

CANADA COMES TO THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

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| 98 |

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## FOREWORD

Prior to 1970, the Wisconsin Synod had only a few scattered congregations in Canada. None of these existed east of the Great Lakes. Much of this was probably due to the fact that, while the Synodical Conference existed, Canada was considered more or less Missouri territory. The years that followed the 1961 separation and eventual dissolution of the Synodical Conference saw the Wisconsin Synod struggling to extend its borders. Some of this expansion was made in Canada. Today there are about a dozen congregations.

However much of this expansion, especially that east of the Great Lakes, is due to the Canadian people. In 1970, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ottawa joined the Wisconsin Synod after severing the fellowship it had shared with Missouri for nearly a century. This move on the part of St. Paul, together with their zeal to spread that saving word, has given the Wisconsin Synod a great boost in Canada. So in a sense we did not go to Canada; as the title states, they came to us.

Yet the Canadian field has hardly been tapped. Opportunities are endless and the door is open. This is said not because we have not been making use of these opportunities, but rather to alert the <sup>reader</sup> hearer to the chances we have to bring the saving message to our often-forgotten northern neighbors. It is to this cause that this paper is dedicated.

CANADA COMES TO THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

I. Founding of the Church.....	1
II. Conflict with the Synod.....	2
III. "The Die is Cast".....	3
IV. LCMS Convention - Denver, July 11-18, 1969.....	5
V. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul - WELS.....	7
VI. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Poltimore, Quebec - 1970.....	8
VII. Confessional Lutheranism Grows.....	10
VIII. Why St. Paul, Not Others?.....	11

## CANADA COMES TO THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

### I. Founding of the Church.

From the beginning the founders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul in Ottawa, Canada, were intent on preserving their confessional Lutheran beliefs. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, a small group of devout Lutherans emigrated to Ottawa from the province of Pomerania in Prussia. Intent on finding a new church home, these people visited various churches, but unscriptural teachings, as well as language, proved to be a problem. The hope of setting up a church of their own seemed to be distant due to the fact that no confessional Lutheran pastor was in the area who could serve them in their German tongue. There was thought of moving to a new area where Lutherans resided when a certain preacher offered to serve them with the Word and Sacraments in their language. However, after two years it was apparent that they were not hearing God's word taught in its truth and purity and as a result, they withdrew from his services and looked elsewhere.

They were directed to Pastor H. W. Schroeder of Grace Lutheran Church in Locksley, Ontario, a city about 100 miles from Ottawa. At their invitation, Pastor Schroeder visited them and conducted the first Lutheran service in Ottawa on November 8, 1874. It was on that evening that these Ottawa Lutherans resolved to establish their own church and congregation and call a pastor of their own. On February 6, 1875, a call was sent to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for a candidate. On July 10, the congregation was notified that Candidate August Senne had accepted the call and about a month later he was in Ottawa and was installed as pastor. A building designed to accommodate 350 worshippers was completed on November 14, 1875, the first anniversary of the congregation. In the meanwhile services were conducted at a local Presbyterian church which

had offered its facilities. Upon the advice of Pastor Senne, the congregation joined the Missouri Synod in 1878. Thus a concern for confessional Lutheranism became rooted in the Ottawa area and has been preserved for over a century.

## II. Conflict with the Synod.

It was a conflict with that confessional Lutheranism which came to a climax in the late 1960's. However, the root of the problem goes much deeper than just a year or two conflict, but had been present for several decades.

An individual who certainly played a vital role in this conflict is Pastor T. C. Pfothhauer. Almost from his youth Pfothhauer was aware of problems which were present in the Missouri Synod. As a boy he recalls how his father, also a Missouri pastor, talked about the problems of the synod. It became even clearer when he attended Seminary that all was not well with LCMS. Once he was out in the field, he was one who wasn't afraid to speak out against the various problems. And one could hardly say that he was a "voice crying in the wilderness," for many of his friends and colleagues shared their concerns about the situation in the synod. Pfothhauer relates:

Many pastors were very concerned. Groups of <sup>us</sup> got together to discuss the situation to determine what could be done. I was one of the executives of a small group called, "State of the Church." Many "hot" debates were conducted at conferences and district conventions. I recall the Ontario District convention at which I had introduced a resolution regarding the evolution matter at Valpo U. The fur flew. One man who later became president of the district stated that he would not give "one red cent" to the Ebenezer Drive Fund\* so long as some of the money went to that institution."

So we can see that Pfothhauer wasn't the only one who showed concern about the various problems in the Missouri Synod. However, unlike many others, he

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\* The Ebenezer Drive Fund was a special thankoffering to raise \$40 million to meet the needs of the synod. This drive was adopted at the 1967 LCMS convention.

was often the leader of this cause and wasn't afraid to stand by his convictions. As to many of the followers, he adds, "Many men would support me privately, but then when it came time to vote on the floor, they would be 'out for a smoke.'"

After starting a mission in Winnipeg and serving a dual rural parish near Stratford, Ontario, Pastor T. C. Pfothenauer accepted the call to St. Paul, Ottawa, where he was installed on August 16, 1964. Unlike his predecessor, who had alluded to the problems in Missouri in only a very general way, Pfothenauer began to alert the members of St. Paul as to what was really going on. The magnitude and seriousness of these problems became all the more apparent as members read articles in the various religious newspapers and periodicals.

Probably something which really brought it home to the members of St. Paul was the obvious conflict which existed between St. Paul and the other Missouri churches in the Ottawa area. It was apparent that these pastors, as well as laymen, choose rather to ignore or overlook any problem that existed. One member describes these "interchurch meetings where heated discussions took place. Missouri pastors in Ottawa were insisting there was no problem at all. When our pastor attended these meetings 'armed with fact in much detail,' it was an embarrassment to them, but a few outspoken pro-Missouri people seemed always to sway the meetings. These people did not want to be educated as to the problems in Missouri."<sup>1</sup>

### III. "The Die is Cast."

Although things had been building up for several years, they all came to a head in 1969. That year the LCMS convention in Denver was to vote on a resolution on whether or not to have altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC. Since the ALC was clearly taken up by the historical-critical method, not to mention many other unscriptural practises, one could hardly espouse such a move

in the light of Scripture. It was then that St. Paul knew that a stand had to be made. On February 4, 1969, the voter's assembly adopted a resolution asking the LCMS not to accept altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC.

This move on the part of Missouri was now the subject of sermons, Bible classes and meetings within St. Paul as well as without. An important inter-church meeting was held on April 6 of that year at St. Luke Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod). There a dialogue was held between Pastor Pfothenauer and Rev. Jon T. Keekley, pastor of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, a liberal daughter congregation of St. Paul. The pastor of St. Luke served as moderator. Before the 175 people who were in attendance, Pastor Pfothenauer set forth in a ten minute address about a dozen points why it was impossible at that time for the LCMS to have a God-pleasing fellowship with the ALC. In the conclusion of this address he pleaded:

So you see my friends, we are really considering the same shop-worn heresy that Missouri and other faithful Lutherans have faced in the past, namely the false idea that the Bible only contains the Word of God. I believe the Bible is the Word of God. I ~~further~~ more hold that fellowship relations must insist on this belief.

What is required of Missouri at this time, in my view, is not further pursuit of plans which will compromise our doctrine and practice, but rather a halt to the negotiations, until such time as the ALC and the LCA will show some solid evidence that they are willing to bring their doctrine and practice into line with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran confessions.<sup>2</sup>

Yet in spite of the indisputable evidence which he presented and the encouragement which he gave, it failed to have a notable impact on those who were present.

Two days after this meeting at St. Luke, the members of St. Paul held a voter's meeting where all the cards were laid down. There a statement was drawn up and sent to synod stating that if the synod joined in altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC, then St. Paul would leave the synod. In drawing

up the statement at the meeting, it was at first worded that they "would consider leaving the synod." At the insistence of one member, the wording was changed to "we will leave." The resolution read:

Resolved, That if the 1969 convention of the LCMS declares altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC in Denver this July, then in obedience to Holy Scripture we will withdraw from the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, and, God-willing, join an orthodox Lutheran Synod or Conference.

So the die was cast. The chips were down. It was all up to the synod whether they would stay with St. Paul or break with them.

As July drew near, the anticipation heightened. The June 1969 issue of The Ottawa Lutheran\* featured a special 30 page edition dealing with the problem. In this were contained many articles speaking about the fellowship issue, the state of the ALC, as well as two articles from the Northwestern Lutheran, an editorial by Immanuel Frey and an article on Liberalism. One could describe the June edition as the hottest issue of the Ottawa Lutheran ever printed. One can guess the outcome of the convention by just glancing at the subsequent issue, the September-October edition. Noticeably the words "Missouri Synod" are missing from the name on the cover.

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\* The Ottawa Lutheran is a regular publication of St. Paul. Today it represents Wisconsin Synod news in Ontario and Quebec.

#### IV. LCMS Convention - Denver, July 11-18, 1969.

The 1969 LCMS convention was a convention of major decisions. Not only was the fellowship issue a prominent one, but in addition to this, a new president for synod had to be elected. President Harms had announced that he would be stepping down. After nominations were received and the list was narrowed down, Dr. J. A. O. Preus was chosen as the next president. This perhaps surprised Harms a bit and also shed a new light on the fellowship issue. Harms



had been in favor of joining fellowship, but Preus was leaning toward the other view.

However, something happened which very well decided the outcome. As the sides disputed the fellowship issue, it was motioned and passed that the convention hear what the president-elect had to say on the subject. At first Preus declined comment. But in the course of the discussion on Wednesday, Dr. Preus did address the convention. "He voiced a concern particularly for the doctrine of the Word of God, saying that he favored a delay to give an opportunity for further study on the subject."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately he concluded with a comment which would come back and haunt him for many years. He promised, "I will abide by the decisions of this convention and use strenuous efforts to draw all Lutherans into a consensus on fellowship." Obviously the president-elect did not wish to antagonize either side and so he summed it up with a comment which would be acceptable to all. According to Dr. Siegbert Becker, Preus didn't think that the convention would vote to join fellowship with the ALC. His statement proved to be a shot in the arm for the unionists and the resolution passed by a vote of 522 to 438. When the announcement of the vote was made, it was greeted with applause and the assembly arose. At the direction of the chairman, the assembly sang the first stanza of the hymn, "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past." President-elect Preus stated that the synod had spoken and assured them that he would support its position and would carry out its wishes. Clearly Preus showed the LCMS that during the next dozen years he would be more of a follower than a leader.

With the LCMS joining in altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul was thereby severed from the LCMS. Phone calls starting coming in urging Pastor Pfothenauer to "give Preus a chance."

Pfotenhauer adds, "I thought I had and as far as I was concerned, Preus blew it at Denver. His remark, 'I will abide by the decision of the convention' finished me off."

Up to this time the various LCMS officials had not really paid much attention to St. Paul's "threats." The district vice-president had visited them and encouraged them to stick with LCMS, but his reasons were mainly sentimental. It seems that no one had taken them all that seriously. Now it was too late.

#### V. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul - Wisconsin Synod.

Now that St. Paul's was a man without a country, the task of finding an orthodox Lutheran synod was begun. In the voter's meeting of September 14, it was "resolved that a study of orthodox Lutheran synods begin. That officials of WELS be invited to speak to St. Paul this fall regarding the WELS. That WELS material (periodicals, etc.) be made available to our membership for their study and consideration. That no decision on synodical membership be made until such time as the study can be completed."

Since the WELS was virtually unknown to Canadian Lutherans, October 26 was declared WELS Day, in order to acquaint the members with the synod. Pfotenhauer had had some previous contact with WELS although this was minimal. WELS "was pictured as a rather silly little Lutheran sect which one could well afford to ignore." Yet he did attend a number of the free conferences which were sponsored by WELS and there he "had opportunity to make the astounding discovery that the WELS men did not have horns."

On WELS Day Pastor Waldemar Zarling together with Prof. Carl Lawrenz visited the church and met with the various groups throughout the day to answer questions and give information about the synod. The impression the

members of St. Paul received was favorable.

Within the next few weeks, contact was also made with the ELS when Pastor Pfothenauer went down to New York State to meet with a group of pastors from that synod.

The decision was soon made to join the WELS and in January of 1970, Pastor Pfothenauer came to Milwaukee for his colloquy. As he relates, "It was a very cold day; I was recovering from the flu; for two cents I would have cheerfully told WELS to go jump. As it turned out the colloquy was a most cheering experience. Pastor Mischke announced that I was accepted into the synod. President Naumann came out of his office and wished me well." By the summer of 1970, St. Paul was formally accepted as a congregation of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Of the 1000 members, 19 wished to remain with the LCMS and severed their connection with St. Paul. Yet there were also some members who left the neighboring LCMS congregations and joined St. Paul, so the difference was virtually nothing.

Certainly there were many hard feelings between congregations, between people, between families. As a member relates it, "After the separation we had a particular trying time because so many families were intertwined with Missouri, my family included. How do you explain not wanting to pray along at table or anywhere else for that matter to people we had associated (prayed with) for so many years."<sup>4</sup>

#### VI. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Poltimore, Quebec - 1970

While St. Paul in Ottawa was fighting for confessional Lutheranism, there was also a conflict arising in Poltimore, Quebec. Poltimore is a small rural town about 40 miles north of Ottawa in the Quebec hills. Actually this town contains little more than a couple of churches, a restaurant bar, and a

grocery store, and could be easily overlooked were there not a marker on the edge of town to pinpoint it.

German Lutheran settlers arrived in this village, then called High Falls, as early as 1850. However it wasn't until 1875, when Pastor August Senne, the first resident pastor of St. Paul, Ottawa, called on them that the first Lutheran service was held in the area. Ever since, ties have always been close between the two congregations, especially since some members are related.

It was in the early 1960's that members of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Poltimore began to realize the problems which were present in the LCMS. Like their fellow Lutherans in Ottawa, questions about their synod began to arise as they read the church publications and talk with members and friends from other LCMS churches. However, unlike St. Paul in Ottawa, the pastor of the Poltimore congregation chose rather to ignore the problems since he did not wish to rock the boat. As concerns grew, several members visited Ottawa where they heard Dr. Siegbert Becker speak about the liberalism in the LCMS. Despite the encouragement of their pastor to remain with "our beloved Missouri synod," a break soon divided the congregation. On May 3, 1970, the first church service was held at a member's home. Seven people were present. Eventually, 39 of the 100 or so members of St. Paul, Poltimore, left and called Pastor Pfothenhauer to serve them. The name "Our Shepherd Lutheran Church" was chosen, which also joined the WELS. Today services are held at the United Church building in Poltimore which is rented for a meager price and provides a convenient location.

Even today much resentment exists among the people of Poltimore. Even to people of other religions, the members of Our Shepherd are looked upon as radicals, liberals, and separatists, which is hardly the case. Perhaps the

following statement which was made after someone attended a funeral at Our Shepherd characterizes it best. The person said with amazement: "Boy, there sure wasn't anything wrong with that funeral sermon!"

Despite the persecution which many of the people face, there are few regrets. One member confesses,

As a result of breaking away, our faith has been strengthened and and we are enjoying a closer Christian fellowship with one another. One thing we have learned from all this is that we know that we need a synod for administration and for training pastors, but we certainly don't put our faith in a synod. So many times we would hear in a Missouri synod sermon, "our beloved Missouri synod."<sup>5</sup>

#### VII. Confessional Lutheranism Grows.

So it was that confessional Lutheranism was preserved in Canada. So it was that Canada came to the Wisconsin Synod. And in the decade that followed quite a bit of expansion occurred. In 1972 St. Paul of Ottawa used some money which had been given for missions and purchased 8½ acres of land in Orleans, an eastern suburb of Ottawa. Two years later, as St. Paul celebrated its 100th anniversary, Pastor David Priebe began work in the area. In January, 1979, a church building was dedicated and Abiding Word, as it is named, had a new home on about four acres of land. The other half was sold at a sizeable profit and a search was made to organize a mission on the west end. Pastor Al Lindke was sent in 1978, and thanks to a grant from St. Paul, land was purchased. Soon a WEF building will be set up.

These two missions have had a considerable impact on the members of St. Paul, well as in the spread of the gospel. People could no longer call it "Pfotenhauer's fancy" as it was known. One member comments, "That theory (Pfotenhauer's fancy) was particularly shot down when people like Dave Priebe and Al Lindke began arriving on the scene. Wisconsin was for real. People

began to realize that Wisconsin now is what Missouri was."6

Besides expansion in the Ottawa area, a preaching station was also set up in Pembroke, a city about 100 miles west of Ottawa. A retired pastor now serves the congregation which pooled resources and purchased a building on their own.

In 1979, a mission was also begun in Mississauga, near Toronto. This had been set up as a preaching station which Pastor Pfotenhauer and the St. Paul vicars served for several years. Pastor Roy Hefti now serves the area which is working on getting missions status.

#### VIII. Why St. Paul, Not Others?

After observing what happened in Ottawa, one might be lead to ask "why?" "Why did St. Paul have such a concern for orthodox confessional Lutheranism?" One can hardly contribute it to one single cause. From our study we have seen that from its founding the members of St. Paul were interested in the pure teachings of Scripture. Yet many churches in the 1800's had such interests and lost them as time went on. Nevertheless the members of St. Paul seemed to hang on to their concerns longer. This points to the importance of the universal priesthood.

Certainly much is due to the influence and guidance of their pastors, particularly Pastor T. C. Pfotenhauer. He arrived at a crucial time in their history and patiently educated his flock. One member openly confesses, "I wonder what would have happened had Pastor Pfotenhauer not come to us."7 Yet his words of warning fell on receptive ears. Had they not listened to him and heeded his warning, little would have happened. This can be seen from the dual parish which Pfotenhauer served prior to Ottawa. When asked whether he informed them as to the problems in the Missouri Synod he stated, "As a

matter of fact I tried very hard to get them into the LCMS. They had been unaffiliated for 125 years. The congo often veered toward the LCA-Canada section."

But why would Pfothenhauer be the one to leave the Missouri Synod? One would think that someone whose roots go back deep into the Missouri Synod would be inclined to remain at all costs. Not only had his father been a Missouri pastor, but his grandfather served as president of "die ~~beliebte~~ Synode."

After looking at these factors one has to attribute it to one specific power. The phrase chosen as the theme for the centennial<sup>n</sup> anniversary celebration in 1974 says it best. It reads: "Kept by His Power."

<sup>1</sup> Carl Noffke

<sup>2</sup> The Ottawa Lutheran, June, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Missouri Synod Convention Proceedings, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Noffke

<sup>5</sup> Raymond LaSalle

<sup>6</sup> Carl Noffke

<sup>7</sup> George Winges



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