

THE FIFTY YEARS OF STRUGGLES, STRIFES AND
SPLITS IN THE INFANT YEARS OF DAVID'S STAR
CONGREGATION

----- THE PASTORS AND THE SYNODS-----

(or Six reasons why the David's Star congrega-
tion joined the Wisconsin Synod.)

Senior Church History
Prof. Fredrich

submitted by
David Kehl
5/1/79

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

As a person drives through the countryside north of Milwaukee, he may chance upon the small spot in the road called Kirchhayn. Up on the hill overlooking the town along with miles of woods and farmland stands an old church which has withstood the weather for almost 125 years now. Those who approach the David's Star church can hardly forget the peacefulness that pervades the whole scene. Having grown up in the teacherage which lies behind the church, the writer of this paper has always been impressed with the unity and the peacefulness that not only was characteristic of the natural surroundings but also of the congregation which filled those surroundings with all its activities. Not once as a child had this author even imagined possible the struggles and strifes that existed in the first fifty years of David's Star's existence - struggles which centered around pastors and synods.

The congregation was in fact born out of the struggles that the confessing Lutherans of Prussia were experiencing in the early 1800's. These people had originally been members of the Lutheran Territorial Church in the Kingdom of Prussia, King Frederick William III, the ruler of Prussia, decided in 1835 to unite into one unionistic state church body the Lutheran and Reformed groups which were separated because of the vast differences in doctrine. The idea of King Frederick William III was to overlook or ignore those differences in teaching and practice of the various denominations in his sphere of influence. Those who were faithful Lutherans experienced persecution and imprisonment. In 1839 a Pastor Johann A. A. Grabau, the members of his congregation in Saxony,

as well as many other Lutherans in Pomerania fled to America to find religious freedom.

One of the pastors near Stettin, Pomerania who also was directly affected by these religious struggles and persecutions was Pastor Gustav Adolph Kindermann. Kindermann rebelled against the idea of having one unionistic church and for that reason was often sought by police who were ordered to enforce that decree of King Frederick William III. But even after the King died and a partial freedom of worship was allowed to Lutherans in the land, Kindermann still had many struggles facing him. He didn't agree with the officials of the Breslau Synod on some issues and thus began to rebel against the synodical authority. Some of the matters in which Kindermann clashed with the Synod were:

- 1) The synod claimed that resolutions passed by pastors and delegates were, according to Scripture, in force and could not be discarded. Kindermann disagreed.
- 2) The Synod classified sins as major and minor depending on the degree of offense given. Kindermann disagreed
- 3) The Synod believed it to be separatistic if one refused to take communion from a pastor who teaches false doctrine. Kindermann disagreed.
- 4) Kindermann objected to the use of "evangelical church" in statements dealing with the United Church.
- 5) Kindermann felt that the United Church should not even be designated a church by the Synod.
- 6) Kindermann did not agree with the Synod that Lutheran schools should be given over to the United Church.

In 1843 Kindermann, who four years earlier had objected to the emigration of Grabau and Von Rohr, now saw emigration as the only hope for freedom of conscience and religion. At the end of June, 1843, Kindermann joined by nearly 1,000 others began the emigration to America. Part of the group settled in Buffalo, New York waiting for their Pastor Ehrenström to be released from his official

detainment in Stettin. The rest of the group moved to Wisconsin where they divided into smaller groups to settle in the rural areas of what is now Cedarburg, Lebanon, and Kirchhayn. The largest group settled in Kirchhayn. It was among that group that Kindermann spent his ministry in America.

A great spirit of Christian brotherhood seemed to prevail at the outset as everyone pitched in to help build the settlements and establish the churches in the area. As the streams of immigrants increased and more congregations began to appear, the need for some form of organization was apparent. During June, 1845, Pastors Johann A. A. Grabau (of Buffalo, NY), Heinrich C. G. von Rohr (of Humberstone, Canada), Lieberecht F. E. Krause (of Friestadt and Milwaukee), and Gustav A. Kindermann met to organize a synod. Kindermann himself is believed to have been the principal force in bringing about this meeting. He and Teacher Stiemke of Kirchhayn traveled sometime in 1844 to visit Pastors Brohm and Grabau in order to make plans to call a meeting at Kirchhayn to which orthodox Lutheran pastors would be invited to begin a synod.² The meeting finally took place in Freistadt and Milwaukee (Krause's churches). Here Grabau, von Rohr, Krause, and Kindermann organized what later became known as the Buffalo Synod.

They declared their adherence to all the symbolical books (creeds) of the Lutheran Church and adopted as the basis of church government the Church Regulations of the sixteenth century, making them binding upon all pastors, teachers, councils, and congregations.³

With this joint formation of the Buffalo Synod, the pastors could hardly have imagined all the strife, harsh words and splitting

that was to occur in the immediate future. The struggles were not over just because they had left Europe, but rather took on a different form. Writing in this subject, E. H. Marth says, "Kindermann's Kirchhayn ministry during the first six years (e.g. 1844-1850) was not a calm and peaceful one but instead was often devoted to the resolution of disputes, most of which were precipitated by his clergyman neighbor L. F. E. Krause.⁴ As Marth says, it does seem that most of the problems centered around Krause. Krause became very tyrannical in his dealing with his congregations. At his Freistadt congregation, Krause had rashly excommunicated a Martin Krueger, accusing him of accepting errors of Pastor Ehrenström. The trouble started when Krause read from the pulpit a report from Grabau which said that Ehrenström had fallen from the faith. Krueger expressed amazement and unbelief at the news and began discussing the matter in the teacherage. When Krause found that out, he soon excommunicated Krueger without giving him a chance to defend himself or discuss the matter. The Kirchhayn congregation refused to acknowledge the excommunication without further proof, (which incidentally never seems to have been given).

While this dispute between Freistadt and Kirchhayn was taking place, Krause stirred up more hard feelings in his Milwaukee church. When they voted down his suggestion that they give him a certain amount of money to buy a horse and buggy, Krause refused to give the offenders Communion. When the elders approached him asking him to meet with them to discuss the matter, he refused. Kindermann was drawn into the matters for his opinion and soon Grabau himself came down to help settle matters. Grabau told the congregation to

stay with Krause even though they wanted nothing more to do with him.

When Grabau left, the dissatisfied group appealed to Kindermann to serve them with the Word and Sacraments instead of Krause. Kindermann told them that that would be impossible as he was part of the Synod's governing body which backed Krause. But he did suggest they might try to get an opinion from Lutheran pastors of another synod. And that is what they did. They appealed to the Saxon Lutheran pastors in Missouri, Angered and bitter toward Krause, the group no longer recognized Krause as their pastor. The separated group then was placed under church discipline by the Synodical officials which included Kindermann. The group then brought the matter of Krause's error before the pastors in Missouri who consequently accepted them into membership.

But while Kindermann was busy as a mediator in this struggle, problems began developing at home in Kirchhayn. Many at David's Star became sympathetic with those groups who had opposed Krause and had broken away from the Buffalo Synod. Later in the spring of 1847 Kindermann delivered a sermon in which he described Krause as blameless and suffering a cross for the cause of the ministry. He in effect also said the dissident group in his own congregation was denying the office of the ministry and so also denied Christ. Dissatisfied at the manner in which Kindermann dealt with this sore spot, this group also declared themselves free from the Buffalo Synod so that they could join a synod in which true doctrines could be found. They broke off from David's Star and started Emmanuel Lutheran Church which lies about two and one half miles north of

David's Star. Pastor E.G.W. Keyl of the Missouri Synod was called to serve these three dissident groups of Milwaukee, Freistadt, and Kirchhayn.

Because of the break, Kindermann became somewhat bitter with Missouri and in the Buffalo Synod's publication, Kirchlichen Informatorium, placed the blame of the break totally on Emanuel congregation. Needless to say, Buffalo Synod in July 1848, excommunicated all the members of Emanuel Church who had previously belonged to David's Star.

No doubt the whole affair caused hard feelings in the congregation, but it wasn't the only struggle Kindermann had to face. Other problems arose especially with Ferdinand Benz who opposed Kindermann's view of the church. Kindermann asserted that the church was a visible organization and that those who had left his parish were fanatics served by a sectarian priest. Benz was excommunicated to the astonishment of the parishoners, but none of them dared to oppose it.

Kindermann and his congregation had survived the split and the problems that had faced them. In spite of the human faults that caused the problems, God richly blessed David's Star congregation during the very peaceful years that followed. The congregation outgrew its limited log cabin church and in 1855 began construction of the present building. Pastor Kindermann who had been faithful over the years, died of a stroke on Easter Sunday, March 27, 1856. Although he was unable to see the completion of the church building, the fruit of those labors continued many years into the present time.

During the vacancy of the pastorate, which lasted a year, several pastors of other synods came to preach at David's Star. Among them are mentioned a Pastor Doerfler of the Iowa Synod and Dr. Hunger of the Indianapolis Synod. Finally after a meeting, the congregation called Ludwig Habel of Buffalo as pastor.

Pastor Habel himself was a very interesting person. His early associations and actions played a large part in his dealings while a pastor at David's Star. Born in Prussia in 1825, Habel came to America and studied at Fort Wayne from 1847-49. He then became pastor of a Missouri Synod congregation at Pomeroy, Ohio. He soon became secretary of the Missouri Synod in 1850. At that time relations between the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod were quite strained. Buffalo Synod was angry with Missouri because Missouri had accepted into membership those "Rottenpredigern and Rottengemeinden" who had been excommunicated by Buffalo (e.g. Emanuel Church - Kirchhayn). In 1852 Habel went on record as requesting that Missouri Synod negotiate peace with Buffalo. Habel soon however, left the Missouri Synod because he felt they had not always done right in all the cases where a Missouri man took over the congregations which had either been excommunicated by Buffalo or which had declared themselves free from that synod.

By the fall of 1854, Ludwig Habel was in Madison as a free lance missionary ministering to the Lutherans in Columbia, Sauk, and Dane counties which were unable to get a Missouri man to serve them. All the work which Habel had started was turned over to the Iowa Synod in the Mid-50's when Habel joined the Buffalo Synod and

was enlisted by Grabau to work in Buffalo, New York.

It was from Buffalo that Habel was called to be pastor of David's Star, Kirchhayn. During the first years at David's Star, the church grew and was strengthened in the unity of faith. In 1859, however, the congregation became dissatisfied with the "mite box" collection which was demanded by Grabau for his support as "Senior Ministerius." Questions began to arise also concerning the relation of the individual congregations to Synod. On Nov. 1861, Habel wrote to C.F.W. Walther that he had a falling out with Grabau. He asked Walther for addresses of some German theologians whom he wanted to ask for opinions on the case. He had no intentions of returning to Missouri synod but did want some weapons and ammunition from the arsenals of the fathers so he would be able to offer Grabau some opposition. Habel then took a stand against the Buffalo Synod stating that synod is only a human institution while Buffalo held that synod was founded upon a divine command. This issue also involved the procedure of excommunication. Habel placed the right in the hands of the local congregation according to the Word of God, while Buffalo placed the power in the Ministerium.

Because of these unresolved clashes, Habel, by unanimous resolution of the congregation, changed a part of the original constitution which had been drawn up under Kindermann. The area that was greatly changed was the part which stated, "that all property of David's Star Church remain with the Buffalo Synod as long as only ten members wish to remain with that Synod." Buffalo suspended Habel from office on July 3, 1862. The Buffalo publica-

tion, Kirchliches Informatorium began to smear Habel's name with articles such as "Separatistisch-Politische Schelmerei des Herrn Habel." (Aug. '68, p6). The great majority of the congregation would not recognize the suspension of Habel and stayed loyal to him. Only a few did not want to adopt that new constitution nor ^{did} they want to break relations with Buffalo Synod. Among these people were the wife of Rev. G.A. Kindermann (who had been so influential in the founding of the Buffalo Synod), and Teacher Carl Stiemke. The group split from David's Star and called itself "St. John Church." This church which is about one mile west of David's Star, is at the present time a member of the American Lutheran Church.

Since they had been expelled from Buffalo Synod, Pastor Habel and the David's Star congregation were without any synodical affiliation. Habel tried to organize a synod of his own and even started a seminary to train students for the Holy Ministry. As far as is known, three men were graduated and served in the Iowa Synod. He started a church alliance called the "Bruderbund," (Brotherhood). The Lutheran Almanac shows that in 1873, 12 pastors belonged to the Bruderbund (v. P. Habel's Praesidium). The Bruderbund often met at David's Star although the congregation did not officially join the group.

Pastor Habel also was very active in Immanuel congregation in Cedarburg filling in as their pastor whenever they had a vacancy during his years at David's Star. When in 1864 the newly called Pastro Lincks arrived at Immanuel, the congregation found him to

be totally unsatisfactory for their congregational needs despite the fact that the credentials which had been previously relayed to the congregation made the people believe he was the right man. After three months, the congregation begged him and even paid him seventy-five dollars extra just to leave. Habel again was asked to serve the congregation. The Kirchliches Informatorium picked up this story from Pastor Lincks point of view and used it to carry out the Buffalo Synod's personal vendetta against Habel. The article, "Habelschen Ränke und Schwanke - eine lehrreiche Geschichte aus neuester Zeit" (April 1865, vol 13, p41) is a prime example of the backbiting and slandering which was very characteristic of the people of that time. The Buffalo Synod itself, however, experienced a three-way split in the next year. In 1870 when they were again lacking a pastor, Immanuel congregation called Habel to be their full-time shepherd. He accepted but continued to serve David's Star until they received a new pastor at the end of that year.

Habel's health began to decline quickly after a fall from his buggy. He realized that he was no longer able to fulfill all the pastoral duties at Immanuel. For this reason he attended the meeting of Iowa Synod in June 1873 to express the wish that Iowa might supply pastors for the congregations of the Bruderbund. Iowa agreed and sent Pastor Strassburg to assist Habel in his pastoral duties. Habel hoped that this would pave the way to closer relations between Brudersbund and Iowa Synod, but apparently nothing came of it. Later in 1873 Habel died - obviously highly respected by David's Star, the majority of whom had stayed

with him in the break with Buffalo, and very highly honored by Immanuel where he served his last years.

The pastor who followed Habel at David's Star was Pastor Friedrich Eppling. Eppling was the first of a number of Detroit pastors who could not find a lasting and satisfying synodical affiliation. Born in Alsace, he was trained in Neudettelsau, and came to America to finish his training at Ft. Wayne seminary. In 1853 he was accepted into the Missouri Synod but didn't stay long. He also (like Habel) left the Missouri Synod in the Missouri-Buffalo controversy because he asserted that Buffalo had been wronged. He was the successor of Sigmond Fritschel of Iowa Synod at the St. Matthew congregation in Detroit. Later he took charge of a Buffalo Synod congregation in Humberstone, Canada (whose first pastor, von Rohr, and a layman were present in the meeting in which the Buffalo Synod was organized in 1845).

In 1866, the Missouri-Buffalo discussions left him in a dilemma since he tried to be neutral when there was no neutral ground. Four years later he took over the vacancy at David's Star which we will remember has at that time no synodical affiliation. With the permission of the congregation, Eppling himself joined the Ohio Synod. Through Eppling, David's Star came into close contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America since Ohio was at that time affiliated with the Synodical Conference. The Missouri and Wisconsin synods were of the major bodies in the Synodical Conference. Because of this,

a consultation between David's Star and the neighboring Missouri Synod pastors revealed a distinct unity in doctrine and practice and a step toward closer fellowship was taken.

But while there was peace during Pastor Eppling's time at David's Star, strife broke out in the neighboring Missouri church which a Pastor H. Meyer was serving. It was not so much a matter of doctrine but of life, mostly externals. The congregation soon split and Pastor Meyer took his followers two miles away and built a new church which he called Zion. The other group stayed at the original property and kept the name and property of the original * Immanuel Church which is located about two miles northwest of David's Star. This group was condemned by the Missouri Synod and were for a while served by a pastor who had no synodical affiliation. The congregation later asked Pastor Eppling to serve them. After many negotiations he consented if they would apologize to their brethren in the Zion Church, and also confess that they had deeply wronged their former Pastor Meyer. Until his departure in 1885, Eppling regularly served the Immanuel Church.

Since Pastor Eppling himself was a member of the Ohio Synod, congregational efforts were being made to affiliate also with that synod and with Wisconsin Synod. When the doctrinal differences arose between those synods during the "Election controversy," Eppling thought that he agreed with Ohio which taught "intuitu fidei" - God calls people in view of their faith. The congregation then sent Eppling to the Ohio Synod convention to apply for membership. At the meeting, Eppling realized that the Ohio view of

* This Immanuel is not to be confused with the Immanuel in Cedarburg which Habel served.

election did not conform to God's Word. Instead of turning in the congregations application for membership, he himself severed relations with the Ohio Synod and joined the Wisconsin Synod/

Shortly after this, Epling accepted a call to Van Dyne, Wis. Still without synodical affiliation, David's Star, together with Immanuel church on Mill road which Epling served, called a Pastor Zacharias Stiemke, a graduate from the Wisconsin Synod's seminary in Milwaukee. (Stiemke by the way, was the son of the first teacher at David's Star). Pastor Stiemke's efforts in the church were richly blessed. Since the dissension between David's Star and the Immanuel Church on the one hand and the honorable Missouri Synod and Zion Church on the other hand was peacefully settled, Pastor Stiemke and the congregation applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. In a meeting in 1892 in Winona, Minnesota, David's Star congregation was accepted as a member of the Wisconsin Synod.

So this David's Star congregation, after fifty years of strifes, struggles, and splits and after a lapse of thirty years in which they had been standing alone with no synodical affiliation, became a loyal member of the Wisconsin Synod and has remained such ever since. In spite of the problems David's Star experienced during its first half century of existence, God polished them into a congregation that up to the present time continues to enjoy doctrinal unity and a peace that come from the teaching of the pure Word of God. It has only been through the rich grace of God that this congregation has been safely led through those years of turmoil. It is through the grace of God that it is so richly blessed today. May that grace of God always be our lasting memory!

Notes

¹Elmer Marth. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"Gustav Adolph Kindermann." (Vol 38, Oct 65) p. 143

²Ibid (Jan.66) p.173

³Ralph Dornfeld Owen, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"The Old Lutherans Come." (Vol 20, April 1947) p.22

⁴Elmer Marth, Op Cit. p. 174

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Marth, Elmer H. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"Gustav Adolph Kindermann," Vol. 38, Oct 1965 pp135-145
Jan. 1966, pp 168- 187.

Owen, Ralph Dornfeld. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"The Old Lutherans Come," Vol 20, April 1947, p.3ff.

Suelflow, Aug. R. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"Trinity Parish, Wisconsin Territory," Vol. 23, April 1952, p. 1ff

Suelflow, Roy A. Walking with Wise Men, Publ. by the South
Wisconsin District of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod, 1967.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY BOOKLETS:

David's Star - "100jähriges Jubiläum," 1943

- "By the Grace of God, 125 Years of life in
Christ" 1968

Immanuel, Cedarburg - 75th anniversary, 1927.

Suelflow, Roy. "History of Trinity Lutheran Congregation 1839-
1954"

*** also

Suelflow, Roy A. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"The Planting of Lutheranism in Detroit," Vol 39 p 83f.

Suelflow, Roy A. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,
"The Relations of Missouri Synod with Buffalo Synod up
to 1866" Vol. 27, Oct. 1954, p121ff