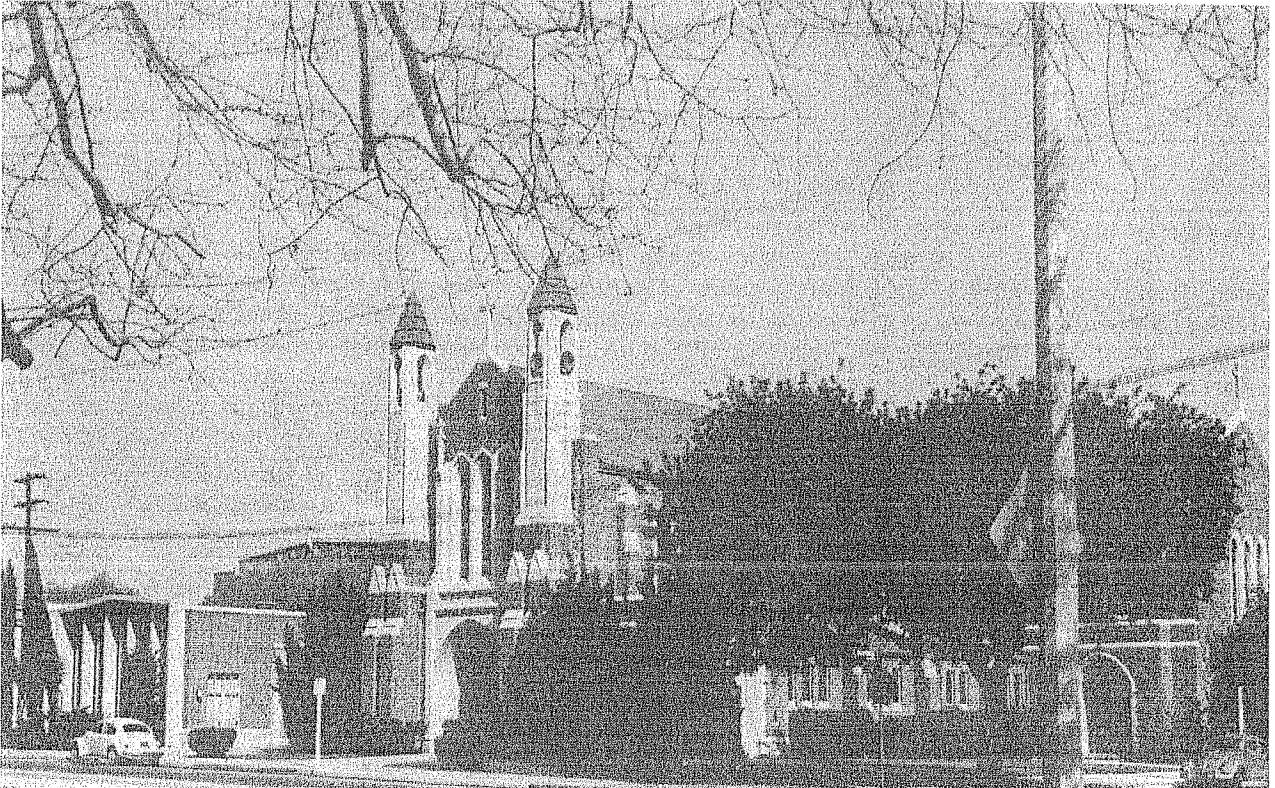


**A WITNESS TO OUR LOVE FOR THE PURE GOSPEL:  
A History of the Move of St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North  
Hollywood from the LCMS to the WELS (1970-75)**



*Senior Church History Thesis*  
Prof. James Korthals  
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By  
David Salinas  
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## Preface

On October 3, 1884 C.F.W. Walther opened his fourth evening lecture for his students at the *Beier-Lehrsaal* of Concordia Seminary with the following remarks:

They [those unwilling to yield on points of doctrine] are regarded as men worthy of contempt. But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace...Let us, therefore, bless all the faithful champions who have fought for every point of Christian doctrine, unconcerned about the favor of men”<sup>1</sup>

The study of history is a discipline that, perhaps more than any other discipline treasures and strives for the ideal of pure objectivity. At the risk of showing a flagrant disregard for this ideal, the goal of this thesis will not be to simply sit back, content at recalling facts and retracing the footprints of a particular church at a particular point in time. This essay will seek to do just what Dr. Walther suggested above: to “bless all the faithful champions who have fought for every point of Christian doctrine.” Far too much hangs in the balance to do otherwise. Every opportunity must be taken and every effort made to sound the bugle call and muster the saints to faithfulness.

Our world is an ever-shrinking vessel. Technological advances in communication and transportation have made it possible for us to have almost instant access to every culture on earth. People can now sensibly speak of a “world culture.” Politically, we no longer talk simply of cultural diversity but of cultural pluralism.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, we thank God and marvel at

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<sup>1</sup>Walther, Dr. C.F.W., *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Trans. W.H.T. Dau, (Saint Louis: CPH, 1986), 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural pluralism as the policy making “that seeks the integration of and participation of all citizens.” Such policy making is necessitated by and derived from the diversity of cultures in a society. Hence, the natural result of a culturally diverse society is cultural pluralism. [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php@URL\\_ID=12321&URI](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php@URL_ID=12321&URI); Internet.

how he has brought the ripe harvest fields to us! On the other hand, we lament that “acceptance” and “toleration” have become the sole words for defining love, even by some segments of the church. Like its society, the American church, by and large, lies in an abysmal state of ungodly ecumenism. For the sake of acceptance and embracing outward unity, the church has seen fit to compromise the pure Word of God. Sadly, in an attempt to embrace everything, the church is standing for nothing.

The ecumenical spirit is, of course, nothing new; it simply pervades like never before. Even members of an orthodox, confessional church body like the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) are susceptible to its wooing. The Q & A page on the WELS website<sup>3</sup>, for example, is chock-full of questions and comments from its own members who genuinely wonder about the validity, wisdom, even sanity of holding so staunchly to the anti-ecumenical Word of truth. The need for examples of faithfulness is as great as it has ever been.

Consequently, this author makes no apologies for his bias or goal. And yet, in a very real sense, one need not do any more than present the facts, in order to honor both the faithful saints of St. Paul’s First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood and their faithful Lord. The record is its own *apologia* and tribute. In addition, it is also this writer’s hope that, as he stands on the verge of joining the public ministry in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), an orthodox, Lutheran church body, he stands as a living testimony to the faithful pastors and people of his home congregation of St. Paul’s North Hollywood. He is here today, because they were and are not of “those who shrink back.”<sup>4</sup> They remained firm in their conviction that every point of doctrine was worth fighting for, and on August 15, 1971 they gave their witness to their

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<sup>3</sup> “WELS: Question and Answer” <http://www.wels.net/sab/qa.html>; Internet.

love for the pure gospel by officially seceding from the then heterodox Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

By God's grace, people today stand poised to defend the Holy Scriptures, because by his grace, people of the past kept and handed down the truth inviolate, and left an example of faith to follow. Let the reader learn from and cherish their example. Let this record of the move of St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood from the LCMS to the WELS stand as a tribute in honor of all who take their stand on the truth of God's Word. "Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...let *us* run with perseverance the race marked out for us."<sup>5</sup>

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### **I. Missouri: a Synod in Peril**

#### *Revolution and turmoil*

The ill-fated political activist Abbie Hoffman once captured the spirit of the 1960's, when he wrote: "Revolution is not something fixed in ideology, nor is it something fashioned to a particular decade. It is a perpetual process imbedded in the human spirit"<sup>6</sup>. To a degree, he spoke the truth. Ever since the fall into sin, revolution has been "imbedded in the human spirit". Since the fall, humankind has lived in a state of constant rebellion against God. However, in many ways revolution as an ideology was "fashioned" to the 1960's in particular. This decade had seen revolution manifest itself in everything from assassination and war on the one hand, to the civil rights movement on the other. In America, the technological revolution put man on the moon.

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<sup>4</sup>Hebrews 10:39

<sup>5</sup>Hebrews 12:1

Empowered by a very vocal counterculture, the cultural revolution sounded out the war cry of liberation, as it swept across the nation in a stream of movements aimed at “freeing” classes of people held in bondage by societal mores. The revolution of the 60's brought much change. One could debate about how much good came of it all. One thing is certain: with revolution came turmoil.

The turmoil, so characteristic of the times, was no less evident in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. For Missouri the 1960's began with the tumultuous break with her sister, the Wisconsin Synod. After much prayer and great inner struggle, the Wisconsin Synod officially severed its relationship with the LCMS on August 17, 1961, over Missouri's persistent error in the doctrine of church fellowship. The tumult of the 60's became mainstreamed in the 70's, and Missouri's doctrinal ills in some ways went from bad to worse. As a result, on August 15, 1971 Missouri lost one of its congregations in its Southern California District, when St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood “resolved, cost what it may, to secede from Missouri.”<sup>7</sup>

Wisconsin's break with Missouri and the subsequent dissolution of the Synodical Conference<sup>8</sup>, as well as St. Paul's secession from its synod did not all of a sudden take place in the 60's and 70's, however. These breaks were “boil overs” of doctrinal trouble brewing steadily

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<sup>6</sup>Hoffman, Abbie, *The Abbie Hoffman web page*, <http://theaction.com/Abbie/>

<sup>7</sup>“Churches of FAL: Authentic Lutheranism in North Hollywood.” *Sola Scriptura*, 3 (May - June 1973), 17. *Sola Scriptura* was a bi-monthly magazine published by St. Paul's in the early and mid 70's for the FAL churches in Southern California. It breathed and gave voice to the same confessional spirit as Missouri's *Confessional Lutheran*. The origin of *Sola Scriptura* will be discussed briefly in the next section of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> The Synodical Conference was a union of solidly confessional Synods established in July of 1872 for the joint undertaking of outreach (particularly to southern blacks), worker training, and the production of orthodox publications. The Synodical Conference originally included Wisconsin, Missouri, and several other confessional mid-western synods. Ironically, the SC came about largely due to Wisconsin's right turn toward confessionalism, and for all practical purposes ended with Wisconsin's break with Missouri in 1961, due to Missouri's left turn toward heterodoxy and unionism. For nearly nine decades Wisconsin and Missouri enjoyed a godly fellowship within the SC. Officially, the SC dissolved in 1967. For a more detailed account of the beginnings of the Synodical

in Missouri during the decades prior to the split. In fact, the first ripples of Missouri's doctrinal woes can already be seen at the turn of the century.<sup>9</sup> Missouri's stance on scouting and her involvement in the chaplaincy program became doctrinal bones of contention with Wisconsin dating as far back as the 1920's.<sup>10</sup> However, the most offensive doctrinal blight to faithful Christians had to be the matter of Missouri's desire for union with heterodox Lutheran church bodies, the American Lutheran Church in particular.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1930's the ALC sought closer relations with other Lutheran church bodies and began a concerted effort to establish those relationships. When the ALC made her overtures of union toward Missouri in the mid 1930's, Missouri responded to the ALC's courtship with enthusiasm. Already at the 1935 Synod Convention Missouri seemed excited and optimistic at the possibility of union with the ALC, and this in spite of clear doctrinal differences still existing between the two church bodies.<sup>12</sup>

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Conference see Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, (Milwaukee: NPH, 2000), 50-5.

<sup>9</sup> In 1899, for example, evidence of confusion over church and ministry surfaced in what has come to be known simply as "The Cincinnati Case". A Missouri Synod congregation in Cincinnati excommunicated one of its members, after he chose to withdraw his son from the Christian day school, because he wanted his son to learn English in what then was a German only school. The congregation accused the member of being derelict in his duty to see his son confirmed and of breaking the Eighth Commandment in seeking to justify his actions. However, when the member appealed the excommunication to Synod, Synod disavowed the excommunication as unbiblical and improperly carried out. Both pastors, however, denied the Synod's authority to disavow the excommunication on the basis that Synod did not have authority over the local congregation. The questions began to surface: "Which body has the final authority, the congregation or Synod?" "Just what is the divinely instituted form of the ministry?" For more on this case along with its outcome and effect see E.C. Fredrich, *WSL*, 107-110.

<sup>10</sup>For a thorough examination of the issues involving Missouri's stance on scouting and the chaplaincy see Braun, Mark, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri*, (Milwaukee: NPH, 2003), 74-122. (Hereafter cites as Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*).

<sup>11</sup>The American Lutheran Church (ALC) referred to in this part of the thesis is the first ALC synod formed in Toledo, Ohio on August 11, 1930 by the merger of the Iowa, Ohio, Buffalo, and Texas Synods. A second ALC synod, referred to later, was formed in 1960.

<sup>12</sup>One might ask: what made Missouri so willing to embrace outward union at the expense of doctrinal purity, especially when her founding fathers fought so mightily for purity of doctrine, fellowship included? In his book, *A Tale of Two Synods*, Mark Braun examines the circumstances surrounding the erosion of the doctrine of fellowship in Missouri. He traces the direct cause to a faulty exegesis of Romans 16:17 introduced by Dr. Brux, a missionary to India. He used his exegesis to justify praying with missionaries of other denominations. Later Missouri Theologians would essentially follow Brux's line of reasoning to establish a basis for so-called "levels of

In his comments on the underlying issue behind the bitter conflict of the American Civil War Frederick Douglass once said: “The American people and the government at Washington may refuse to recognize it for a time but the inexorable logic of events will force it upon them in the end; that the war being waged is a war for and against slavery.” The underlying issue behind Missouri Synod’s troubles was not the result of a “new” Missouri finding herself at odds with “old” traditionalists. It was the result of her conflict with God. Her failure to tow the doctrinal line and to administer proper church discipline, as well as her drive toward unionism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated the heart of the issue and the true cause of her woes. It was the “inexorable” truth that many in her midst were in fact staging a revolution against the clear Word of God. And with revolution comes turmoil.

#### *Unionism continued*

Because of this revolution against God’s Word, the unionistic spirit present within Missouri in the 1930's would only continue to thrive over time. It would possess some of her brightest theologians and etch a path toward modern ecumenism. The only thing holding this spirit in check as Missouri headed into the 1960's was her tie to the Wisconsin Synod. Oddly enough, the ALC had the insight to recognize this very thing. Mark Braun quotes the ALC’s *American Outlook*, as likening Missouri to “a powerful ship surging forward—but anchored fast.”<sup>13</sup> Braun then goes on to say: “The forward surge was apparent in Missouri’s increased willingness to cooperate with the National Council bodies and in its acceptance of a joint

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fellowship”. Braun also notes an indirect, but no less insidious cause of unionism in Missouri’s almost worldly desire to join the mainstream of American Christianity.

<sup>13</sup>Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 192.

Missouri-ALC doctrinal statement. Missouri's chief anchor was the Wisconsin Synod."<sup>14</sup> When this "chief anchor" was severed in August of 1961, nothing would hold down Missouri from getting swept away by the ecumenical current.

Since the spirit of ecumenism or unionism establishes union by setting aside the Word of God, such a spirit brings about anything but a healthy, God-pleasing union. On the contrary, such a spirit brings about a malaise of division and turmoil everywhere it goes. The strife of war is bound to come, as shown by Wisconsin's break from Missouri in 1961 and by St. Paul's withdrawal from Missouri a decade later. Unionism forces the faithful adherents of God's Word to take their stand against false doctrine, ultimately by separating themselves from this gangrene. As a judgment on falsehood, the faithful depart leaving behind a greater percentage of errorists. Sadly, when one looks back at the Missouri of the mid-twentieth century, one sees the faltering steps of a once faithful and staunchly confessional synod; one beholds a synod in peril.

## **II. St. Paul's, North Hollywood, Takes Her Stand.**

### *The healthy sign of war*

As the Lord faithfully preserved a small remnant within the majority of apostate Israel, so he preserved a faithful remnant in an increasingly unfaithful Missouri. As long as spiritual life exists, the love for God, his Word, and human souls will rouse the faithful to sound the alarm and fight against unsound teaching. In a church body like Missouri this healthy sign of spiritual life manifests itself in the eruption of civil war. Missouri's civil war became visible in 1940, when the two opposing sides rallied around their respective publications.

The *American Lutheran*, published since 1918, represented the liberal side, which stood

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*



in full support of union with the ALC. The *AL* tended to overlook doctrinal differences between the synods and to trivialize doctrinal matters. It branded those who opposed the perilous union with the ALC as uncharitable legalists steeped in traditionalism and it blamed them for causing a rift in the church. By its very name, the *Confessional Lutheran*, first published in 1940, made known the side it represented. “Its masthead proclaimed: ‘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 the same judgment’ (1 Corinthians 10:14).”<sup>15</sup> “The monthly magazine was unequivocally opposed to union with the ALC.”<sup>16</sup> And so, “The *Confessional Lutheran* became the vehicle for conservative, largely Midwestern Missourians who opposed fellowship with other Lutherans unless founded upon their complete acceptance of the *Brief Statement*.”<sup>17</sup> In a relatively short period of time, the *CL* enjoyed a widespread subscription.<sup>18</sup> Missouri’s civil war had begun in earnest and was widespread. Thank God for that!

#### *Along the North Hollywood front (1970-1971)*

Doctrinal battles exemplified by Missouri’s civil war are never anything less than wars over truth waged for the sake of the immortal human soul. In Ephesians 6 Paul reminds

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, 165.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, 166.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, 167. The *Brief Statement* was a confessional treatise primarily authored by Missouri’s chief theologian, Franz Pieper, and published by Missouri in 1932. The *Brief Statement* clarified its doctrinal stance, especially with regards to election. For those outside Missouri the *Brief Statement* has come to represent the last great doctrinal stand taken by Missouri. For the confessional-minded in Missouri it likewise became “the touchstone of orthodoxy and the symbol of authority.” (Nelson, Clifford, E, “The New Shape of Lutheranism 1930–”, *The Lutherans in North America*, ed. Clifford Nelson, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 464.)

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, 165. Braun cites a *CL* article entitled “Who Subscribes to the ‘Confessional Lutheran’?” in which he notes that within seven years the *CL* had over a thousand subscribers in over 46 states.

Christians how spiritual warfare is unlike any earthly war,<sup>19</sup> and yet it is like every other war. There are winners and losers, even if one cannot always tell them apart. There are heroes and casualties, even if no shots are fired or blood is spilt. Any and every war waged for doctrinal purity comes with a high cost but an even greater reward. The following is the account of what took place along the North Hollywood, California front.

Since her founding on November 19, 1928, St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood, has sat nestled on the northeastern side of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. In 1947 St. Paul's opened the doors of a Christian day school and in 1955, a monumental gothic-style sanctuary replaced the one commonly referred to by those in the community as the "little white church". As it did on the day of its dedication, St. Paul's grand sanctuary stands east-west on the corner of Tujunga and McCormick, with her imposing double steeples, roof top cross, and main doors facing west. By 1970, St. Paul's had officially existed as a congregation for forty-two years. In that time God had blessed St. Paul's with the kind of growth that enabled her to make substantial inroads into her community with the gospel and to become a voice for confessional Christians in the area.<sup>20</sup>

While many things about St. Paul's changed over time, clearly the most important thing remained the same. Since its founding as a preaching station, St. Paul's "pastors and members have contended for conformity with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in doctrine and practice. They refused to be drawn into ecumenical compromise with either

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<sup>19</sup> In Eph. 6:12 Paul reveals who a Christian's true enemies are, when he says, "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

<sup>20</sup>At its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary service on November 8, 1953, the service folder noted that there were 14 worshipers in 1928 and 1100 in 1953. As noted in "A Celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Paul's First Lutheran Church." *PowerPoint Presentation held at St. Paul's, November 16, 2003.*

outspoken liberals...or the more subtle moderates who mutilate that Saving Truth with unScriptural teachings.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, from “the time of its first called pastor, The Rev. H.W. Schmidt, the congregation has had a vital concern that the Gospel be preached in all its truth and purity. Some still remember the warnings of Pastor Schmidt in the 30's when he expressed a serious concern about the future of the LCMS if ‘present trends’ continued.”<sup>22</sup> The last statement not only proved to be remarkably prophetic, it demonstrates how Missouri did not—as some imagine—suddenly experience a doctrinal tailspin in the 50's and 60's. Rather, Missouri had suffered a gradual decline in its doctrinal fortitude, as one compromise slowly but inevitably led to another.

“The congregation’s second pastor, The Rev. Alvin E. Wagner, not only offered a faithful witness to the ‘sound words’ of the Gospel” in his daily ministry, but *Sola Scriptura* also noted how he had served on Missouri’s Commission of Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) for a critical seven year period (1965-71). There “he was a proponent of sound doctrine, true ecumenism, and the objective reliability of the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>23</sup> Pastor Wagner had served St. Paul’s faithfully from 1947 to 1971, and “under his leadership, St. Paul’s hosted many a meeting for those who were troubled in heart and conscience at the doctrinal deterioration so obvious in the LCMS.”<sup>24</sup>

Pastor Wagner not only ensured that St. Paul’s remained orthodox during his ministry,

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<sup>21</sup>“Churches of FAL: Authentic Lutheranism in North Hollywood.” *Sola Scriptura*, 3 (May - June 1973), 16.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, 17.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*. *Sola Scriptura* noted that Pres. J.A.O. Preus, his brother Robert, and Dr. John Warwick Montgomery were among the speakers invited to these meetings.

but also labored hard to ensure that St. Paul's remained so after his departure. For instance, he was the key figure in bringing about *Sola Scriptura*, a "bi-monthly magazine (dealing with specific Doctrinal (sic) issues in a positive, clear and theological manner)," and was instrumental in helping bring about the free association of churches known as the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL).<sup>25</sup> Under his guidance, the Church Council passed a strategic motion that first of all gave St. Paul's members a voice for their confessional stance; secondly, helped support the aforementioned confessional projects, and thirdly loosened the ties with Missouri. This motion would help smooth the transition after the break with Missouri. In the April Voters' Meeting, the chairman of the Board of Finance "informed the body that various members wish to have their contributions stay within St. Paul's and not be used in support of Synod" for matters of conscience.<sup>26</sup> The motion was made and carried to set up a special "protest" fund, titled "The Congregational Outreach Fund" in the May Voter's Assembly. The fund enabled the members of St. Paul's to "protest Synod's actions" of unionism by withholding their contributions normally designated for Synod. The monies in this fund instead went for the publication of *Sola Scriptura* and the support of FAL.<sup>27</sup>

The witness St. Paul's gave by its confessional position also speaks volumes of Pastor Wagner's influence on the people. In a sermon quoted in *Sola Scriptura*, he could say with joyful confidence:

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<sup>25</sup>FAL was an *association* (it had too loose of an organizational structure to be called a synod) of confessional churches that left Missouri in protest over the synod's doctrinal aberrations. It became a kind of interim synod for St. Paul's, after leaving Missouri and heading to the WELS. The final section of this thesis gives a brief overview of the formation of FAL. *Official Minutes: Voters' Assembly, May 12, 1970.*

<sup>26</sup>*Official Minutes: Voter's Meeting, April 14, 1970.*

<sup>27</sup>Incidentally, St. Paul's synodical pledge in 1970 was \$14,000. They voted to lower the pledge by \$4000 and redistribute the monies into the "Congregational Outreach Fund." Such a substantial decrease for the times made this a "loud" protest to Synod. *Official Minutes: Voter's Assembly, May 12, 1970.*

No minor role has this congregation played. Its witness has been given with clear decisive trumpet sounds that have been heard throughout the length and breadth of Synod. In many dramatic ways it has alerted its beloved sister congregations to the theological poisons that are being needled into the veins of their synodical seminaries, colleges, publications and ministerium.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Pastor Wagner guided St. Paul's in calling an associate and successor of the same orthodox stripe as he.<sup>29</sup> So, on April 26, 1970 it "was moved, seconded and carried 'to make the vote cast for Harry W. Marks unanimous."<sup>30</sup> St. Paul's now extended its second call to its third pastor, Pastor Harry W. Marks, serving at the time in Bishop, California.

Harry Marks was born on March 23, 1934 in Moorhead, Minnesota. In 1942, at the age of eight, he moved to Southern California with his parents and sister. His parents were strict Missourians, but often found themselves too busy to take him and his sister to church, due to the demands of their business ventures. He recalls how he and his sister would have to travel by bus and streetcar to get to church.<sup>31</sup> The pastor of his home congregation recognized young Harry's gifts and planted in him the seed for the ministry. The ministry is where he would end up, but not before taking a detour.

Shortly after high school, he volunteered for the draft rather than take a college deferment. He served in the army artillery for two years. The contact he had with men of other faiths forced him to re-examine and prize his own orthodox faith. As his faith grew, so did the

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<sup>28</sup> *Sola Scriptura*, (May-June, 1973), 17.

<sup>29</sup> The call to Pastor Marks shows the influence Pastor Wagner had on the people. In the brief bio of the three candidates on the call list, the District President favored the calling of Pastor Merlin C. Meyer. The DP noted that "a move at this time would be to his advantage." The Board of Elders took the District President's advice and openly recommended the calling of Pastor Meyer. However, when the final vote was cast, Pastor Marks received 30 votes to Pastor Meyer's 27. St. Paul's subsequently issued its second call to Pastor Marks.

<sup>30</sup> *Official Minutes: Special Voter's Meeting*, April 26, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Harry W. Marks, interview by author, 22 November, 2003, Milwaukee, WI, telephone. (Hereafter cites as

seed for the ministry. And so, he decided to see if it would be possible to enter one of the seminaries with his vocational architecture high school education. That, however, proved to be more difficult than he thought. Concordia, St. Louis, required the prerequisite of four years at Fort Wayne; Valparaiso did not have a preministerial program, and Concordia, Oakland, did not want former military students mixing with the student body. In a last ditch effort, he contacted the small but conservative seminary of Concordia Springfield. After some delay he was admitted to join a class of some 60 freshmen, most of whom were veterans.<sup>32</sup>

Pastor Marks did his vicarage in Seattle and in 1962 received his first full-time call to a mission congregation in Pawling, New York. His first call proved especially difficult due to the strained relations with the leaders in his district. He described the Atlantic District of Missouri as liberal and with several pastors who were high-church to the extreme.<sup>33</sup> The little mission he served had a surprisingly high number of lodge members in attendance. When he tried to rectify the situation, the District opposed him. They told him to receive members on the basis of Baptism and “some semblance of a confession of faith”.<sup>34</sup> Pastor Marks refused, and after only two years in New York, he not surprisingly received and took a call to the English District in a suburb of Chicago. He served this congregation as Minister of Evangelism from 1964-67. In his view, this District held even less of a confessional stand than the one he had just left. According to Pastor Marks, the concept of church discipline had all but evaporated and he was “deeply

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*Marks' Interview).*

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

troubled by what he saw".<sup>35</sup>

In 1967 he received and accepted his third call. This one took him to Bishop, California.<sup>36</sup> The Lord had led Pastor Marks literally coast to coast. However, the move to Bishop brought about for him the most pleasant of changes. He had finally arrived at a doctrinally solid church and District.<sup>37</sup> In fact, while he served in Bishop, a handful of congregations in California joined to form the Californians for Authentic Lutheranism (CAL)<sup>38</sup>. As the 1970's came around, the battle for orthodox Lutheranism in California was well under way.

At St. Paul's the 1970's marked both the beginning and ending of an era. In 1970 Pastor Wagner entered his penultimate year as the shepherd of St. Paul's. In addition to his role as pastor of this sizeable congregation, he had for some time assumed the role of a confessional leader for Missouri at large.<sup>39</sup> He was also spearheading the plans to publish and edit the bi-monthly journal *Sola Scriptura* later that year. *Sola Scriptura* aimed at promoting confessional Lutheranism in California, while at the same time denouncing Missouri's unionism.<sup>40</sup> At this

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<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Bishop is a relatively small town located in the Owens Valley on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mts. Bishop enjoys close proximity to Mt. Whitney, Mammoth Mt. Lake, Yosemite National Park, and Death Valley.

<sup>37</sup>*Marks' interview.* It's interesting to note that often the outlying areas of Midwestern synods tend to lead the doctrinal slides. However, Pastor Marks spoke of Missouri's Southern California District as an orthodox district at the time he accepted the call to serve Bishop. However, as Missouri continued to pursue fellowship with the ALC in the 60's, this District also experienced a doctrinal decline. With sadness, he remarked how he saw the District change right before his eyes.

<sup>38</sup>CAL was comprised of eight California congregations: Bell Gardens, Fallbrook, St. Paul's North Hollywood, Escondido, Camarillo, Messiah North Hollywood, Vallejo, and Bishop. CAL would become the precursor for FAL (Federation for Authentic Lutheranism).

<sup>39</sup>As mentioned in *Sola Scriptura* (see footnote 24), he had been a member of Missouri's Commission of Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) since 1965.

<sup>40</sup>Originally, Herman Otten of Missouri took care of printing *Sola Scriptura*. After the break, the printing moved to the west coast where St. Paul's took charge of its printing. *Marks' interview.*

critical time, Pastor Wagner and the people of St. Paul's felt the urgency to call another orthodox and capable man to help in the work of promoting sound doctrine. In April 1970 St. Paul's extended its second call to Pastor Marks. He accepted. However, when he arrived on August 31, he did not expect to stand alone at the helm before the end of his first full year as pastor of St. Paul's.<sup>41</sup>

*A time to break*

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the sun... a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace”<sup>42</sup> Time is in the Lord's hands, and now the time had come for St. Paul's to stand up and be counted. The days and months leading up to Missouri's Synod convention, slated for July 15, 1971 in Milwaukee, revealed no change of direction in Missouri's drive toward fellowship with the ALC<sup>43</sup>. Both shepherds of St. Paul's knew what would have to take place: secession from Synod.

Only one cliché appropriately captures the idea of secession: “easier said than done.” 1971 was a time of high tensions, and tensions in the church ran high. The mix of high stress and low patience often makes a perfect recipe for meltdown. By way of example, Pastor Marks related an anecdotal and rather bizarre account of just such a meltdown. Apparently, the pastor of

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<sup>41</sup>When Pastor Marks arrived at St. Paul's, he said that he knew two things: 1) St. Paul's would almost certainly have to go through with their expressed willingness to break from Missouri and 2) Pastor Wagner was fast approaching retirement age. He asked Pastor Wagner to stay through the transition after the break, but it was not to be. *Marks' interview.*

<sup>42</sup> Eccl. 3:1, 6-8.

<sup>43</sup> This ALC differs from the one formed in 1930. This American Lutheran Church Synod was formed in 1960 in the merger of the first American Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church.



one of the California congregations failed to inform his new members of the problems with Synod and of the congregation's decision to leave. Not surprisingly, the lack of effort in getting people on the same page caused the congregation to polarize. At the council meeting, where they were to make the decision to secede, tensions ran so high that one man had a heart attack in the middle of the meeting. The other council members called an ambulance, picked the man up, carried him outside, laid him down on the ground, and then went back inside to continue the meeting!<sup>44</sup>

At St. Paul's, emotional conflagrations of such a kind were averted because both pastors worked diligently to inform and clarify the issues for the members. Still, St. Paul's experienced a goodly amount of inner turmoil. Much of it came from the fact that the thirty-five foot distance between the church and school was actually a mile-wide canyon. A substantial rift had for some time separated the church from the school, and neither of the two happened to be on the same page on this most critical issue, at this most critical time. By the spring of 1971, the church had largely shared a desire to leave synod for doctrinal reasons. The school, however, did not agree with the church's position and continued to support the synod. Many teachers' meetings were held at the time to deal with the problems and make sure everyone got on board. Many did. Sadly, one of the key figures did not. The principal, Mr. Eugene Straub, felt very strongly against withdrawing from Synod and resigned his call, as a result. In his resignation letter to the congregation, dated May 25, 1971 he said:

It is vital to the total mission of a church that the pastor, teachers, elders, and members be in harmony on doctrine and practice. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod was the tool used to bring me to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as my personal Savior...My heart is still with the synod. I do not feel ready to deny

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<sup>44</sup> *Marks' Interview.* Pastor Marks, who was at the meeting, noted that he stayed outside to minister to the man and his wife until the ambulance arrived. The man, by the way, did survive.

it. The course of action outlined by the pastors concludes that St. Paul's First Lutheran Church will withdraw from the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod after the Milwaukee convention. This decision has not been an easy one to make. But we just were not united on our viewpoint of synod and how to handle this problem...I resign my call to St. Paul's First Lutheran Church.<sup>45</sup>

Opposition also came from the local media when St. Paul's took its stand and separated from Missouri. John Dart, a reporter for the L.A. Times, publicly lambasted St. Paul's for taking such a hard-line position by withdrawing from Missouri. That the world should take offense in this case comes as no surprise. However, the cut runs deepest when opposition comes from one's brothers in the Lord. It was noted earlier how the Southern California District held a generally solid doctrinal position. The operative word, of course, was "generally." The District President at this time happened to lean very strongly to the left. This meant, of course, that the willingness to compromise on fellowship and join the ALC would gain momentum, and not fizzle out. Pastor Marks "commented that it appeared as if the local district administration was willing to join and have united (sic) with other Synods at any cost or compromise."<sup>46</sup>

St. Paul's and the other confessional California churches found themselves on the outs with the leftist leaders in the district. As it does today, liberalism viewed Authentic Lutheranism as a kind of antiquated anachronism, particularly out of place in a Hollywood setting. *Sola Scriptura* describes how soon after St. Paul's had settled in the area, the liberal branches of Lutheranism represented by the ALC and LCA "sent in missionaries to compete with and scoff at its authentically Lutheran stance."<sup>47</sup> St. Paul's "was soon heckled by so-called *fellow* Lutherans"

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<sup>45</sup> Letter by Eugene C. Straub, May 25, 1971. Pastor Marks did not refute Mr. Straub's convictions in this matter. However, he did note that Mr. Straub was, at the time, under review by the School Board for making numerous and rather egregious errors in judgment. "Perhaps", said Pastor Marks, "this was an easy way out for him."

<sup>46</sup> *Official Minute: Voters' Meeting*. April, 13, 1971.

<sup>47</sup> "Churches of FAL: Authentic Lutheranism in North Hollywood." *Sola Scriptura*, 3 (May - June 1973),

for its “authentically Lutheran stance.”<sup>48</sup> Because the liberal wing in Missouri no doubt sympathized with and shared many of the same views as those in the LCA and ALC, St. Paul’s was essentially being “heckled” by those inside and outside its fellowship.

On February 9, 1971 at 6:01 am Pacific Standard Time, an earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale ripped through the San Fernando Valley. When all was said and done, the earthquake caused over \$500 million dollars worth of damage. St. Paul’s church survived, though it did not come away unscathed from nature’s fury. The edifice sustained external damage evidenced by cracks and its downed roof top cross. Over all, the earthquake did not have long lasting physical impacts on the church building.<sup>49</sup> Poetically, the earthquake stands as a perfect and enduring symbol of the spiritual rumblings taking place in the life of this church. Shockwaves of internal tensions and external opposition would continue to ripple up to and beyond the time of St. Paul’s withdrawal from Missouri.

Other factors, besides the spiritual and emotional warring, made secession a very unattractive proposition. 1971 was turning out to be a year of financial hardship for St. Paul’s. Mr. Bob Oetting, from the board of finance, forecast that the church was “running a projected \$10,000 deficit through the end of the year.”<sup>50</sup> \$10,000 is a sizeable deficit to carry even by today’s standards, and much more so in 1971. Furthermore, a continued financial deficit was the least of the church’s problems in the scenario of a break with Missouri. Should it decide to

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Official Minutes of Regular Voters’ Meeting*. April 13, 1971. Already by this voters’ meeting, the Trustees reported that the “church properties have been inspected and all earthquake damage of an immediate nature has been repaired.”

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

secede from Synod, St. Paul's would face a veritable financial deathblow!

Many church constitutions included reversionary clauses, giving the synod legal claim to the property in the event of a break. In fact, nearly every congregation that chose to secede lost its property as the synod appealed to these reversionary clauses. To its great dismay St. Paul's had just such a stipulation in its constitution. Pastor Marks worked with the Elders to excise the reversionary clause, before making the decision to break. However, a four-year statute of limitations hung over the reversionary clause. This left a four-year window open for Synod to appeal the stricken clause. All St. Paul's would be able to do during this time is "hold our breath and pray."<sup>51</sup> The prayer was answered. After St. Paul's broke with Missouri, Missouri never attempted to seize the property. Pastor Marks described it as nothing short of a miracle. Why would Missouri not claim this prime piece of real estate, when it had claimed everyone else's? No one ever knew and no one ever bothered to ask.

Perhaps the greatest piece of symbolism occasioned by the earthquake came in what did *not* fall. To this day a magnificent and well-anchored marble crucifix stands over the altar at St. Paul's. On the morning of February 9<sup>th</sup> the earth shook but the cross remained firmly in place. We are left with an uncanny symbol of how this congregation's conviction to the truth remained firmly in place in the midst of all kinds of rumblings. Without a doubt the break with Synod would not and did not prove easy; secession never is. But the clear and simple truth had come down to this: Missouri Synod had denied the undeniable call to remain faithful to the Word of God at all costs. St. Paul's could not abide that position and remain true to that call. Therefore, quite simply the time had come for St. Paul's to stand up and be counted.

"All members were again urged to participate in the forthcoming lectures, and to come to

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<sup>51</sup> *Marks' interview.*

a personal understanding of the Truth as presented in Holy Scripture.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps this statement best summarizes the plan to prepare the members for the break. Both pastors worked hard to inform and fortify the people with the truth, and clarify the issues in question through Bible Study, special lectures, and publications such as *Sola Scriptura*. Slow, patient, and clear instruction was the order of the day. Pastors Wagner and Marks devoted considerable time and energy over the two-year period from 1970 to 71 to careful instruction. Over this time, they held repeated meetings with the congregation, Voters’ assembly, and school faculty. About the only place they refrained from speaking openly about all the happenings was in the pulpit. Besides, the sense of “overkill”, the pulpit by its very nature did not give people the opportunity for discussion or provide the needed context on a controversial subject.

One of the most effective ways the pastors and lay leaders informed the body at large was by examining the faulty doctrine in the synodical Sunday school materials. They laid these materials out for the people to peruse and compare the false doctrine with the true. This method proved effective because the simplicity of the Sunday-School materials enabled anyone to see and examine Missouri’s teachings from the practical side. The *Mission Life* series, in particular, made the outrageous and eye-opening claim that many left-wing leaders and politicians were to be regarded as modern day prophets.<sup>53</sup>

On March 7, 1971 a special Voters’ Meeting was called to order. At this meeting the voters discussed and made their final emendations to the memorials for the Synod Convention in July of that year. St. Paul’s stood atop the ramparts and sounded its trumpet call for Missouri’s repentance one final time. The first memorial directly attacked Missouri’s adoption of resolution

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<sup>52</sup> *Official Minutes: Voters’ Assembly*. January 12, 1971.

<sup>53</sup> *Marks’ interview*.

3-15 in the Denver Synod Convention of 1969, in which Missouri declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC. St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood resolved,

That...the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod recognize that it cannot embrace the American Lutheran Church in unionistic fellowship on one side and expect to continue in fellowship with St. Paul's...on the other side, which reject and are in protest against Resolution 3-15...and be it further resolved, that St. Paul's-First Lutheran Church herewith states unequivocally that it cannot settle for a false fellowship which embraces Articles II, III, and IV of Synod's Constitution in theory only while it embraces church bodies with which no unanimity of doctrine and practice has been achieved; and be it further resolved, that St. Paul's...request Synod to repeal Resolution 3-15 and to sever all fellowship arrangements with the American Lutheran Church until true and God-pleasing unity of faith and practice has been achieved.

The second memorial called for Missouri to break from the Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA)<sup>54</sup>. The organization known as the LCUSA had a social emphasis in its mission and was “involving our beloved Missouri Synod in highly debatable social, political, and nonreligious issues that do not represent the thinking of all our congregations...LCUSA is (also) carrying out a semi clandestine series of doctrinal discussions that are not open to the entire constituency of our beloved Synod.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the LCUSA was being partially funded by Missouri Synod Mission offerings and a certain number of its officials continued to defend a document that had openly denied the deity and vicarious atonement of Christ.

The third memorial called for the public recantation or discipline of those who signed the gospel-reductionist document known as “A Call to Openness and Trust.” This document essentially picked out the gospel of Christ from the Bible, set it aside Scripture, and made the

<sup>54</sup> In 1917 several Synods concerned about the spiritual well-being of soldiers in WWI organized themselves into what became known as the National Lutheran Commission. Until 1967 Missouri had refrained from joining this ecumenical organization. However, by the 1960's Missouri was actively engaged in dialogues with the various NLC Synods, and in 1967 joined them to form what became known as the LCUSA.

<sup>55</sup> *Memorial of the Special Voters' Assembly*. March 7, 1971.

gospel the sole basis for fellowship. This enabled Missouri Christians to embrace in fellowship those who otherwise denied just about every other doctrine in Scripture. The final memorial called on Missouri to disavow and rescind its Mission Affirmations adopted in the Detroit Convention of 1965, which among other things included a gospel reductionism. The Mission Affirmations completely blurred the sense of the Great Commission by turning what the Lord had designated a spiritual mission into a social one. “More and more denominational Boards under the aegis of the World Council of Churches are interpreting the Church’s Mission in terms of ‘humanization’ i.e. the promotion of humanitarian economic, medical, educational...efforts as contemporary forms of Christian missions that render the actual proclamation and verbalization of the Gospel unnecessary.”<sup>56</sup>

The final document presented on that day was “A Call to Loyalty to our Savior Jesus Christ and Unity in the Written Word.”<sup>57</sup> In undeniable and unmistakable terms this document made Scripture, and the Lutheran Confessions, which correctly expressed and expounded the Word of God, the sole basis for Christian unity. The document also publicly declared St. Paul’s state of confessional protest (*in statu confessionis*) against Missouri, and the document made clear that should Missouri fail to heed the actions expressed in the memorials, St. Paul’s would in fact withdraw its membership from the synod. “Pastor Marks then closed the meeting and included a petition that all present pray earnestly for guidance form Our Heavenly Father in these critical and crucial months ahead.”<sup>58</sup>

On July 15, 1971 the Missouri Synod gathered for its biennial Convention in Milwaukee, WI. At a gathering in a church nearby the convention Pastor Marks preached a sermon in which

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* See Addenda, 34 for “A Call to Loyalty to Our Savior Jesus Christ and Unity in the Written Word.”

he called for faithful Missourians to leave the synod if the synod failed to return to orthodoxy. Pastor Wagner presented a paper calling for the same action. Not surprisingly a furious opposition broke out. What came as a surprise, however, was to see conservatives not liberals leading the opposition! The liberals, who were well informed on the issues, had by this time grown so hard and cold to the calls for repentance that they actually looked forward to a conservative exodus with child-like anticipation. The liberals viewed this convention as a type of fat trimming, in which they could say “good riddance” to the wailings of a backward thinking minority. Pastor Marks even remarked how the liberals spoke to him and Pastor Wagner with open cordialness.

However, the conservatives who did not want to leave the synod felt conflicted, and perhaps even conscience-struck and embarrassed at their lack of intestinal fortitude in the matter. They knew that the liberals had made a doctrinal shambles of this once honorable Synod. Yet somehow, they wanted to believe that one day a conservative swell would eventually turn the tide in Missouri. The history of the General Council<sup>59</sup> has shown the delusion of this romantic rationale. Certainly, no Nineveh-like conversion or confessional renaissance would take place in Milwaukee. In fact, after the meeting, Pastors Marks and Wagner had to be escorted out of the building for their physical safety.<sup>60</sup> Everything that happened at that July Convention

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> In 1867 several Midwestern Synods united to form a joint synod called the General Council. The GC had taken more of a confessional stand than its predecessor synod, the General Synod. However, the GC did not require complete doctrinal unity in order to join. The founders of the GC worked with the principal of osmosis, when it came to confessionalism. They felt that the non-confessional minded men would catch orthodoxy through contact with those who held a confessional stance. However, Scripture teaches and history shows that tolerating error in the hopes of sound doctrine eventually winning out never works. Error always acts like a virus that ends up infecting, permeating, and finally weakening the confessionally sound position of a faithful church body. For more on the General Council see E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, “Following the Frontier: 1840-75,” 230-238.

<sup>60</sup> *Marks' interview.*



represented how the majority of the synod was handling the situation. Surely, the time had come to break.

The moment of truth for St. Paul's arrived one month later on Sunday, August 15, 1971. On that day Pastors Wagner and Marks walked out of the office together for the Voters' Assembly. They only discussed what they would do in the event of a 50/50 vote. They would table the motion and discuss it further. "Pastor Marks opened the meeting with a prayer and a statement to the assembly and congregation concerning a resolution to terminate our relationship with LC-MS...Pastor Marks made a presentation of the background of events leading to our resolution to sever from LC-MS..."<sup>61</sup> The members of the assembly adopted the resolution to sever from Missouri, and the floor opened for discussion. The main discussions centered on the issues of teacher acquisitions and the effects on called worker pensions. Still, as emotionally charged as the meeting was, everyone, including the dissenters handled it well. No one broke out into a tirade because the pastors and lay leaders had fielded and answered all the questions well.<sup>62</sup> The congregation clearly trusted the pastoral leadership, and it showed in the decorum of the meeting. The resolution read:

Whereas our congregation has repeatedly spoken to the LC-MS in matters of doctrinal concern, and whereas our witness to the truth of God's Word and God's demand for doctrinal purity has not been heeded...therefore be it resolved that we of St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ terminate our relationship with the LC-MS on Reformation Day, October 31, 1971, and be it further resolved that we officially join the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism on All Saints Day, November 1, 1971, and be it finally resolved that *we take this action as a witness to our love for the pure Gospel of*

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<sup>61</sup> *Official Minutes: Special Voters' Meeting.* August, 15, 1971.

<sup>62</sup> *Marks' Interview.*

*God's love in Jesus Christ and obedience to His Written Word. Soli Deo Gloria.*<sup>63</sup>

The final vote came out 58 in favor and 4 against. "Pastor Wagner gave a closing statement and prayer. The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 p.m. with a hymn." This was the last pastoral act Alvin Wagner carried out as pastor of St. Paul's. He had retired from the full-time ministry and taken a retirement call to serve a congregation in Ventura, CA.

By this time St. Paul's had already made contact with both the ELS and WELS. St. Paul's came to the WELS with its need for teachers, and the WELS responded accordingly. Over the next few months St. Paul's "dotted the 'Is' and crossed the 'Ts'" of the break. They officially severed all financial support to Missouri's ministry. An official letter of explanation went out to President J.A.O. Preus, indicating St. Paul's disagreement with Synod's doctrinal and confessional position. By the November 11<sup>th</sup> voters' meeting, St. Paul's had granted all the requests for release from membership. At that meeting the voters also adopted the resolution to establish altar and pulpit fellowship with the WELS and ELS.<sup>64</sup> Yes, this was the time to break.

### III. St. Paul's Comes to the WELS

*New beginnings (1972-1975)*

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.'... What a joy it is to hear these words after experiencing the year which has just passed... a year filled with much soul searching, much anxiety and considerable earnest prayer over the problems of the Church. By the grace of God we took the action demanded of us by the Word of God in that year when we separated ourselves (sic) from the LC-MS. Such action was by no means easy. But when has being a faithful Christian ever been easy... There is much work ahead of us this year. There will be many opportunities to preach the Word in

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<sup>63</sup> *Proposed Resolution About St. Paul's Relationship to LC-MS.* August, 15, 1971. Emphasis added. See Addenda, 35 for the complete resolution.

<sup>64</sup> See Addenda, 36 for the attached resolution.

season and out of season. There will be many requests to give reason for the hope that is within us. There will be many challenges set before us. In Christ let us arise and shine!<sup>65</sup>

1972 was a year of new beginnings for St. Paul's. The congregation entered the new year with the optimism and joy that one might experience by exiting a long, dark tunnel and getting to see the warm light once again. The conscience testifies that the greatest burden is never doing what God expects but failing to do what he demands. For several years St. Paul's was forced to co-carry the burden of their synod's faithlessness to God's Word. By severing its ties to Missouri, St. Paul's dropped that weight, and could now breathe a sigh of joyous relief in the freedom of doing what was right. 1972 also marked a time in the ministry for rolling up one's sleeves and getting back to the business of "just being pastors."<sup>66</sup> Pastor Marks noted how the enormous burdens of the previous two years had overshadowed some of the other important pastoral duties. The New Year also ushered in a new beginning for St. Paul's under the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL).

St. Paul's had officially joined FAL as a charter member two months earlier on November 1, 1971. In hindsight, Pastor Marks commented on how it would have probably worked to everyone's advantage had St. Paul's simply joined the ELS or WELS after its break with Missouri. However, coming into FAL was a natural move because St. Paul's already had helped charter the California version and precursor of FAL, known as CAL, the Californians for Authentic Lutheranism. Both Pastors Wagner and Marks helped spearhead this free association of churches in California who had been disenfranchised by Missouri's increasing waywardness.

During the late 1960's, when Missouri was in full throttle on its course toward unionism,

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<sup>65</sup> *Sola Scriptura*. (Jan-Feb. 1972), 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Marks interview*.

the CAL churches began talks with other groups of confessional churches, especially in Missouri's Northern Illinois District. When Missouri adopted Resolution 3-15, declaring altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC, in the Denver Synod Convention of 1969, all of these churches made a joint protest against Missouri's unionism with "The Ecumenical Declaration". CAL and Missouri's other confessional churches rallied around this document in an effort to call Missouri to repent and return toward the biblical stance on fellowship. This joint protest eventually gave birth to FAL on November 1, 1971. *Sola Scriptura*, the bi-monthly journal begun by Pastor Wagner, became FAL's official publication.<sup>67</sup>

#### *Dissolution and Merger (1975)*

From the first the future of FAL looked dim. The organization had too inefficient a structure to effectively carry out the main work of a synod in worker training, missions, and publications. Far too much administrative work lay in the hands of already busy full time pastors. As a result the administration suffered badly. St. Paul's actually ended up impounding monies set aside for FAL, after Pastor Marks recognized that FAL was using trust money for current expenses. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the secession from Missouri, FAL had to deal with the whole matter of *in statu confessionis*, "a state of official protest", taken by many churches in light of Missouri's Resolution 3-15 of 1969. St. Paul's would get tangled up in a somewhat enigmatic controversy with some of the other FAL leadership.

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<sup>67</sup> After the break with Missouri, St. Paul's began to print *Sola Scriptura*. However, the printing was jobbed out because the volume was too great. One of the issues was sent to every LCMS pastor, including the Brazil District, and many in Germany and Scandinavia also held subscriptions. FAL had given St. Paul's permission to purchase a large Heidelberg press, but St. Paul's never made the purchase since FAL never determined with clarity how much printing it planned to do. "Granted we wore out three small offset presses at St. Paul's; but this was on a FAL *inter nos* entitled *Letter to the Churches*. We also printed tracts, did letterheads for the small congregations, and did the printing for the annual conventions." *Marks' Interview*.

Two of the greatest difficulties in applying the principals of church fellowship come in knowing *how* to give an adequate confession to the truth, while demonstrating loving patience with an erring Christian, and knowing *when* to make a decisive move to sever ties. The history of Wisconsin's break with Missouri has the scars to show the difficulty in making these decisions. Many in the synod felt Wisconsin took too long to break, others not long enough. At any rate, many have looked to the actions of the Lutheran Church Fathers to guide them in their application of fellowship principals. In the Formula of Concord, Article X, dealing with matters of *adiaphora* (things neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture), the framers rejected and condemned as false the teaching that "in a time of persecution [when a clear confession is required] we may yield to the enemies of the Gospel in such *adiaphora* and ceremonies, or may come to an agreement with them (which causes injury to the truth)."<sup>68</sup> In other words, at a time when a clear confession needs sounding nothing remains an *adiaphora*. Things that would otherwise be free to do or leave undone, become matters of one's confession. This is what lies at the heart of *in statu confessionis*.

Regarding the matter under discussion, a Christian's membership to a particular parish or synod is *per se* an *adiaphora*, given the fidelity of that church body to the Word of God. However, should the church body go doctrinally astray, one's membership—an otherwise free matter—suddenly becomes a matter of confession. The Christian, ever bound by the Word of God, will publicly protest the error in some way. *Sola Scriptura* comments:

Thus the Formula of Concord...provides a sample of the first action to be taken when one's own church body persists in concessions and teaching that are contrary to the Word of God and endangering the Gospel. That step is to declare oneself publicly in protest to those deviations and unable for doctrinal, confessional reasons to practice fellowship with those who advocate and

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<sup>68</sup> F.O.C. Art. X: Epitome, Antithesis 3, *Triglotta*, 831.

subscribe to these aberrations. In that way the *Status Confessionis* becomes the form of selective fellowship authorized by the Lutheran confessions, specifically the Formula of Concord.<sup>69</sup>

*Sola Scriptura* furthermore made clear that on the one hand the *Status Confessionis* “is not tantamount to the breaking of fellowship.”<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, “it is only an interim procedure. It is not an attitude that can be maintained indefinitely. It does not allow one to say—I don’t like the situation but I can live with it.”<sup>71</sup> Herein *Sola Scriptura* identified and anticipated the abuse that might arise out of the selective fellowship available in the state of confessional protest. Conceivably, a Christian could use the *Status Confessionis* as a kind of washing of hands without decisive action, and therefore without a real confession of faith. The Christian could declare himself *in statu confessionis*<sup>72</sup> against his synod or church to assuage his conscience, commune with other confessional Christians, but then not sever fellowship with the erring body. Finally one’s actions will speak one’s confession the loudest.

*In statu confessionis* became the official issue over which a problem arose between St. Paul’s and FAL’s leadership. It appears that the point of contention revolved around the Biblical warrant for establishing an interim action in regards to fellowship principals. The issue of the *Status Confessionis* along with the vast administrative problems in FAL led to an enormous blow up in one of the FAL meetings held at North Hollywood in November of 1974. FAL quickly severed fellowship ties with St. Paul’s. In response to an explanation and appeal to recant FAL’s

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<sup>69</sup> *Sola Scriptura*, (Nov.-Dec., 1970), 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>72</sup> See Addenda, 37, 38.

actions in breaking fellowship with St. Paul's,<sup>73</sup> the Chairman of FAL, Pastor Kauffeld, said,

Questions of dissolution, study of dissolution, Mission outreach, Status Confessionis, elections and other matters were brought before it. Several resolutions cite the existence of completely unknown "Administrative" problems as a reason for the proposed dissolution... Then came the floor discussion. When Status Confessionis came to the floor, bedlam broke loose. That which had always been a simple and common type of Altar Fellowship practice was suddenly a complex, difficult and controversial matter... The convention voted to uphold Status Confessionis... A couple pastors jumped up and declared they would not abide by the resolution of FAL... The next morning a layman submitted a resolution suggesting that pastors not agreeing with FAL should leave. A pastor presented a resolution that those leaving should be granted peaceful releases... Letters began coming, not asking for release but terminating membership for "administrative" reasons.<sup>74</sup>

St. Paul's had recognized the dire administrative problems with FAL, and Pastor Marks had for some time seen the writing on the wall as to FAL's impending demise. As a result, St. Paul's along with several of the other CAL churches requested administrative releases from the doomed organization of FAL. They did not by this action, however, seek to break religious fellowship with the members of FAL. The chairman and perhaps several of the other leadership apparently regarded the requests for administrative releases as breaks in fellowship, due to the vehement doctrinal division over the matter of *Status Confessionis*.

Over the next several months two things occurred: 1) a thorough study of *in statu confessionis* got underway with a paper presented to both the ELS and WELS.<sup>75</sup> As a point of interest, a man by the name of Val Andrea (a WELS graduate) headed the study. Val happened

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<sup>73</sup> *Letter from St. Paul's to FAL*, February 25, 1975. St. Paul's asked two things of FAL: 1) "A complete statement of the charges against our congregation which led you to terminate altar and pulpit fellowship with our congregation. 2) "A demonstration of how we are persistent errorists worthy of the serious action which you have taken against us." In the appeal to recant St. Paul's made clear that it stood on the same doctrinal footing as it had when it joined FAL. In addition, FAL neither stated the charges nor carried out loving admonition before moving to break. For the complete appeal see Addenda, 39.

<sup>74</sup> *Letter from FAL to St. Paul's*, March 5, 1975.

<sup>75</sup> *Official Minutes: Church Council*, St. Paul's, March 3, 1975.

to be a descendent of none other than Jacob Andrea, one of the primary framers of the Formula of Concord. 2) The final dissolution of FAL and merger of its churches with ELS and WELS. In FAL's convention at Hillsboro, Oregon in April of 1975, attended by WELS President, Oscar Naumann and Professor Carl Lawrenz, the final resolution stated:

Should the congregation of the FAL approve the merger with the ELS by the required two-thirds (2/3)...and; Should the WELS assembled in its 1975 Convention approve the merger with the FAL; That the FAL will be declared dissolved at the time of the merger and all the assets and liabilities of the FAL shall become the assets and liabilities of the WELS.<sup>76</sup>

St. Paul's ceased its publication of *Sola Scriptura* in connection with the dissolution of FAL. In November of 1975 St. Paul's held one last meeting with the WELS and ELS over the matter of *in statu confessionis*. Even before its break with Missouri, St. Paul's had been holding discussions with both the ELS and WELS, and enjoyed a good working relationship with both synods. St. Paul's decided to join the WELS mainly because WELS could provide St. Paul's with its teachers. And so, in 1979 St. Paul's officially became a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>77</sup>

### In Conclusion

“...this doctrine is not our property which we might be at liberty to give away; it is God's own property which we hold in trust as stewards and which it is our duty to preserve not only to ourselves but to all Christendom, yea, to all the world, and to leave and transmit intact to remote posterity...No doubt it is a poignant disgrace to stand accused of being a heartless and uncharitable wretch, a disgrace which would fain break the heart of many a champion of God's truth, but which it was at all times and everywhere the lot of God's faithful soldiers to bear. In witness whereof our fathers say, and we with them, in the confessions of our church: 'To separate from so many men of many lands and profess a separate doctrine is a burdensome thing. But here is God's command that every man should beware of

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<sup>76</sup> *Resolution for Dissolution of FAL* as copied in a letter from FAL to St. Paul's, June 1975.

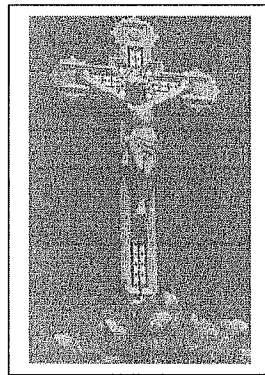
<sup>77</sup> Pastor Marks officially joined the WELS in 1978.



being agreed with those who teach false doctrine.”<sup>78</sup>

The people of St. Paul’s, North Hollywood lived out Dr. Walther’s words. Certainly the credit for them doing so does not belong to them, as it does to their faithful God and Savior. One might rightly view history as the retracing of the path God paves in time by which he leads his saints from here to glory. This gives us cause for great joy and confidence. Through Isaiah, the Lord promises that “though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed.”<sup>79</sup> We rely on him to keep his promise to keep us faithful, as he has done for the saints of all time.

And so, to him who promises more than we ever hope or imagine, we pray for his grace, his Spirit, and his strength to bear the high cost of faithfulness. We boldly ask to be found faithful witnesses to the truth out of love for the pure gospel, like the saints of St. Paul’s First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood were and are to this day. Through the faithful, few though they be, God’s Word will yet remain, and salvation and faith will be found among humankind when Christ returns.



The marble altar crucifix survived the 1971 earthquake and still stands to this day.

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<sup>78</sup>Walther, Dr. C.F.W., *Theo. Quart. J.* 1898. As quoted in *Sola Scriptura*, (May - June, 1973), 18.

<sup>79</sup>Isaiah 45:10.

**ADDENDA**

SPECIAL NOTE MEETING 3-7-71  
ATTACHMENT 5

A CALL  
to  
LOYALTY TO OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST  
and  
UNITY IN THE WRITTEN WORD

This Call is offered by some ministers and laymen of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LC-MS). As proponents of authentic Lutheranism, they wish to speak to the membership of Synod and declare their conviction:

- (1) that loyalty to Jesus Christ, our only Savior, and to His Word, given to the Apostles (John 17:8, 26), is more important to them than institutional loyalty.
- (2) that His Blessed Gospel of justification by grace through faith alone demands not "diversity in unity" but unity in the Truth and the Word of our Lord as He Himself declared in His high-wedded prayer (John 17:17, 26-28).
- (3) that the authoritative source and norm of Christian teaching is not merely the Gospel but the Holy Scripture which is clear and definitive in its God-breathed, human form.
- (4) that Holy Scripture is being compromised and the Gospel endangered by the current interpretation of our Synod's Denver Convention Resolution 3-15, which declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church.
- (5) that the agreement to decline and practice demanded by the SCRIPTURES - 1 Cor. 1:10, "that you all speak the same thing and be perfectly joined," by the LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Formula of Concord T.D. C.S., Tri. 850, A unanimous adherence to and maintenance and use of the pure doctrine."

by the CONSTITUTION OF LC-MS.

Article III-Object No. 1 of Synod: "The conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:13-6; 1 Cor. 1:10) is being destroyed and the "united defense against schism and sectarianism required by the Word of God (Rom. 16:17) is being neutralized by those who in the schools and churches of Synod are advocating a pluralistic, doctrinal position and challenging her historic understanding of what it means to be an authentic, confessional church proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ under the authority of Scripture.

Therefore,

- a. we the undersigned who are committed to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).
- b. witness and work for the restoration of authentic Confessional Lutheranism in those areas where it is lost, and
- c. believe that we are not arbitrarily free but are liberated by our Lord through the Gospel to be obedient to His Words, call upon the members of our beloved Synod to join us in the following

PUBLIC DECLARATION

A. that we are in confessional protest (in strict confessionality) to the LC-MS Denver Fellowship Resolution 3-15, and to the doctrinal determination within our Synod as evidenced in "A Call to Openness and Trust."

\* NOTE: ST. PAULS FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH, NORTH HOLLYWOOD INTERPRETS THE SENTENCE PARAPHRASE "TO DECLARE OUR INADEQUACY OF THE LC-MS. TO MEAN IT WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD."

B. that we are conscience-bound to an immediate redirection of financial support to causes which are authentically Lutheran.

C. that we are aligned in a free association with those who subscribe to these convictions and join us in doing all in our power now and at the Milwaukee Convention in 1971 to persuade the LC-MS

- 1. To rescind Resolution 3-15 of the Denver Convention.
- 2. To withdraw from the Lutheran Council in U.S.A.
- 3. To discipline those who have departed from the official doctrinal position of LC-MS.

D. If these Scriptural and Confessional requirements are not met, we are conscience-bound to declare our independence of the LC-MS and shall convene immediately after the Milwaukee Convention for appropriate unified action.

IN CONCLUSION

we declare that we are prepared to live by our convictions and invite those who share them to respond to this Call to Loyalty to our Savior Jesus Christ and Unity in the Written Word by mailing their signatures and responses to:

CALIFORNIANS FOR AUTHENTIC LUTHERANISM  
Rev. Thomas E. Dudley, Chairman  
Gerhard Clasen, Treasurer  
Jean Simpson, Secretary  
Post Office Box 11  
Fallbrook, California 92028

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Residence \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 I am signing as an individual \_\_\_\_\_ pastor \_\_\_\_\_ teacher \_\_\_\_\_ layman. I am signing in behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church of \_\_\_\_\_

PROPOSED RESOLUTION ABOUT  
ST. PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP TO LC-MS

- WHEREAS our congregation has repeatedly spoken to the LC-MS in matters of doctrinal concern, and
- WHEREAS our witness to the truth of God's Word and God's demand for doctrinal purity has not been heeded, and
- WHEREAS our LC-MS in its Milwaukee convention (July 1971) failed to take God-pleasing action on the matters of altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church, membership in the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. and doctrinal discipline, and
- WHEREAS the LC-MS is frequently interpreting the Great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:19-20) in terms of social action (Mission Affirmations, Social Ministry, Affirmations and Mission:Life), therefore be it
- RESOLVED that we regard the LC-MS as a heterodox and unionistic church body which is either unable or unwilling to act according to God's directives in the matters of doctrinal purity and ecumenism (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 5:6-7; 11:18-19; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:9-10; Matthew 7:15-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18), and be it further
- RESOLVED that we of St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ terminate our relationship with the LC-MS on Reformation Day, October 31, 1971, and be it further
- RESOLVED that we officially join the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism on All Saints Day, November 1, 1971, and be it finally
- RESOLVED that we take this action as a witness to our love for the pure Gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ and obedience to His Written Word.

Eoli Deo Gloria

*HR*

TO CONFIRM THE ACTION OF THE FEDERATION FOR AUTHENTIC LUTHERANISM  
IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF ALTAR AND PULPIT FELLOWSHIP WITH  
THE WISCONSIN EV. LUTHERAN SYNOD  
AND  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Whereas, doctrinal discussions with the WELS and ELS by members of FAL's Board of Directors and the Board of Colloquy have indicated that we enjoy a doctrinal oneness with these two, authentic Lutheran bodies, and

Whereas, on the basis of the "Brief Statement" and several position papers, it is evident that we are one in doctrine and practice, and

Whereas, both the WELS and the ELS have extended to FAL altar and pulpit fellowship at its 1971 convention, and

Whereas, the voting delegates at the FAL convention unanimously accepted this altar and pulpit fellowship; therefore,

Be it resolved, that St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood confirm this action of FAL as prescribed in Article VIII C of the FAL Constitution; and

Be it further resolved, that we give glory to God who by His grace alone has given us this gift of unity; and

Be it finally resolved, that we pledge ourselves to maintain this fellowship with Christian love and integrity seeking at all times to maintain this fellowship through the proclamation and practice of sound doctrine.

#6

MY STATEMENT OF CONFESSIONAL PROTEST (STATUS CONFESSIONIS)

- + I hereby declare myself to be <sup>on the basis of Holy Scripture & the Lutheran Confessions</sup> one in doctrine with St. Paul's First Lutheran Church of North Hollywood, California. This means that I believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man to be my Savior; that I believe that man is by nature sinful and under the wrath of God and would be lost forever unless delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ; that I believe in the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God; that I believe in the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the virgin Birth of Christ, the  <sup>bodily</sup> resurrection of Christ, both heaven and hell, <sup>the last day of judgment</sup> the return of Christ in judgment, the resurrection of all flesh and the joyful entrance into heaven of all who believe in Christ.
- + I understand and believe that in the sacrament of Holy Communion I receive in, with and under the bread and wine the very body and blood of Christ in a special, supernatural manner for the forgiveness of sins and for the strengthening of my Christian faith and life.
- + I furthermore join this congregation in protesting against the errors so common to the visible church of our time and especially common to the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.
- + I have openly and publicly stated my opposition to error in my synod to my pastor and congregation encouraging my congregation to adopt the position of Confessional Protest against the error in my synod.
- + I do not financially support those agencies of my church body which promote false doctrine or non-Lutheran causes.
- + I do not commune at the altars of those congregations who are indifferent to doctrinal purity or those who teach or tolerate the modern error of our time.
- + I declare St. Paul's Lutheran Church of North Hollywood, California to be correct in the action which it took in severing its relationship with its former synod for doctrinal reasons.
- + I am prayerfully aware that the time may soon come when I must also separate from my present church body, lest I become a party to unsound doctrine and <sup>violate my Christian</sup> <sup>conscience.</sup>

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

18

A STATEMENT OF CLARIFICATION

October 19, 1975

- I. Let it be understood that we regard as a gift of God and, therefore, precious our altar and pulpit fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We acknowledge this fellowship to be the unifying work of the Holy Spirit and pledge ourselves to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" as our obligation under Jesus Christ.
- II. The paper entitled "In Statu Confessionis" is a study document which is in a state of continued study as evidenced by the changes which have been made since its first writing on January 19, 1975.
- III. The purpose of this study document is that of answering misunderstandings about the practice of status confessionis which were made at the FAL convention in North Hollywood in November 1974.
- IV. The study document under consideration is the product of a study conference known as Conference of Authentic Lutherans. This conference has as its purpose theological study, fellowship among our congregations and the protection of pension moneys on deposit with the LCMS. This conference does not speak officially or representatively in behalf of any congregation. The Conference of Authentic Lutherans is not as a church body or synod, and therefore, carries out no churchly functions such as the establishment of church fellowship, the acceptance or declaration of doctrinal positions, the establishment of missions, etc.
- V. Since a question has been raised about the authorship of this study document, let it be known that this study is the product of several individual studies and study conferences and is not to be regarded as the work of any one individual.
- VI. It should be further understood, that the practice of status confessionis is a minute portion of the doctrine of church fellowship within the larger framework of the doctrine of the church.
- VII. Inasmuch as the allegation has been brought to our attention that the dissolution of FAL resulted from a doctrinal dispute over the practice of status confessionis, we herewith present evidence which makes abundantly clear that a struggle over autonomy led to the dissolution: some working within the framework of FAL's constitution and others refusing to do so.
- VIII. Finally, let it be understood by the participants of this meeting, that the principle of status confessionis has already been accepted by WELS, ELS and FAL in previous discussions, some of which date back as far as 1971.

February 19, 1975

AN APPEAL TO RECENT FEDERATION COUNCIL ACTION

WE CONFESS

1. That our doctrinal position is the same today as that which we held at the time of the inception of FAL
2. That our teaching and practices in the matter of altar and pulpit fellowship are identical with those of our sister synods, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod
3. That we are not asking for a peaceful release for doctrinal reasons but rather for the practical reasons of administration

WE CONDEMN every form of selective fellowship and unionism as being contrary to both Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and therefore divisive of altar and pulpit fellowship.

WE REGRET that the Federation Council of FAL has declared us to be no longer in altar and pulpit fellowship on the basis of "certain doctrinal positions and practices which appear contrary to the position adopted by FAL in convention underly the request for these releases (emphasis ours)." Certainly Christian love dictates the necessity of brotherly admonition, doctrinal discussion and a carefully written statement of charges before a termination of fellowship can be declared. Furthermore, Christian love would also permit the accused to answer any charges made against them before they were judged guilty.

WE REGRET that the above-mentioned action of the FAL Council was taken without following the Biblical steps necessary when differences of doctrine and practice are in question (Matthew 18).

WE REGRET that the above-mentioned action of the FAL Council was taken in contradiction to the unanimous decision expressed by the FAL in convention while the convention was fully cognizant of all statements made while the convention was in session.

WE REGRET that although the FAL Convention resolved  
 "It has been ruled that any pastor and/or congregation who feels that he and/or it cannot abide by the rules of FAL (71) or is dissatisfied with the operating policies of the FAL should remove himself and/or itself from FAL in order to allow those remaining to get on with the Lord's work in unity."

And that subsequent to this action the chairman of the FAL Council formerly notified in the name of the FAL those pastors and congregations requesting a peaceful release that their request would be honored only to discover that the FAL Council has now totally and unexplainably reversed these actions.

WE PLEAD with our brethren in FAL to rescind their resolution of February 1, 1975 and we further request that peaceful releases be given to all congregations and pastors requesting them on the basis of their dissatisfaction with the operating policies of



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