroughly endorsed the course upon which Immanuel had embarked and recognized that by the Divine Call, which they had issued to Pastor Unke, they had a new helmsman to pilot Immanuel's ship, which was sailing ever closer to reunion with the Wisconsin Synod.⁴⁸

That attitude was reflected by an overwhelming majority when it was brought to a vote in 1970. The congregation voted to restore fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and it, for the first time in its 43 year history, became an affiliated congregation in the Wisconsin Synod. The congregation without a Synod now participated in full fellowship with other congregations, pastors, and teachers of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Much educating remained to be done, but the biggest hurdle had been cleared--The congregation without a Synod now had one.

This paper has a happy postscript to it. Not only did the congregation without a Synod find a Synod, but the pastor who stood alone once again joined the brotherhood of Wisconsin Synod pastors. An early indication of Uetzmann's softening and eventual relenting was in 1977 when he and Pastor Unke, Immanuel's only shepherds for half a century, together participated in Immanuel's Golden Anniversary Service on July 10, 1977. He came full circle in 1982 when he presented himself to Pastor Unke and asked to become a communicant member at Immanuel, which privilege was officially granted him on May 20 of that year when the Church Council accepted his application for membership. Less than two years later on March 21, 1984 the Lord called His faithful servant home to his reward, where for this war-worn veteran the winds of war were finally stilled.

ENDNOTES

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3. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, Jan. 1943, p.3.
4. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, Feb. 1943, p.10.
5. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, March 1943, p.15.
6. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, April 1943, p.18.
7. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, April 1943, p.20.
8. Report of committee to Immanuel congregation, 1937, p.4.
9. Theophil Uetzmann, Faith-Life, June 1943, p.26.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p.27.
13. Ibid., p.27.
14. Theophil Uetzmann, letter to congregation, March 14, 1937.
15. Ibid.
16. Report of committee to congregation, June 1936, p.2.
17. Theophil Uetzmann, letter to congregation, March 14, 1937.
18. Report of committee to congregation, June 1936, p.8.
19. Congregation committee letter to COP, May 23, 1936, p.3.
20. Schink, letter to Immanuel, Feb. 3, 1937.
21. Theophil Uetzmann, letter to congregation, March 14, 1937, p.2.
22. Ibid., pp.6-7.
23. Immanuel's appeal to Manitowoc Pastoral Conference, March 19, 1937.
24. H. Koch, Letter regarding the protest of Immanuel, March 1937.
25. Immanuel, letter to Gerhard Schaefer, Aug. 16, 1937.
26. Immanuel, letter in Faith-Life, Sept. 9, 1943, p.12.
27. Report of Committee to North-Wisconsin District, June, 1938.
28. Boetcher, Secretary of North-Wisconsin District to Immanuel, June 28, 1938.
29. Immanuel, letter recorded in Faith-Life, October 1943, p.4.
30. W.E.Pankow, letter to Immanuel, Sept. 1, 1938.
31. Immanuel, letter to NW District, December 16, 1938.
32. Immanuel, letter to K.A. Hoessel, President of ALC, July 19, 1938.
33. K.A. Hoessel, letter to Immanuel, July 25, 1938.
34. Behnken, letter to Immanuel, July 30, 1938.
35. W.E. Pankow, letter to Immanuel, Jan. 20, 1939.
36. R. Jesse, letter to Immanuel, Feb. 23, 1939.
37. Ibid., Sept. 6, 1939.
38. Immanuel, invitation to Pankow and North Wisconsin District, March 30, 1940.
39. W.E. Pankow, letter to Immanuel, April 4, 1940.
40. M.A. Zimmermann, letter to Immanuel, April 16, 1940.
41. Members of Immanuel, letters of resignation, 1940.
42. Gertrude A. Gieschen, letter to Immanuel, July 13, 1938.
43. Immanuel, Reasons Explaining the Action of the Immanuel Cong. Taken on March 13, 1938.
44. Proceedings Northern Wisconsin District, 1966.
45. Dahlke, letter to Uetzmann, November 11, 1966.
46. Theophil Uetzmann, letter to Dahlke, December 15, 1966.
47. P. Hensel, Faith-Life, May/June 1970, p.24.
48. Wilbert Hasche, letter to Uetzmann, March 12, 1970.