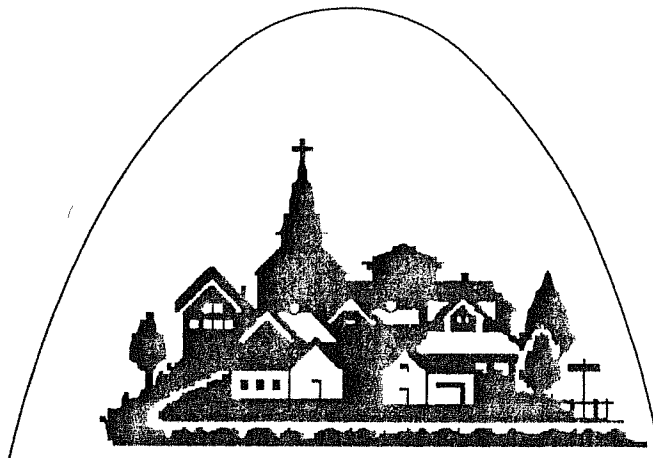


**How
the
Wisconsin Synod**



**Began its Work in
St. Louis County**

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Church History
5/15/89

How the Wisconsin Synod began in St. Louis County

Of all the areas that the Wisconsin Synod endeavors to go to spread the Gospel message, there are three that seem to be entrenched with other religions. One is Japan with its pagan ancestor worship. A second area is the Mormon territory of the West. The third is an area similar in its hold, but different in that although the Gospel is taught, it is not taught in its full truth and purity. This area is St. Louis, the stronghold of the Missouri Synod with its continually erring doctrinal practices.

At the present time, the WELS has four churches in St. Louis and the surrounding area. The largest of these is Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church located in South St. Louis County. Martin Luther was the first of these four WELS congregations to be formed. It was not, however, founded as a WELS exploratory mission, or as an outreach endeavor. The roots of Martin Luther congregation lie in a bizarre soap opera of events that started in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

In 1950, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod put forth a statement of adoption of the Common Confession along with the American Lutheran Church. This act of unionism led a group of pastors and their congregations which made up the St. Louis Study Club to withdraw from fellowship with the Missouri Synod. These congregations joined with other Missouri Synod congregations who held the same doctrinal stance as they did and formed the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. This took place on September 26, 1951, in Okabena, Minnesota.

However, there were some congregations that did not fully agree with Missouri Synod's new position, but because of internal disagreement they held reservations about joining with the new Orthodox Lutheran Conference. In these instances, it was the pastor who was instrumental in swaying the congregation's allegiance. One such congregation was Trinity Lutheran Church of Chesterfield, Missouri. Although the pastor was a member of the St. Louis Study Club, the congregation was split 90 in favor of remaining in the Missouri Synod and 70 against.

It was at this time that the Concordia Seminary Faculty of St. Louis came out with a new stand on the meaning of engagement to marriage. The old position was that engagement was a tantamount to marriage and was a binding force and marriage in God's eyes. Breaking an engagement was the same as divorce in the eyes of God. The Seminary's new position was that engagement is not a binding force and "not a tantamount to marriage."

The heads of the smaller Trinity group (those against the LC--MS), pastor G. G. T. Schupmann, Elmer Schaeffer and Herman Strumpler, could not stand any more of this heresy and pulled their congregation from the Missouri Synod to join the newly formed Orthodox Lutheran Conference as charter members. Mr. H. A. Strumpler was elected as the lay member at large for the publication of the new Orthodox Lutheran Conference, the *Orthodox Lutheran*. Although the other churches of the St. Louis Study Club had had no problems in leaving Missouri Synod, Trinity congregation did. Although the group in favor of leaving the LC--MS was the smaller of the two groups, they were able to bring about this move because of the overall dissatisfaction of the

congregation with the Missouri Synod.

The 90 members who were not fully in favor of leaving the Missouri Synod were headed by Fred Mertz and Rev. Martin C. Olsen, the Missouri Synod Statementarian or visiting pastor. The 90 members had tried to rejoin the Missouri Synod on their own through regular channels of voters' meetings but needed the help of Rev. Olsen and the LC--MS.

During Trinity's October and November monthly meetings, motions were made by the 90 members to return to fellowship and membership with the Missouri Synod. Four days before the December 10th monthly voters meeting, some of the 90 pro-Missouri Synod members, headed by Fred Mertz, had a meeting with Reverend Olsen.

As a result of the meeting prior to December 10, 1951, the strategy agreed upon at the meeting of December 10, 1951, was to press a motion to rejoin the Missouri Synod and said motion was made on two different occasions and received considerable debate. (Defendants' Memorandum)

However, their plan did not go as hoped. During the December 10th meeting, the motion to rejoin the Missouri Synod failed for a third time. Pastor G. Schupmann made a motion to table the decision concerning Synodical membership until the next meeting which was scheduled for January 14, 1952. Since the 90 were still the majority, they called a special meeting of the voting assembly for December 20, 1951 following the procedures of the congregational by-laws.

This new date was set after a December 16th meeting with

Rev. Olsen by the pro-Missouri Synod group. This only left four days to contact all the voting members. Many of the members were contacted by mail with postcards dated December 18th. Many of the pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference members received their cards on the evening of the 20th upon returning home from work and so were unable to attend this important meeting. Rev. Olsen was not invited to attend since he was not a member of Trinity, but was planned to have phone contact from 7:30pm to 9:00pm. In this way, Rev. Olsen could be kept abreast of the meeting.

Rev. Olsen's advice for the meeting was two-fold.

First, that they should hold their meeting on the church premises irrespective of the circumstances and conditions or hardships that existed and secondly, that they should adopt the motion to rejoin the Missouri Synod and transact no other business. (Defendants' Memorandum)

But this advice proved to be somewhat in vain for the 24 voting members (out of the 90) found the church doors locked and were unable to have a proper meeting with the pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference members and so devised another form of attack.

On January 14, 1952, the regularly scheduled meeting took place and Pastor Olsen was present with a wire recorder. At no other meeting was there a need to record any conversation but this meeting proved to be a special case. The plan of the pro-Missouri Synod members was to gather enough evidence to lay a foundation for a law suit against the pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference members of Trinity Lutheran, Chesterfield. It seemed that since the majority was not able to rejoin the Missouri Synod by constitutional procedure, that they would have to call in the

court system to settle the matter.

Now this may seem like a strange situation for a church body to get into but the outcome was important. The winner of the case, doctrinal orthodoxy aside, would have custody of the church and all the church property.

Although the pro-Missouri Synod members, or the plaintiffs, were in the majority and in most cases should have claim to the church and its properties, the pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference members, or the defendants, had a strong case. According to the Trinity Lutheran Constitution;

In case a member severs his connection with the congregation***he has no right to vote, is not eligible to office and has no claim whatever to the property of the congregation. (Trinity Lutheran Church Constitution and By-Laws)

This made a strong case for the defendants when they contended that by the plaintiffs action of Decembers 16th and 20th, and the willful contact and accepting of Rev. Olsen's advice, they had already removed themselves from the membership of Trinity Lutheran. A point made even stronger when at the January 14, 1952 meeting, the defendants elected all new church officers to replace the pro-Missouri Synod men. It was in this light that the defendants were able to say, "They were well aware of what they were doing and consequently they must hang by the rope that they themselves manufactured." (Defendants' Memorandum)

During this time, the defendants continued to hold church services at Trinity Lutheran under Pastor G. Schupmann, but none of the plaintiffs would attend. When the plaintiffs would try to

hold a service or make use of the church, they would find it locked.

Elmer [Schaeffer] locked the church doors and sat on the old frame parsonage front porch (new one is brick) and in a porch swing watched the people who came for church try to get into church. One even crawled in a window. Finally church was held for some time under the trees in front of church...He always said, "Come out from among them and be ye separate," but he never told them what they were to separate from. (Rev. J. B. Erhart, correspondence)

The plaintiffs then received a court injunction granting them the use of the premises from 7:45-9:15am on each Sunday.

In order to try to win back the pro-Missouri Synod members to a more orthodox view, the defendants placed signs on the lawn of the church and quoted scripture to the plaintiffs. This only added fuel to the fire. The a few of the signs read:

Concordia Seminary St. Louis, MO teaches
"Engagement not tantamount to marriage" thus
deny Matt 1:20 Our answer We abhor
promiscuity Deut 22:23-24: Heb 13:4

To keep our conscience clean and not to become
guilty of the sins of Missouri Synod, Trinity
Lutheran will hold services in the parsonage,
because of a court order granting the
plaintiffs use of church from 7:45 to 9:15 am
until case is adjudicated.

Missouri Synod common confession falsely
teaches through the Holy Scriptures which God
caused to be written by men chosen and
inspired by Him. God instructs and assures us
regarding His will for us. We answer the
"Word" was inspired not the "men." 2Tim 3:16
Rom 3:2 1 Cor 2:13

Two of the original signs were stolen and noted missing on

Sunday morning. The following Tuesday evening, members of the pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference group went out to replace the missing signs and to watch guard over the church property. It was at this time that Rev. Martin Olsen parked about eight feet from the signs with his car headlights on the signs. As the three men worked on the signs, Rev. Olsen shouted, "If you don't shut up, I will beat the H--- out of you!" (Orthodox Lutheran, Dec 1952. p.22)

The answer "You are too yellow" caused him to get out of his car and he then requested us to meet him on the "road," where the narrator [Herman Strumpler] mixed it up with Rev. Olsen, who ran after landing a blow on the narrators face and twisting the glasses, followed by the narrator's kicking Rev. Olsen on at least three different occasions during this footrace. (Orthodox Lutheran, Dec. 1952. p.22)

Instances of minor vandalism and harassment continued throughout the summer with the police being called on more than one occasion. Instead of the two parties coming to some agreement while waiting for the court to settle their case, the violence grew.

On Wednesday night, October 29, the duty of guarding the property fell upon Oscar Hertlein and Otto Reimnitz, who arrived early in the evening, this guard to be increased later in the evening, the narrator [Herman Strumpler] arriving about 7:30 P. M. At intervals one of the number would keep an eye on the signs and the rear part of the church.

At about 9:30 P. M. a car stopped with the headlights shining on the signs. A man left the car and walked toward the signs after a few seconds, while the narrator moved behind the bushes closer to the signs to get a better

view. Two men in the car came out and one man, weighing about 200 pounds, entered upon the premises demanding to know what was going on. With this the narrator took his picture (his definite identity has to date not been established), and he endeavored to take the camera, particularly the films, from the narrator, and thus the encounter began. The other two gentlemen also made their appearance and were identified as Rev. George A. Loose, Pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church of University City, St. Louis County, Missouri, and his father, Rev. F. W. Loose of Lorain, Ohio, both Statementarians....The heavier man proceeded to obtain a headlock on the narrator, and with a ring or other instrument struck a terrific blow on the back part of the narrator's [Herman Strumpler] head and in back of the ear. Because of the camera in one hand and eyes fitted with glasses, it was difficult to extricate from the headlock, but finally a knee to the groin brought this about....After finishing off the nearly 200 pounder....the narrator found Rev. George Loose choking Mr. Hertlein while the latter was lying prostrate on the ground in the pallor of death, and Rev. F. W. Loose was kicking Mr. Hertlein, even though Mr. Reimnitz attempted to stop Rev. F. W. Loose....It took a blow to Rev. F. W. Loose's chin from the narrator to stop the aggressor from kicking, also a blow to the head of George Loose to save the life of Mr. Hertlein...After Mr. Hertlein regained his breath and composure, it was discovered he had not said a word nor raised a hand but was jumped upon by Rev. F. W. Loose from the back not five feet from the church building. Rev. F. W. Loose in his anger demanded that WE leave "Missouri Synod property" (our church grounds).

This was the worst documented violence that I was able to find, but Herman Strumpler was reported to have driven an old blue Buick well beyond its time due to the fact that it had bullet holes in it. These bullet holes were incurred while watching the church.

After all the violence and hard feelings, it took the St.

Louis County Circuit Court to put an end to the "Religious War," as Life magazine dubbed it. But the outcome was not what it should have been.

Finally it came to a court trial. I had all the proceedings because the lawyer's wife on the church [Trinity Chesterfield] side was being instructed by me for membership. Her husband shot himself after the trial and she quit the class. (Rev. J. B. Erhart, correspondence)

The pro-Orthodox Lutheran Conference men had a strong case but were not able to keep the church property which by the church constitution and by hard work and orthodox teachings, was theirs. The Missouri Synod was much too powerful and was able to sway the jury to keep the Trinity Church in the Missouri Synod.

This meant that there were 70 "rebels" who were without a church and also without synodical ties. Prior to this, due to the problems and the bad publicity which surrounded the court case, Trinity Lutheran had officially removed itself from the Orthodox Lutheran Conference on May 10, 1954. Rev. G. Schupmann passed the motion.

I move that Trinity Lutheran Church of Chesterfield, Mo. for the welfare of the O.L.C., its own welfare, and the welfare of its pastor and its assistant pastor give up its membership in the O.L.C. and be independent; and that it continue to support and pray for the O.L.C. as heretofore; that such relinquishing of membership be effective at once; and that we apply for membership again when it is safe for both parties; and that this resolution be sent to the president of the O.L.C. thru Kenneth Hoesch. May 10, 1954. (Copy of actual Resolution)

The 70 members were who had been evicted from Trinity and had resigned from the OLC were without a church but there were also no longer 70. A small portion of them had split off and had begun to hold services in the Webster Groves Legion Hall. The reason for the split after having gone through so much at Trinity was conflict over how they had resigned from the O.L.C. Pastor G. Schupmann said it was on good terms while the smaller group said otherwise.

WHEREAS: Trinity Lutheran Church, OLC of Chesterfield, Mo. withdrew from the Orthodox Lutheran Conference on May 10, 1954 at the request of Rev. Gustave G. Schupmann and Rev. A. W. Schupmann, to avoid censure from the Orthodox Lutheran Conference for slander by Rev. Gustav G. Schupmann and foul language used by Rev. A. W. Schupmann in his accusation to the Church Council, as set forth in the memorial to the OLC convention, dated May 19, 1954 by O. E. Reimnitz and Warren Osterloh; and

WHEREAS: The pastors of Trinity Lutheran Church have failed to remove the offense set forth in the memorial, but have toured many states, to gain support from other OLC pastors for their ungodly deeds, (which is supported by documentary evidence) thus making them partakers of their sins:...

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED: that our congregation remain out of the fellowship of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, who have become a heterodox church body, by their ungodly practice...(Resolution of the Orthodox Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO)

And a third party commented:

In one meeting just before the enclosed final separation paper was issued, Rev. Artie [Schupmann] said, "IHR SAID ARSCHLECKER." That did it! Those on the printed list enclosed asked him to apologize. He would not. The members on the enclosed list left and

called me. (Rev. J. B. Erhart)

The document of separation was dated July 28, 1954. So at this time the smaller group, which was holding services in the Legion Hall, called Pastor J. B. Erhart of Cochrane, Wisconsin. Pastor Erhart, a member of the WELS, became the pastor of the Orthodox Lutheran Church of Webster Groves. Pastor Erhart encouraged the congregation to join the Wisconsin Synod and because of his membership, they were admitted. They then bought a church building on Tuxedo Boulevard in Webster Groves, Missouri. Some of the twenty-five members of Orthodox Lutheran Church who had left the Trinity congregation were Elmer Schaeffer, Herman Strumpler, G. Hoffmann, A. Hoffmann, Arland Hoffmann, Robert Kunze and Paul Reimnitz.

In the meantime, Pastor Schupmann and the Assistant Pastor, Artie Schupmann, his son, and the rest of the rebel group had been holding services in Baldwin, Missouri. They had services on their own and were able to build their own church, Trinity Baldwin. One of their members, A. T. Kretzmann, was instrumental in starting up a sister congregation in the town of Owensville, Missouri, which becomes important later on.

After the death of Rev. G. Schupmann, Rev. Artie Schupmann was the only pastor at Trinity. During this time, the late 50's, Trinity was an independent church body. Everything seemed calm, but only for the moment.

In the year 1959 the actions of the General Synod Convention led to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran

Confession. Pastor Erhart of the Webster Groves church joined the CoLC and so did the entire congregation. So now the small group that left the Missouri Synod and the Orthodox Lutheran Conference had left the WELS to join the CoLC. Here they remained, but again only for a while. In 1965, for reasons of doctrine, Pastor Erhart left the straying CoLC and rejoined the WELS. However, the members of Orthodox Lutheran congregation felt that they could not return to the synod which they had just left. With that Rev. Erhart took a call to Stockton, Kansas. The members of Orthodox Lutheran church then called a CoLC pastor, Leonard Bernthal.

Pastor Bernthal had many problems with the congregation and was not able to keep them together. The Orthodox Lutheran congregation disbanded in about one year after Pastor Erhart's departure.

Meanwhile, things were beginning to happen at Trinity Baldwin. Rev. Artie Schupmann joined the WELS in 1962 and by 1965 had brought his entire congregation and the Owensville congregation in with him. They received a loan from the WELS to build new church buildings and were doing well until Rev. Artie took a call. The congregation struggled but was able to install and ordain Seminarian Roger Zehms on July 17, 1966.

But once again, things went wrong. 1966 was the same time that the members of the CoLC church in Webster Groves lost their church. They then went looking for the nearest conservative church they could find and it happened to be Trinity Baldwin. Although a few members had joined Trinity when Rev. Erhart left Orthodox Lutheran, they were not the trouble.

The group that came in after the close of the CoLC Orthodox

Lutheran congregation included Elmer Schaeffer, the Hoffman families, the Reimnitz families, and many others of the first 25 that had left Trinity to begin with. This only brought out the worst in both groups. Many of the Trinity members would not allow the Orthodox Lutheran people to join. The two main opposers were Mrs. G. Schupmann and Mr. F. J. Niebruegge, who both "had it in for" Elmer Schaeffer. Pastor Zehms, fresh from the Seminary was not sure how to handle all this.

In a last ditch attempt to gain membership to Trinity, Baldwin, the Elmer Schaeffer family said, "You let my sister in, why won't you let us in?" Mrs. Schaeffer was referring to her sister Mary Schlawin nee Erhart. Rev. J. B. Erhart's daughter and her husband had joined Trinity, Baldwin when Pastor Erhart left the CoLC. This then put the Schlawin family in contention with some members of Trinity because they were related to the Schaeffers.

Pastor Zehms then took a stand and tried to put an end to all the personality clashing and accept the new members into the congregation. They held only scriptural and orthodox teachings and could not be turned down on the basis of Scripture. With this, the congregation of Trinity Baldwin not only refused to allow in the new members but released the pastor as well.

The members of Trinity soon became upset when some of their more faithful members who had been in favor of accepting the CoLC people, were not in church on a regular basis. Trinity decide to clean house and sent out notices to appear before the Board of Elders. Since they had no pastor at this time, Albert Schupmann,

son of Rev. G. Schupmann and brother of Rev. Artie Schupmann, took charge of the congregation.

One such letter reads:

Dear Friends:

As elders of the church we believe it is time to remind you of some of your obligations. Will you listen? You remember, of course, that when you joined Trinity church, you pledged yourself to the ordinary conditions of membership - to fulfill the obligations and to share in the privileges of church membership according to our church constitution, and do that together with us in the congregation here, not elsewhere.

You have, however not shared in the privileges of fellowship in Word and Sacrament with us nor fulfilled the financial and moral obligations of membership for six months or more. We know of no valid excuse for such continued absence or for such neglect of your duties as a member.

WE, therefore, summon and cite you to appear before the Board of Elders on August 28, 1967, at 7:30 pm in the church basement to answer for your absence and to give heed to our admonition as well as to show cause why the Elders should not recommend to the voters at the next meeting that your names be stricken from the membership rolls for your long-continued neglect of your duties as members....May we remind you here already that the Lord expects us as your brethren in the faith and as Elders of the church to admonish you and that He also expects you to come and listen?....(Letter of Admonition to a member)

It is at this point that the small congregation in Owensville, Missouri comes in. Since Pastor Zehms was still a called worker in the St. Louis area, serving Owensville, he was not forced to take another call but was able to take the group from Orthodox Lutheran of Webster Groves and begin a mission

congregation in St. Louis.

On March 26, 1967, 44 people from the Webster Groves and Baldwin congregations joined in public worship under Pastor Zehms at a Howard Johnson Motor Lodge in St. Louis County. At this time, Herbert Schmidt was elected chairman, Wallace Schlawin, secretary, and Gerald Straub as treasurer. At the next Sunday service, a Sunday School was started. On May 7th, the first confirmand, Benjamin Schlawin, was confirmed as a member of the congregation and the first baptism, Mark Richard Zehms, was on August 20, 1967.

From that time until present, Martin Luther Ev. Lutheran Church of South County has grown to become a self supporting church of the WELS. Their orthodoxy is questionable. Because of their strong Missouri Synod background and continual influx of Missouri Synod people, they easily fall prey to false doctrines. Pastor Zehms, who was very strong in defending the truth in Baldwin, allowed many things to go by unquestioned. He left the ministry in 1987 due to his own divorce. At present, he is back in the WELS Campus Ministry program.

Trinity of Baldwin remained in the WELS for only a short time after their "house cleaning" of 1967. Oddly enough, it was not for their lack of Christian love in dismissing and excommunicating whomever they pleased that caused them to be removed from the WELS. Al Schupmann began to declare fellowship with pastors who had left the WELS. Pastor Koch of Colorado Springs had left the synod on the doctrine of the third use of the law was the head of one of these churches.

The Synod would not have know or done anything about Trinity's unionistic practices if it had not been for a slip of the tongue at a meeting held Trinity Baldwin where District President Horn was in attendance.

In an open meeting Al said that he was not in fellowship with Koch and others likeminded. At the close of the meeting, Al rushed through the assembly over to me and said, "I still am." Pres. Horn was right behind him and heard it. He said, "I heard that." That ended the membership of Trinity in the WELS. (Rev. J. B. Erhart, correspondence)

This was more than just a loss of synodical ties for Trinity. They had received a \$50,000 loan from WELS and now were forced to pay it off or lose their church. At that time an old lady who had left the church many years earlier died. She had never changed her will and Trinity was left enough money to pay their debt to WELS and keep their church.

The first WELS congregation in St. Louis County went through many hard times and by the Grace of God, one small core of members was able to maintain purity of doctrine and keep the WELS alive.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Correspondence. Written.

From Rev. J. B. Erhart, Kirkwood, St. Louis, MO

From Rev. M. J. Lenz to Rev. R. Zehms. January 6, 1967.

From O. E. Reimnitz to Rev. W. H. McLaughlin, M.S.T. May 19, 1954.

From Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Schlawin, Kirkwood, MO

From Albert Schupmann to Wallace Schlawin. August 23, 1967.
August 30, 1967.

From Members of Trinity to Rev. W. H. McLaughlin, M.S.T. July 19, 1954.

Correspondence. Telephone.

To Rev. J. B. Erhart.

To Wallace Schlawin.

To Rev. Art Schupmann.

Dedication of Church and Fellowship Hall, Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church, 10151 Sappington Road, St. Louis, MO. May 31, 1981.

Defendants' Memorandum, State of Missouri, County of St. Louis, In the Circuit court of the county of St. Louis--State of Missouri, Fred Mertz, et al., (plaintiffs) vs. Elmer Schaeffer, et al., (defendants).

Life, May 1954.

The Messenger, bulletin from Orthodox Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Synod, Tuxedo and Bompert, Webster Groves, MO. January 19, 1958.

Orthodox Lutheran, November, 1951, vol I thru July 1953, vol II.