

The Origin of the
Lutheran Conference
of
Confessional Fellowship
(LCCF)

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Introduction

When one surveys the religious scene in America today, an interesting phenomenon becomes evident - the existence of "micro" church bodies. The Lutheran church has not escaped being touched by this phenomenon. In fact, for certain reasons which lie beyond the scope of this paper, of all denominations, it seems that Lutheranism lends itself in a unique way to the establishment of "micro" church bodies. Throughout the existence of Lutheranism (at least here in the United States) the existence of "micro" church bodies seems to form an unbroken chain from the earliest times of Lutheranism right down to the present.

Oh, the organizations themselves may have, for various reasons, come and gone. So we see the coming (and going) of "the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood"; "the Icelandic Synod"; "the Buffalo Synod"; etc. Others have come and as yet have not "gone", such as the "Protestant Conference" the "Illinois Lutheran Conference"; and the "Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship" (LCCF) among others. The last of these groups forms the subject under consideration in this paper.

As of this writing, the LCCF consists of five congregations, one of which operates a Lutheran Elementary School; four active and one retired pastor; and a conference that meets annually. Four of the five congregation are located in Minnesota. The other one is located in Texas.

Background

In order to fully understand how and why the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship (LCCF) came into existence, we must go back in time about 30 years prior to its actual formation...into the early 1950's. At this time the Synodical Conference still existed, although tension had developed on account of one of the member Synods; the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; reacting positively toward overtures from the then American Lutheran Church. (The Synodical Conference was composed of: (1) Evangelical Lutheran Synod, (2) Slovak Synod; (3) Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and (4) Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The Finnish Synod was in fellowship with the LC-MS, but was not a member of the Synodical Conference). Incidentally, the interesting position of fellowship of the Finnish Synod with only the LC-MS raises the interesting question as to exactly what their relationship was with the first three synods mentioned, which made up the then Synodical Conference.

Words of caution were heard from both the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod directed toward the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod for the purpose of having the latter Synod see that continuing on the course that it had charted at that time would result in a dissolving of fellowship ties. Things progressed to the point where, in 1955, the ELS voted to suspend fellowship with the LC-MS. The WELS, on the other hand, endured an inner struggle of a different sort. They recognized on the one hand the danger that the actions of the LC-MS posed to the well being of WELS itself, but hoped on the other hand that relations with the LC-MS would improve. Perhaps the hesitancy on the part of WELS to act can be traced, at least in part, to the eagerness to act which caused the split which resulted in the formation of the

Protestant Conference of the 1930's. Perhaps they wished to avoid a repeat of that tragedy.

Be that as it may, as a result of the lack of action on the part of WELS over against fellowship with the LC-MS, and as a result of the triangular fellowship position which the ELS found itself to be in (on the one hand severing fellowship with the LC-MS but on the other hand continuing in fellowship with the WELS, who remained in fellowship with LC-MS) several congregations, pastors, professors and teachers withdrew in protest from the above mentioned church bodies and formally organized a new church body - the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). They formally organized in 1961 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Watertown, South Dakota.

The CLC established a college and seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Prof. Edmund Reim, who had resigned from both the WELS and also as President of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on account of WELS continuing in fellowship with LC-MS, was called as President and Professor of the newly formed Immanuel Lutheran Seminary. Foreign Mission work was begun in Japan with missionary Fred Tiefel serving the new field. Since that time foreign mission work was added in Nigeria, West Africa and in India. Extensive home mission work was conducted. A publishing house was established and two periodicals were begun: (1) The Lutheran Spokesman for the laity and (2) Journal of Theology for the clergy.

The CLC was not without its own set of internal problems. Several controversies rocked the young church body, among them: (1) Church & Ministry (1961-1964); (2) Who may I Acknowledge as a Christian (1970-1974); (3) 3rd Use of the Law (1972-1980); (4) Marriage & Polygamy (1974-1982); (5) Fraternal Benefit Societies (1972-1985). The last of these controversies was the

spark which ignited the flame which brought the LCCF into existence.

The Spark

Having their origin rooted in the Synods which made up the former Synodical Conference, the CLC inherited many of the practices, policies, and organizational ties which were part of the congregations which were formerly affiliated with the constituent Synods of the former Synodical Conference. Among those organizational ties were fraternal benefit societies and in particular Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) and Lutheran Brotherhood (LB).

The spark which began the controversy within the CLC occurred in the early 1960's. Some students attending Immanuel Lutheran College were eligible for AAL scholarships. AAL required that applications for scholarships be accompanied with the endorsement of the respective department head representing the school which the student attended. The faculty of ILC was hesitant in accepting money from AAL since that organization also supported church work among those whom the CLC found it necessary to sever fellowship. They wished to avoid another triangular fellowship problem.

Prof. Edmund Reim, former president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, studied the issue and presented his findings in the form of an outline at an ILC faculty meeting on Nov. 29, 1965. The conclusions of the outline were (1) "the work that AAL is doing is church work"; (2) "the work is joint church work in an area that involves more than externals"; (3) it is "unionistic in character". The practical conclusion was "we can for the same reason neither recommend nor endorse these scholarships."

The faculty approved the conclusions of Prof. Reim and they were submitted to the Board of Regents of ILC and also to the

president of the CLC.

In the course of time the individual members of the various congregations of the CLC became aware of the faculty decision. Among them were the members of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church, Spring (Houston) Texas. They became disturbed because some of the members of the church were policy holders and voting members of an organization which the faculty of the college and seminary that they supported deemed to be "unionistic." These members of Bethel requested that their pastor, Arvid Gullerud, study their concerns. This was done at a church council meeting on June 11, 1971. The result was that the following resolution was adopted by the church council:

Whereas, the work that AAL is doing in its program is church work, i.e., joint church work with such as are not united in the confession of their faith, hence unionistic in character; THEREFORE, it is obvious that the Word condemns membership in and/or support of AAL.
That, since membership in AAL is shown to be wrong from God's Word, nothing more can be added. References: Eph. 5:11-12; II Cor. 6:14-18; Matt. 18:19; Matt. 7:15; I Tim. 6:3-5; I John 4:1; Romans 16:17-18; Eph. 5:8-11.²

At a voters meeting on July 18, 1971, the congregation unanimously approved the findings of the church council. The following resolution was adopted at that meeting:

"RESOLVED, that we at Bethel EV. Lutheran Church Spring, Texas, therefore cannot give endorsement to AAL, and encourage our members to alleviate themselves of any connection with Aid Association for Lutherans."³

At that time Bethel was a member of the Wisconsin Conference of the CLC. In the words of pastor Arvid Gullerud, then pastor of Bethel, "Since it had been expressed that we confer with our brethren in the faith regarding our conclusions, the pastor of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church of Spring, Texas, brought the matter to the attention of the Wisconsin Pastoral Conference (of the CLC-DPB),

which graciously allotted time for a study of this matter,"⁴

The Wisconsin Pastoral Conference of the CLC requested that the president of the CLC place this subject on the agenda of the general pastoral conference of the CLC, to be held in April 1972 at St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, Austin, Minn. President Robert Reim (son of Edmund Reim) agreed to do this. He assigned Prof. Gordon Radtke to present a paper at the conference on this subject. In his paper Prof. Radtke reached the same conclusions as those who preceded him.

It was rather obvious that among the clergy of the CLC a general consensus had been reached relative to the doctrinal stand taken over against fraternalism - it is unionistic. There was doubt that the same consensus existed among the laity. The question arose as to how to best inform the individual members of the congregations concerning this matter? The President of the CLC, Robert Reim, received several requests that a paper on this matter be presented at the next CLC convention, to be held July 11-14, 1972, at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisc. The suggestion was accepted and Pastor Arvid Gullerud (who made the study for Bethel, Houston but who had subsequently accepted a call to Servant of Christ Lutheran Church, Sepulveda [Los Angeles], California) was assigned to present the paper. Pastor Gullerud presented the paper along with the same conclusion as he had reached previously - fraternal benefit societies are unionistic; we as individuals should not be involved in unionistic activity.

The Flame

The Proceedings of the 1972 convention of the CLC met with mixed reactions when received by the congregations. Some fell in

line with loud shouts of "yes" and "amen". Others dug in their heels; determined to resist to the last dollar of cash value of their AAL policy. The vast majority, including the author of this paper, were simply bewildered and overwhelmed by this "new" event which had occurred "suddenly". My attendance at the convention of 1972 (I was enrolled as a Seminary student at that time) was the first time ever that the words "Aid Association for Lutherans" had ever touched my ears. I was not alone in this experience. Many could not see what the big fuss was all about.

After the 1972 convention paper of Pastor Gullerud, the official publication of the CLC, The Lutheran Spokesman, carried articles from time to time concerning fraternal benefit societies in general and AAL and LB in particular. The first such article appeared in the January 1974 issue. They pointed out what was considered to be unionistic activities of those organizations and what Scripture calls for the individual to do relative to unionism.

But a seeming contradiction in theology was developing. Many within the CLC became uneasy over this seeming contradiction. On the one hand, the CLC came into being because church bodies which were part of the old Synodical Conference declared that the LC-MS was involved in unionism but those same church bodies did not separate from self declared "unionism" even though they recognized that Scripture called for separation. On the other hand, the CLC heard a convention essay, accepted the essay, and its official publication likewise, declared that membership in fraternal benefit societies was "unionistic" and yet they seemed to see no need to act and separate themselves from it. What applied in 1960 seemed not to apply in 1970. What applied to unionism relative to LC-MS did not

seem to apply to unionism relative to AAL and LB. In the mind of some, the legitimacy of the very existence of the CLC as a separate church body was at stake.

In October 1975 the Lutheran Brotherhood invited representatives of the CLC "to participate in a study aimed at improving their program of financial assistance to the Lutheran Church".⁵ The president of the CLC declined their invitation because of the stand of the Synod in objecting to the unionistic fraternal benefit societies.

At the 1976 convention of the CLC this action of the president was reported in the President's Message and Report, and was submitted to the floor committee on Doctrine for action. The floor committee not only approved of the action of the president of the CLC relative to the overture from LB, but it went a step farther, as the following paragraph reveals:

Be it further resolved that we encourage the constituents of the CLC to study the matter of involvement in unionistic fraternal insurance companies on the basis of God's Word, and in an evangelical manner seek to eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven, so that by God's mercy and grace in Christ Jesus we all act in accordance with God's Word and speak the same thing."⁶

Now a directive originated from a regularly called synod convention to "seek to eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven." (of fraternal benefit societies).

The kicker was the words "seek to." Some interpreted these words to mean "proceed at once to search out, one by one, like an inquisition, each and every member of the congregation who is involved at all or in any way with AAL or LB and have them choose either (1) church membership or (2) AAL/LB membership." Others interpreted the words "seek to" to mean "work at the problem and whatever result occurs is what occurs but in any case it will not affect the membership of any member of the congregation." Still others took the words to mean

"Let's draw the line here and admit no new members to the congregation who are involved in AAL/LB. When existing members die off the problem will correct itself."

The author is not at all suggesting that the floor committee which presented the resolution to the convention, or that the voting delegates at the convention of 1976, had the intent of being nebulous in the wording or meaning of the resolution. Each individual seems to have read his own interpretation into the words of the resolution while being unaware that other interpretations of the same words existed. Each delegate seemed confident that his own interpretation was the only interpretation of the wording which existed.

Before too long it became obvious that not all agreed on the meaning of the resolution of 1976. In the meantime, an unfortunate event occurred in Mankato, Minn. A member of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minn., was involved in a serious automobile accident. The victim required an extended hospitalization. Several funds were established to provide financial aid for the family of the victim. AAL was one group which established such a fund. Members of CLC congregations in the area, including members of Immanuel, Mankato, supported and promoted the AAL fund. This was in open contradiction to the convention resolution to "seek to eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven." The practice which existed within the synod made it clear that not all within the synod attached the same meaning to the resolution of 1976.⁷ (I had a passing acquaintance with the family in question at Immanuel, Mankato. The incident is clearly etched into my mind to this day. DPB).

On the other hand, St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, Green Garden Mich. withdrew from the CLC on account of what it perceived to be a legalistic manner of dealing with the matter of fraternal benefit

societies. The pastor of the congregation, Jonathan Schaller, remained a member of the CLC. A minority from St. Paul's formed Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, Green Garden, Mich., and called pastor Jonathan Schaller to be its pastor.⁸ Pastor J. Schaller later resigned from the active ministry (but remained a part of the CLC) so that Good Shepherd could form a joint parish with Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church, Marquette, Mich., with the pastor of Calvary serving both congregations. Subsequently, Good Shepherd dissolved and joined Clavary.

On account of the confusion which existed during this time period, two memorials were prepared and presented to the 1978 convention of the CLC concerning the matter of fraternal benefit societies and the interpretation of the 1976 convention resolution. These two memorials were presented by (1) Pastor Gilbert Sydow, Faith Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, Minn., and by (2) Mr. Norman Gurath, layman from Luther Memorial Ev. Lutheran Church, Fon du Lac, Wisc. Copies of both memorials are appended to this paper. In essence, each memorial was aimed at clarifying the meaning of the wording of the original 1976 convention resolution which read "and in an evangelical manner seek to eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven." (By the way, in subsequent versions of this resolution, e.g., 1978 convention proceedings, the words "seek to" are deleted. This did not cause confusion to cease. DPB).

There were pastors and congregations in the Minnesota Conference of the CLC who took the 1976 convention resolution in what could be called a "hard line" interpretation. They did not only "seek to" eliminate AAL and LB membership from their midst...they actually succeeded in accomplishing it. Then to see that others in the same conference were tolerating not only membership in organizations

marked as being "unionistic" but also watching some of those members participate in public fund drives sponsored by those same organizations, and set up for the purpose of benefitting a member of a sister congregation, well, tension developed as a result. In addition to this, at least one congregation in the Minnesota Conference of the CLC had AAL members who served on the church council. The very same congregation had decided to have the members of the church council visit all of the members of the congregation for the purpose of instructing the membership concerning the unionistic activities of fraternal benefit societies (for obvious reasons, the author has not included in the body of this paper the name of the congregation. He has the documentation in his files for anyone who would like to see it). This was public knowledge in the Minnesota Conference at the time. This fact added to already existing tension within the conference.

So the two memorials were submitted to the 1978 convention of the CLC in order to resolve the situation. They were referred to the floor committee on Doctrine of the convention for action. As stated above, both memorials are appended to this paper. The report of the floor committee, as adopted by the 1978 Convention of the CLC, read:

Whereas the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) has marked fraternal benefit societies that function as do the Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) and the Lutheran Brotherhood (LB) as unionistic; and

Whereas our Lord teaches us that His believers actively seek the instruction of His Word (John 10:27);

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"; and

Whereas the Word of our Lord directs His believers to avoid such unionistic fraternal benefit societies (Romans 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"; and

Whereas all members of congregations of the CLC are required "to permit themselves to be fraternally admonished when they have erred" (Model Const. Art. III, B,8). (Prov. 3:11-12):

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

Therefore be it resolved that "we all speak the same thing," and obedient to instruction and admonition in the Word of our Lord, in an evangelical manner eliminate the leaven of unionistic fraternal benefit societies from our midst.⁹

Note that (1) fraternal benefit societies are "marked...as unionistic" (1st whereas), (2) believers are "to avoid such unionistic fraternal benefit societies (3rd whereas) and (3) "Therefore be it resolved that...in an evangelical manner eliminate the leaven of unionistic fraternal benefit societies from our midst." Note that the words "seek to" (1976 resolution) now officially disappear from the scene.

Now the line was drawn. The die was cast. Unionistic fraternal benefit societies were to be eliminated from the midst of the CLC. It was to be done in an evangelical manner...hence no set of prescribed procedures were drawn up and adopted which all had to uniformly follow.

The Fire

In the meantime, the problem at Immanuel, Mankato, did not go away. "Participants in the AAL fund drive for the auto accident victim were slow to heed the pleas to discontinue AAL involvement. The consequent, long-drawnout dispute, together with the other facets of applying the convention resolution, ultimately resulted in a number of families and individuals withdrawing or being terminated from Immanuel Congregation, and thus also from the CLC." ¹⁰ It is

important to understand that not all of the persons "withdrawing or being terminated from Immanuel Congregation" were the result of wishing to retain membership in AAL/LB. Some of that group were no longer members because of either (1) perceiving that Immanuel and also the CLC in general chose to "mark" but not to "avoid", or (2) Immanuel perceived some members as being devisive. Those who ceased, by whatever cause, to be members of Immanuel, Mankato, but wished at the same time to maintain membership in AAL/LB, joined other Lutheran congregations in the area where this was acceptable. Those who ceased to be members of Immanuel, Mankato, disagreeing with the congregation, the CLC and with other Lutheran church bodies, began to fellowship together and conduct their own worship services, meeting in homes and using lay preachers.¹¹ On October 28, 1981, a meeting was arranged and officers were chosen.¹² In the meantime, on October 20, 1981, Pastor G. Sydow announced his withdrawal from the CLC.¹³ The Mankato group extended a call to Pastor G. Sydow and he accepted. (Pastor G. Sydow graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1938).

Pastor G. Sydow had retired from the full time ministry in 1979. He did serve, however, as a retired vacancy pastor. In fact, he served a vacancy in Carlsbad and McIntosh New Mexico which the author of this paper served. G. Sydow installed me in that dual parish in December of 1980. After my installation, he returned to his retirement home in Eagan, Minnesota.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minn. was being served at the time by Pastor Glenn Oster at the time of my installation in New Mexico. He accepted a call and left in June of 1981. Pastor David Lau, of Redeemer Ev. Lutheran Church, in Red Wing, Minn.,

served St. Peter's as vacancy pastor until August of 1981. Thereupon the CLC Board of Missions (St. Peter's was a mission congregation) asked Pastor Sydow to serve St. Peter's as vacancy pastor. He accepted. When Pastor Sydow resigned from the CLC on account of their perceived lack of action on the matter of "unionistic fraternal benefit societies" he also resigned as vacancy pastor of St. Peter's. On November 1, 1981, St. Peter's voted to withdraw from the CLC and they called Pastor Sydow to be their permanent pastor. He accepted the call but continued to reside in Eagan.

Back in Mankato, the group there who had called Pastor Sydow met on November 3, 1981 for a second organizational meeting. At this meeting they chose the name "Christ Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church." In this manner Pastor Sydow came to serve this dual parish of independent Lutheran churches.

Faith Lutheran Church in Sanborn, Minn., with its pastor, Marvin Eibs (According to my memory, Pastor Eibs is a graduate of Concordia, Springfield. There is no picture of Pastor Eibs at WLS. He was ordained and installed on July 13, 1947 at Trinity Lutheran, Smith's Mill, Minn., according to the proceedings of the 1948 Minn. Dist. Convention of WELS. He was a member of WELS until leaving that body sometime in the early 1960's and joining the CLC), was one congregation which took immediate, active, and decisive action to "eliminate the leaven of unionistic fraternal benefit societies from our midst." (1978 resolution). They had deep and grave concerns about what was being done about the problem in other CLC congregations. (The author vividly remembers those concerns of Pastor Eibs as he publicly expressed them on the floor of Synod Conventions and at general Pastoral Conferences). As a result of their concerns both Pastor Eibs and Faith congregation suspended fellowship with the CLC on

November 3, 1981.¹⁴

Gilbert Sydow had served as pastor of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, Minn., from October 1965 until his retirement from the active ministry in August 1979. Seminary graduate Michael Thom became Pastor at Faith, New Ulm, at that time. The Sydow's moved to Eagan, Minn.

During the fall of 1982 the young Pastor Thom attempted to deal with the fraternal benefit society issue. This author has only second hand hearsay information; but it has been said that Pastor Sydow prompted some of his former members to try to vote the congregation out of the CLC as St. Peter's, Rochester and Faith, Sanborn had done a year earlier. A vote was taken in the fall of 1982 (I don't recall the exact date) and the congregation voted to remain in the CLC.

When this occurred a number of members withdrew from Faith, New Ulm, began conducting services and called Pastor Eibs to serve them. He accepted. In November 1982 the group took the name Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church. On December 22, 1982, Good Shepherd, along with Christ Our Redeemer, Mankato, called Pastor Robert Mehlretter to be their pastor. Pastor G. Sydow went into retirement again, leaving Christ Our Redeemer vacant, and Good Shepherd extended a joint call thus allowing the new pastor to serve full time in the ministry. Faith, Sanborn was also agreeable to this since they supported Pastor Eibs full time prior to their suspension of fellowship with the CLC.

Pastor Mehlretter, a graduate of Immanuel Lutheran Seminary (CLC), had served as a teacher in the high school operated by Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato. His call was terminated by Immanuel on November 11, 1980 because he had charged a member of

Immanuel with false doctrine and refused to retract the charge. These events occurred a full year prior to the formation of either of the congregations to which he was later called. After the termination of his call, teacher Mehlretter and his family moved to Beloit, Wisc., where he found secular employment to support himself and his family. When Christ Our Redeemer was formed a year later, they called Pastor Sydow, who had resigned from the CLC at about the same time that the congregation came into existence. Upon receiving this joint call, Pastor Mehlretter returned to the area that he had left. Pastor Mehlretter had not at this point in time (while living in Beloit Wisc.) resigned from the CLC. Rather he appealed the termination of his call according to the prescribed manner. In part, Pastor Mehlretter was vindicated, but his stand over against the CLC relative to the method of dealing with church members who are also members of fraternal benefit societies, along with his accepting the call extended to him, eventually caused him to leave the CLC. The author has all the reports, the appeals, and the reports of the commissions of review of the case in his files but has not made copies of the same to attach to this paper.

In the mean time Pastor Robert Wehrwein (graduated from Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in May 1974. Pastor Wehrwein and the author were classmates and in the same graduating class), St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church, Okabena, Minn. was implementing the 1978 Synod directive in his congregation. After the withdrawals of Pastor Sydow and Pastor Eibs as well as the re-entry into the ministry of Pastor Mehlretter, Pastor Wehrwein found himself to be in agreement with their views concerning fraternal benefit societies. This fact became public when Pastor Wehrwein sent a letter to the officers and visitors (comparable to District Presidents in function in the WELS) in which he stated,

"As things now stand (RE: fraternal benefit societies), there can be no peace. The situation as it presently exists is intolerable. For our (who is "our"? DPB), we are unable to resolve it at this stage of affairs."¹⁵

Then on January 16, 1983 the St. John's bulletin, written by Pastor Wehrwein, said, "Right now there are men outside of the synod whose theology is better than that of one or more men inside of the synod."

On account of the public nature of the issue, a special meeting of St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church, Okabena, Minn., was held on Feb. 6, 1983. Present at the meeting, in addition to the members and pastor of the congregation were, by invitation, Pastor Dan Fleischer, President of the CLC and Pastor Paul Larsen, Visiting Elder of the Minnesota Conference of the CLC. In addition, since the meeting was open to any other interested persons, Pastor Vernon Greve of Trinity, Watertown, S.D., along with lay representatives from Trinity: Ed Klatt, Martin Fuerstenau, Vernon Fuerstenau, and Tim Fuerstenau were also present. The author of this paper knows each individual, both Pastors and laymen, personally.

A marathon meeting of 5½ hours ensued. The format was question and answer, moderated by the chairman of the congregation, Mr. Loren Marschel. The issue of fraternal benefit societies and the~~position~~ of Pastor Wehrwein was fully discussed. In the end President Fleischer asked Pastor Wehrwein if he had changed his mind in any way. Pastor Wehrwein said "No". Thereupon President Fleischer read a letter prepared earlier (the author has a copy of the letter. In fact, most of what appears in this paragraph of the paper comes from Pastor Wehrwein's notes of the meeting) in which it was stated that he had no choice but to suspend Pastor Wehrwein from fellowship with

the CLC because of his agreement with Pastors Sydow and Eibs.

Two days later, February 8, 1983, President Dan Fleischer and Vice - President Robert Reim made the suspension of Pastor Wehrwein official by addressing a letter to him informing him in an official manner of the suspension. (The author has a copy of the letter in his files). The congregation decided to remain in fellowship with the CLC, so in May of 1983 Pastor Wehrwein ended his ministry at St. John's.

Since Pastor G. Sydow had retired from the active ministry once again for reasons of health (Pastor Mehlretter had already been called to serve at Christ Our Redeemer, Mankato, which had been formerly served by Pastor Sydow), Pastor Wehrwein was called to St. Peter's, Rochester Minn. in October of 1983. He appealed his suspension in accordance with the constitution and by-laws of the CLC. At the 1984 convention of the CLC (The author was present at that Convention), the synod upheld his suspension. (The author has in his files the appeals of Pastor Wehrwein, along with the reports of the commissions of review of the case in his files but has not attached copies to this paper. The actual disposition of the case is reported in the Proceedings of the 1984 Convention of the CLC).

The Organization

On December 19, 1982, St. Peter's, Rochester held a special congregational meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss establishing a conference of like minded congregations and pastors. According to the January 3, 1983 Sunday bulletin of the congregation:

It was also resolved that we propose a special meeting to the other like-minded congregations at Mankato, New Wlm, and Sanborn to consider the future and what we might do as joint ventures. Letters have been sent suggesting that each congregation elect two delegates for a meeting sometime in February. Things that might be considered are:

Do we want a conference type organization?

Just how much organization do we want?
 Shall we have a modest publication for the
 exchange of information?
 Is there anything that we can do jointly
 about inter-congregational financial
 help?
 What can be done about preparing pastors for
 the future?

A meeting was called on February 12, 1983 in Mankato, Minn. in the Lincoln Community Center. Pastor G. Sydow was elected temporary chairman and Mr. John Sommer of Good Shepherd, New Ulm Minn. was elected secretary. Two papers were presented in the morning session and the afternoon session was set aside for making plans for formal organization. A confessional statement was adopted at a meeting in Mankato on May 1, 1983. The group accepts the three ecumenical creeds: (1) Apostolic, (2) Nicene, (3) Athanasian, as well as the six particular symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: (1) Unaltered Augsburg Confession, (2) Apology, (3) Small Catechism, (4) Large Catechism, (5) Smalcald Articles, (6) Formula of Concord. It also accepts the following doctrinal statements of the CLC, to wit: (1) Brief Statement of 1932 of "Old Missouri", (2) Concerning Church Fellowship, (3) Concerning Church and Ministry. The document added to their confessional statements which distinguishes the LCCF from other church bodies is the document entitled Concerning the Theology involved in the Fraternal Benefit Society Issue adopted at Mankato, May 1, 1983. The author has a copy of this document in his possession. The following congregations were represented at the meeting and accepted the confessional statements:

- (1) Christ Our Redeemer, Mankato Minn.
- (2) Faith, Sanborn Minn.
- (3) Good Shepherd, New Ulm Minn.
- (4) St. Peter's, Rochester Minn.

The group included Pastor G. Sydow, Pastor M. Eibs, Pastor R.

Mehltretter, and Pastor Dan Hanel (A graduate of Immanuel Lutheran

Seminary, but not serving as a regularly called pastor). Pastor R. Wehrwein joined the group after leaving the pastorate of St. John's Okabena, when the congregation decided to remain in fellowship with the CLC.

All was not over, however. At the CLC convention of 1982 it was recognized that Holy Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church and its Pastor, Leonard Bernthal, had withdrawn from the CLC because they rejected the synod position of marking fraternal benefit societies as unionistic.¹⁶ They concurred with the action of St. Paul's, Green Garden Mich., of several years earlier. On the other side, Bethel, Spring (Houston), Texas, submitted a memorial to the convention requesting clarification on the manner of dealing with individual members of a congregation involved in fraternal benefit societies. Bethel was the congregation which made the original congregational study on this matter (Memorial attached). The convention correctly concluded that "It is not the role of a church body to specify how cases of casuistry in the individual congregations are to be handled."¹⁷ It went on to give three points of general Scriptural principles in dealing with specific cases. The convention response was unsatisfactory to the Pastor, Gene Rutz, and a minority of the congregation. Pastor Rutz subsequently resigned from the CLC and also from Bethel. The group which he continued to serve organized as Holy Truth Evangelical Lutheran Church, Spring (Houston) Texas. They became "confessionally affiliated" with the LCCF.

Conclusion

Subsequent events within the LCCF include the following:

- (1) A publication, called the LCCF Newsletter was begun.

Pastor R. Wehrwein is currently the editor. It is published

six times/year.

(2) There is no school of higher learning. There is no foreign (or home to my knowledge) mission work. A conference meets annually.

(3) Pastor G. Sydow later reversed his decision relative to charges of false doctrine over against the CLC. He applied for and was readmitted into the ministerium of the CLC as an emeritus member.

(4) Pastor M. Eibs retired from the ministry and as of this writing, to my knowledge, Faith, Sanborn, has been unable to find a pastor to serve them.

(5) Discussions between the two church bodies were conducted for a time for the purpose of resolving the differences which exist between them, but as of this writing those discussions have terminated. No success was achieved at resolving their differences.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

David P. Baker
1714 West Mequon Road
Mequon, Wisc.

53092

March 24, 1994

Footnotes

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- ¹As appears on the paper Why a Study of the Fraternal Life Insurance Organization Aid Association for Lutherans? by Pastor Arvid Gullerud, available from the CLC Bookhouse, Eau Claire, Wisc. Page 3.
- ²Ibid, p. 4.
- ³Ibid, p. 4.
- ⁴Ibid, p. 4.
- ⁵1976 CLC Convention Proceedings, p. 17. Available from the CLC Bookhouse, Eau Claire, Wisc.
- ⁶Ibid, p. 26.
- ⁷The Beginnings of the LCCF, pp. 5-6. Available from Pastor Robert Wehrwein, 1916 1st Ave. NE, Austin, MN 55912.
- ⁸Proceedings, Op. Cit., p. 17.
- ⁹1978 CLC Convention Proceedings, pp. 46-47. Available from the CLC Bookhouse, Eau Claire, Wisc.
- ¹⁰Beginnings, Op. Cit., p. 6.
- ¹¹Ibid, p. 7.
- ¹²Ibid, p. 7.
- ¹³Report of the Visitors - Officers Conference of the CLC, held in Minneapolis, Minn. on Nov. 18-19, 1981, p. 4. Available from CLC bookhouse. This Special Conference was called in response to the withdrawals from the CLC of Pastors Sydow and Eibs.
- ¹⁴A paper written by Pastor M. Eibs, dated Nov. 3, 1981, with no title, in which he announces his withdrawal from the CLC and states his reasons why he has taken this action, p. 1. Available from either Pastor Wehrwein or myself.
- ¹⁵A letter written by Pastor R. Wehrwein, dated Dec. 26, 1982, addressed to the Officers and Visitors of the CLC. Available from Pastor Wehrwein or myself.
- ¹⁶1982 CLC Convention Proceedings, p. 32. Available from the CLC bookhouse, Eau Claire, Wisc.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 32.

N.B. Much of the material which appears on page 19 of this paper is taken from the document "Not Ashamed of the Gospel", which is a tract issued by the LCCF which details their doctrinal position. It is available from Pastor Wehrwein or myself.

This is the "Sydow Memorial." From the
1978 Proceedings of the CLC Convention.

B. Re Aid Association for Lutherans, Lutheran Brotherhood, Fraternal Organizations

1. The Problem

Whereas the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) has declared itself in opposition to fraternal benefit societies that function as do the Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) and the Lutheran Brotherhood (LB); and

Whereas this is expressed in the 1976 convention resolutions as follows: "Furthermore, be it resolved that we encourage constituents of the CLC to study the matter of involvement in unionistic fraternal insurance companies on the basis of God's Word, and in an evangelical manner eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven, so that by God's mercy and grace in Christ Jesus we all act in accordance with God's Word and speak the same thing."; and

Whereas this resolution is lacking in precise definition and allows for contradictory teaching and practice in our midst (this is already evident) such as:

1. We would like to have you withdraw your membership in fraternal benefit societies, but the decision is yours depending on your spiritual maturity, and our fellowship-membership relationship remains unaffected.
2. We would like to have you withdraw your membership in fraternal benefit societies; that is a congregational membership requirement and our fellowship is involved; and

Whereas this resolution does not define how we are to "act in accordance with God's Word"; and

Whereas this resolution does not assure that we all "speak the same thing"; and

Whereas our confessional honesty and integrity is at stake. (If with our "lodge clause" we mean: "We would prefer that you do not belong to organizations that conflict with the Word of God, but the choice is yours," then let us openly say so. Or if with our fraternal benefit resolution we have an unstated reservation and mean: "Although we find certain fraternal benefit societies to be organizations in conflict with the Word of God, yet, because of extenuating circumstances, we do not consider them to come under the "lodge clause" of our congregational constitutions," then again we should openly say so.);

1978

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Therefore be it resolved that this convention define itself more exactly as to the teaching and practice the CLC is to follow in dealing with membership in fraternal benefit societies that function as do the AAL and LB.

II. The Solution

Whereas the words "eliminate from our midst this unionistic leaven" could not be said except it were true that certain fraternal benefit societies (AAL, LB) are operating with principles and practices that conflict with the Word of God; and

Whereas it is a requirement of the CLC that all congregational constitutions have this membership qualification: "9. hold no membership in secret orders or other organizations conflicting with the Word of God (Romans 16:17-18)." (model constitution, latest edition);

Therefore be it resolved that we formally and officially declare that what we in reality have already confessed together in these statements, with their implication for fellowship-membership in our congregations, be the teaching and practice to be followed in our CLC congregations.

G. Sydow

This is the "Gurath Memorial." From
the 1978 Proceedings of the CLC Convention.

2. Whereas membership in a LODGE, AAL, or any unscriptural fraternal organization is a sin according to Scripture (Eph. 5:11-12) "Don't have anything to do with the works of darkness, from which no good can come. Instead show that they are wrong." (12) - "We're ashamed even to mention what such people do secretly." (Matt. 7:15) "Beware of false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but in their hearts they're greedywolves." (1 John 4:1) "Dear friends, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God. Many false prophets have gone out into the world." (Romans 16:17-18) "Now I beseech you brethren, MARK them....; and avoid them." For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;....." (1 Tim. 6:3-5) - (11 Cor. 6:14-18) - (Matt. 18:19).

Whereas the official statement adopted at the 1976 CLC convention..... (Proceedings 1976 p. 26) "Is not adequate."

Whereas "More definition is needed" because "it could allow for a possible variety of actions in our midst, which would be confusing to our people and detrimental to our public confessional image."

Whereas the official statement could allow for members to continue as members of an unscriptural fraternal organization (AAL - Lutheran Brotherhood - etc.).

Whereas the impression is given that we are dealing with "weak brethren" and not "persistent errorists."

Whereas the 1976 official statement does not "come to grips with the issue."

Whereas all unscriptural fraternal organizations identify themselves as false teaching organizations on the doctrine of CHURCH FELLOWSHIP, "promulgating this error in the name of Christianity in a manner more flagrant and blatant than WELS ever did."

Whereas it is a contradiction that our people hold membership both in the CLC and other self-styled CHURCH organizations; and

Whereas "We are making ourselves guilty of the same error for which we fault WELS;"

Therefore be it resolved that the CLC in convention follow the clear WORD OF GOD and eliminate from its midst all members who persist in holding membership in any self-identified unscriptural fraternal CHURCH organization. "Scripture points the way when it tells us to purge out the leaven."

Norman A. Gurath

This is the text of the Bethel memorial. The "following points" of the "Therefore" clause of the memorial appear on the next two pages. Taken from the 1982 Proceedings of CLC Convention.

MEMORIALS

A. From Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church, Spring, TX (Undersigned members)

To the CLC Convention:

We agree in general with the report of the officers and visitors presented at the special pastoral conference, January 5-6, 1982 (the report prepared during the conference).

However, we feel that the report did not go far enough in helping our pastors make the important decision as to "if and when" suspension from communion is called for. It is in this precise area that there seems to be a difference of opinion.

Therefore we ask you, our brethren in convention assembled, to consider the following points, and to reaffirm in this or some other form the practice which our pastors have learned in seminary and which has been followed in orthodox Lutheran circles for many years.

In Christ's service,

Gene Rutz
Raymond Baumgartner
Floyd Fougeron

SUSPENSION FROM COMMUNION: NON-ADMISSION TO COMMUNION

I. The confession-fellowship aspect of Holy Communion.

- A. Those who attend Holy Communion together should agree with one another in doctrine and practice (confessional unity).

I Corinthians 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

I Corinthians 10:16-17 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.

- B. A person's total confession consists in what he says he believes together with what his actions show he believes.

Luke 11:28 Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Luke 6:46 Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

- C. When a person is involved in a sinful practice, his confessional position comes into question; to admit him to Communion under such conditions is to violate the Communion fellowship, and to give offense to others who know his circumstances.

II Thessalonians 3:14-15 If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

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I Corinthians 5:11 I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Note: If even social fellowship is to be avoided in cases of disobedience, how much more the expression of fellowship in the Lord's Supper.

II. The repentance-absolution aspect of Holy Communion.

- A. Since we are "to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent" (Luther's Small Catechism), a person who is under church discipline should refrain from attending Holy Communion until the matter is settled by repentance and absolution.
- B. Church discipline actually begins whenever one Christian admonishes another.
Matthew 18:15 If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.
- C. However, since the pastor is primarily responsible for admission to Communion, the pastor must be involved in the admonition before he can ask a person to refrain from attending Communion.
- D. But non-admission to Communion should be in effect from the time the pastor first admonishes a person until the matter is settled, and not only during the "third step" of church discipline ("tell it to the church," Matthew 18:17).

III. It goes without saying that, in all dealings with our fellow Christians, we will be motivated by our love for Christ, for His Word, and for our fellow Christians, and by a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of all, and that our dealings will always show this love and concern.

Special application to fraternal insurance companies such as AAL/LB:

The only thing that has to be determined in the case of a policy holder is whether he is involved in an ongoing sinful practice or not. If a person is not responsible for his actions (e.g. mentally incapacitated) or has no control over his policy, he cannot be said to be involved in a sinful practice. However, if a person is responsible for his actions and has control over his policy, he is involved in a sinful practice. The fact that he does not understand why his actions are contrary to God's Word, or does not agree that they are, does not change the circumstances leading to non-admission to Communion.