

# Turmoil and Triumph

A History of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois,  
1995-2005

Senior Church History CH3031  
Professor James F. Korthals  
Philip Bigelow  
21 December 2005

---

When a congregation goes through a doctrinal controversy it is an extremely difficult time for all that are involved. Many emotions are at work that tears people in different directions at different times. Emotion and fact too easily become intermingled and soon it is difficult to separate one from the other.

Doctrinal controversy is something that no congregation wishes to endure. Friendships can be broken, feelings hurt, and worst of all, spiritual pitfalls can be the result for some involved. At times when doctrinal issues arise in a congregation lines may be drawn in the sand according to personalities, rather than looking at the issue from a biblical perspective and discovering what Scripture states about the issue. This is when Satan is at his best and attempts to accomplish as much destruction and turmoil as possible. Anyone that has been involved in a doctrinal controversy can tell you that they are not pleasant. It is a very emotionally demanding time for all parties involved. It is a time when one must hold to the truths of Scripture even though this may mean upsetting others and accepting the reality that they will take out their frustrations on you. This may happen and whether they realize it or not; the problem they have is not with you, but with God. It is a time when those that stand up for the truth of God's Word may have to withstand personal attacks from those that do not agree. It is at this time when those being attacked must remain evangelical in approach in the face of adversity so that they may bring the erring brothers and sisters back to the truth as stated in God's Word. Indeed, doctrinal controversy is a difficult time for all that are involved.

Yet, it is also at times of controversy that God chooses to richly bless his children. Under such circumstances people are forced to revisit Scripture and find what it says; instead of accepting an idea because someone told them it is so. The result of reading God's Word: strengthening of faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. As a congregation goes through such

a difficult time members are forced to mine the Scriptures for themselves and let God's Word determine what is right and wrong.

In times of controversy a congregation is forced to take a stand. What does it mean to be a Lutheran church body? What does it mean to be a *confessional* Lutheran church body? The congregation reexamines these questions and finds the answers as they apply today and not because someone else determined that Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church was going to be this or that over fifty years ago. The members learn the truths from Scripture and how to apply those truths today. Indeed, God does bless his church even in the midst of controversy and turmoil.

The doctrinal controversy that shook the members and staff of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois, dealt with church fellowship. This issue is certainly not one that has been without discussion throughout the years in the WELS. The synod has dealt with this issue thoroughly in the past. One need not look further than the dialogue between the Wisconsin and Missouri synods in the 1950's to find an example of this. This was an emotionally charged time on both sides. Yet, in order to uphold the truth of Scripture the WELS was forced to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod. This break tore at the hearts and emotions of many people, but it had to be done and through all of the heartbreak many realized that it had to be done.

Many of the members of Faith Lutheran Church that experienced the break with Missouri now were forced to fight a battle concerning church fellowship on a much more personal level. This time the debate was to be fought within their congregation. This time a man that served as their pastor for eighteen years<sup>1</sup> would be in the spotlight of the proceedings.

---

<sup>1</sup> The History of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, 15 April 2001, 4. This is a brief history of Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, IL. It was given to the members of Faith in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. Hereafter this source will be cited as History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church.

Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church began as many mission churches have in the WELS. “In 1947 permission was sought and granted from Peace Lutheran Church in Wilmot, Wisconsin to form a mission church at Antioch, Illinois. The first exploratory service was held on Easter Sunday, March 28, 1948, at the American Legion Hall. Pastor R.P. Otto of Peace Church officiated. There was an enthusiastic response with members coming, not only from Antioch, but outlying villages and rural areas as well”.<sup>2</sup> Peace Lutheran Church of Wilmot, Wisconsin, decided to start a daughter congregation just south of the Wisconsin/Illinois border.

Their efforts were blessed by God and this small exploratory mission grew into an official congregation.

On February 18, 1951, a special meeting was held at Peace Lutheran Church to organize the Antioch group as a separate congregation. Final approval was granted at their quarterly meeting on April 15, 1951. The name of “Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church” was chosen and Pastor Otto received and accepted the call to serve this mission congregation in addition to his duties at Peace.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the small group of believers that gathered to worship their Lord at the American Legion Hall became known as Faith Lutheran Church. The gracious Lord certainly blessed his children with numerical and spiritual growth. In 1951 Faith had 92 communicant members.<sup>4</sup> This growth continued to the point where it was evident that Faith would need a full-time pastor for the care of its souls. “As the congregation grew to about 200 communicant members, it felt the need for a full-time resident pastor”.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout a period of nineteen years God blessed Faith with four Pastors that served their Lord and their congregation faithfully. During this time Faith built a church building in order to fulfill its worship needs. This building served them as their place of worship until 2004

---

<sup>2</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 1.

<sup>3</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 1.

<sup>4</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 1.

<sup>5</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 2.

and continues to serve the congregation in the capacity of the Christian day school. In the early 1970's the congregation expanded its ministry by opening a Christian day school in the church basement. As the school grew in enrolment there was a need for the school to have its own facility. The school addition, which consisted of four classrooms and a gymnasium, was dedicated on 16 July 1972.<sup>6</sup>

In April of 1978 Pastor Darald Gruen was installed as pastor of Faith. He also served as principal of the school during his first year of service at Faith. The school continued to grow making it apparent that more classrooms were needed. Therefore, more classrooms and a library were added to the school.

The Lord blessed Faith with such growth that a second pastor needed to be called in order to care for the souls of the congregation. Pastor Greg Hermanson was called from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's graduating class of 1985. This was the first time in Faith's history that two pastors served the congregation at one time. As the two pastors carried out their ministries at Faith it became apparent to each other that the two of them were on separate pages. This, however, remained hidden from the congregation for quite some time until the doctrinal controversy broke in 1995.

As Pastor Hermanson came to Faith, fresh from the Seminary, he noted some peculiar practices that were taking place. An example of this was Pastor Gruen exploring the pros and cons of fasting with the congregation.<sup>7</sup> Doctors were brought in to speak to the congregation about what fasting would or would not do to a person's body. These extreme behaviors and ideas were not uncommon for Pastor Gruen and many times were done without Pastor Hermanson's prior knowledge.

---

<sup>6</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 3.

<sup>7</sup> Pastor Greg Hermanson, Personal Interview, 5 November 2005. Hereafter this source will be cited as Hermanson Interview.

Pastor Gruen, however, was also seen as a very loving and emotional man by the members of Faith. One member states, “He carried [his ministry] out honorably, professionally, as a man of God. It was clear to see that he loved and respected God’s Word. He was a man my child looked up to and greatly admired. He seemed to have a strong, close relationship with members of all ages”.<sup>8</sup> Another member comments, “Pastor Gruen was a pastor the congregation looked up to. Most, if not all, thought of him as a man of integrity and a true believer in our Lord”.<sup>9</sup> He was a pastor that many people trusted and confided in. He had a true love for his people. Pastor Gruen certainly had an influence on this author pursuing the pastoral ministry.<sup>10</sup>

But, in showing such love and emotion throughout his ministry Pastor Gruen polarized the congregation in some ways. There was a portion of the members that were drawn to those activities and also a portion that were alienated by such displays of emotion.<sup>11</sup> This was displayed in 1990 when the congregation was asked to house Ukrainian orphans for four and one half months. “Many members of Faith congregation, as well as other WELS churches in the area, came forth to have the privilege of housing orphans. It was a great way to show them our Christian faith. January of 1991 saw the arrival of 129 Ukrainian children to O’Hare airport, where many families of Faith Lutheran brought home children to be family members for several months”.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Personal letter written to the author. Hereafter this source will be cited as Personal Letter 1. Other letters will be sequentially numbered as they are cited in the paper. If needed or interested, the author can make copies available for any of the personal letters written to him.

<sup>9</sup> Personal Letter written to the author 2. Hereafter this source will be cited as Personal Letter 2.

<sup>10</sup> The author’s family left an ALC church and joined Faith when he was in the third grade. As early as fourth grade he too can remember having a deep honor and respect for Pastor Gruen and wanting to become a pastor just like him. He demonstrated to the congregation that he was a very loving and compassionate man and this became evident, perhaps to an extreme, as his ministry progressed at Faith.

<sup>11</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>12</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 5.

Certainly one would expect that such an undertaking would be the result of teamwork between the two associate pastors at Faith, but unfortunately this was not the case. This effort by Pastor Gruen was seen as a mission of love by the congregation, so most of the members were behind the program at its inception. Then the effort's focus turned towards adoption once the orphans were here, which created some division at Faith.

This created a whole new set of challenges for Faith. Now these Ukrainian children had to be educated in Faith's school, yet they could not speak fluent English, as one could imagine this invited some problems in the congregation because there was no prior approval or plan implemented to handle this situation.<sup>13</sup> Pastor Gruen very much acted alone<sup>14</sup> in his efforts to bring the Ukrainian children to Faith.<sup>15</sup>

The situation with the Ukrainian orphans serves as a great example to show Pastor Gruen's and Pastor Hermanson's working relationship. There wasn't one. Pastor Hermanson was in the dark concerning the situation with the Ukrainians and other aspects of ministry at Faith as well. The reality of the relationship between their two pastors was hidden fairly well from the congregation. Pastor Hermanson was not one to cause dissention. While he may not have agreed with everything that Pastor Gruen did at Faith, he did not speak out against these actions either.<sup>16</sup> "That both eased the congregation because they didn't perceive their pastors as fighting, they perceived their pastors as getting along very well".<sup>17</sup> This both held the

---

<sup>13</sup> It was not that the congregation did not love these children. They did, and shared the Word of God with them in order that they may become children of God. But, this author has learned in conversations over the years that there was a feeling in the congregation that things were not handled the best way. A huge burden was placed on the teachers at Faith to educate these children. It was not a matter of not wanting to do it, but a question of how do we do it. None of these actions were approved by the Board of Lay Ministry or the Board of Education at Faith. It was simply seen as a mission of love by some and a personal project of Pastor Gruen by others.

<sup>14</sup> He acted alone in the respect of his relationship with Pastor Hermanson. He did work with other Pastors from northern Illinois in bringing the Ukrainian orphans to the Chicago area.

<sup>15</sup> Hermanson Interview.

<sup>16</sup> Hermanson Interview.

<sup>17</sup> Hermanson Interview.

congregation together, but also polarized it as well because those that agreed with what Pastor Gruen was doing gravitated towards him and those that did not agree with him gravitated towards Pastor Hermanson. The congregation saw that Pastor Hermanson was not fasting, was not involved in the Ukrainian project, and did not house a Ukrainian.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, even though Pastor Hermanson did not speak out against these actions those that did not agree with the actions tended to go to him. The opposite was also true. Those that were involved in these things went to Pastor Gruen. It soon became apparent that there were basically two different ministries functioning in the same congregation. It reached the point that some members would come to church and leave or stay on a given Sunday depending on who was preaching that particular day.<sup>19</sup>

These differences of ministry would reappear as the doctrinal controversy broke. Some members thought it was a personal battle between the pastors. Some were of the opinion that Pastor Hermanson was looking to destroy Pastor Gruen and thought that if the differences between the two were reconciled then everything would be restored. While it was a strained and dysfunctional relationship between the two pastors this had no bearing on the events that led to Pastor Gruen's removal due to doctrinal reasons.<sup>20</sup>

As time went on Pastor Gruen began showing subtle hints of his doctrinal position, but it was never anything that could be nailed down. Simple statements of Scripture were no longer enough to establish a doctrinal stance. One of the teachings of Scripture he began to question was whether or not people would spend eternity in hell.<sup>21</sup> One member of Faith comments,

---

<sup>18</sup> Hermanson Interview.

<sup>19</sup> Hermanson Interview.

<sup>20</sup> Hermanson Interview. Pastor Hermanson also expressed an encouragement to this author that this is never the kind of relationship you want with an associate. It is crucial that associate pastors work together in order to accomplish one ministry, not a divided ministry with one pastor doing one thing and the other pastor doing another.

<sup>21</sup> Hermanson Interview.

Pastor Gruen had exhibited some liberal views some 8 or 9 years earlier<sup>22</sup> in a Bible Class on Revelations I attended. He made the statement that Hell was only for Satan and his angels that were thrown out of heaven with him. He then, seeing the expression on my face, stated that we have to be careful not to add anything to scripture that it does not say, stating it does not say people will be sent to Hell.<sup>23</sup>

Pastor Gruen's argument for such a stance was that statements about hell were only mentioned in a few, very short passages. How could a God of love and mercy send people to hell for eternity? If God truly is a merciful God, then how can this be? This does not make sense to our emotions and our emotions do not want to accept such truths. It is far easier to accept that God is a loving God if he would not punish anyone for eternity by sending them to hell. It is on this teaching, however, that Pastor Gruen began to show signs that emotions were stronger than Scripture. "That was the first turn I saw that his emotions held a little bit more sway than clear statements of Scripture".<sup>24</sup>

It was during the early 1990's that Pastor Gruen began teaching a Bible study on the philosophy of men's and women's roles. It was very much based on emotion and intellect, rather than being based on what God's Word says. He would go beyond what Scripture said in his applications. Now, with such a clear abandonment from the Word, Pastor Hermanson confronted Pastor Gruen and told him these classes had to stop. Pastor Gruen obliged, but then started a study with a small group of men. During this time it became clearer that Pastor Gruen was following his emotions instead of God's Word when dealing with certain doctrines. "There was a growing stepping away from what the clear statements of Scripture [said] and wanting

---

<sup>22</sup> This is 8 or 9 years earlier from his removal in 1996. This would put that Bible Class around 1988.

<sup>23</sup> Personal Letter 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hermanson Interview.

things founded on verses of Scripture and having them more based on emotion and pietism”.<sup>25</sup> These were the warning signs that set the stage for what was about to happen next.

On 10 January 1995 Pastor Gruen delivered a paper to his fellow pastors at the meeting of the Southern Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the WELS. The content of this paper sparked the fire that became the doctrinal controversy which ended in Pastor Gruen’s removal on 18 July 1996.

The paper has seven parts. The first is a parable and sets the stage for the remainder of the paper. It begins with a father that adopts five sons. Each of these sons has different strengths and weaknesses. The son that Pastor Gruen focuses his attention on is William. “William’s strengths were his intelligence and academic ability; his weaknesses were his pride and lack of love”.<sup>26</sup> As time passed William separated from his brothers, which resulted in hurting the father’s heart. The father pleads with William to overlook his brother’s errors, but William remains in his “pride and lack of love” creating pain in his father’s heart. This section concludes with the father warning William of his actions and saying that these actions may even hurt William in the long run.<sup>27</sup>

The paper continues by claiming the WELS has committed many mistakes in its application of church fellowship principles. The first is as follows, “In my opinion, our first mistake is that rather than emphasizing the oneness that we have with all other repentant believers in Jesus Christ, we emphasize the differences. And this is wrong”.<sup>28</sup> He goes on to state in the same paragraph, “It is my opinion that, as their Creator and as the most intelligent human ever, Jesus knows that his disciples are all different individuals and that they will have

---

<sup>25</sup> Hermanson Interview.

<sup>26</sup> Pastor Darald Gruen, Paper to the Southern Conference, 10 January 1995, 1. Hereafter this source will be cited as Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper.

<sup>27</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 1, 2. This paragraph is a summary of “The Parable” section of Gruen’s paper.

<sup>28</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 2.

different ideas and ways of doing things and that is because they each have different brains and life experiences”.<sup>29</sup> This serves as another example of Pastor Gruen allowing emotion to override what Scripture clearly states. Nowhere does Scripture excuse error because all men are individuals and think differently. It says the exact opposite. It tells us to mark and avoid those that teach falsely without exception. “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them”.<sup>30</sup>

He presents arguments “in my opinion.” He does not offer any Scriptural basis for the arguments he presents. This will be a recurring theme throughout the proceedings of the controversy.

He moves forward by stating the WELS second mistake. “In my opinion, our second mistake is that, whenever we have a difference with another church body, we automatically assume that we are 100% correct and that the other church body is in error”.<sup>31</sup> At this point it seems as if he is willing to make concessions concerning the truth of Scripture. He claims that the WELS cannot be 100% correct as a church body and other denominations cannot be wrong all the time. The correct answer is found somewhere in the middle. “But at the same time it has been my experience in life that, whenever I have a difference with someone in thinking, the answer is usually somewhere in the middle”.<sup>32</sup> Yet, he fails to realize the fact that the differences the WELS has with other church bodies is not because the WELS says it is right or wrong, but it is right or wrong because God’s Word says it is. The above arguments are

---

<sup>29</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 16:17

<sup>31</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 3.

followed with the logic that the WELS must be wrong because statistics are not on the synod's side.

But I am beginning to wonder if we really are one of only a half dozen or so church bodies on the face of the earth which understand the gospel 100% correctly. If we do understand the entire Word of God correctly, tell me why it is that we have in our Lutheran schools many zealous first graders and so many angry and rebellious eighth graders. Tell me why it is that our WELS congregations have only 44.8% of our members in worship on an average Sunday, why after spending approximately \$1 billion dollars over the last decade we have approximately 6,000 less people in worship on an average Sunday (1983: 46.5% of 415,368 = 193,146 vs. 1993: 44.8% of 418,134 = 187,324), and why it is that so many of our own members feel that WELS worship is uninspiring and lacks joy.<sup>33</sup>

After charging the WELS with making these mistakes he follows with a section entitled "The Pain We Have Caused." He lists different reasons for hurting different people. Those people include our heavenly Father, other pastors, and members of the WELS. The question that causes concern in this section of the paper is this, "I believe that we have hurt ourselves by not being open to new ideas".<sup>34</sup> Yet, he does not define what he means by "new ideas." Is this a synonym for false doctrine? One is simply left to speculate about what are the true intentions of the author. This ambiguity would show its ugly face not only throughout this paper, but also throughout the length of the controversy.

He identifies the WELS as William in the parable that opened the paper and suggests changes that need to be made within the WELS and its practice of church fellowship. These suggestions are important because they lay the framework for the discussions that would take place over the next year and one half. They are as follows.

1) I pray that we shall repent of our pride and of our cold indifference toward other Christians in different denominations. I pray that we will truly recognize

---

<sup>33</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 5.

that we have gone beyond a defense of the truth into an almost smug self-righteousness.

2) I encourage all my WELS brothers to start emphasizing the unity of the body of Christ rather than the divisions.

3) I encourage all my WELS brothers to go out and meet the other pastors in their towns.

4) I encourage all my WELS brothers to be more understanding of the human emotions and needs adversely affected by our present rigid unit concept of fellowship. We have caused a lot of pain, unnecessary pain, for a lot of people because of our legalistic and judgmental approach to fellowship.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note that out of these four points he only attempts to use Scripture to prove his second point. The other points are filled with emotional arguments that are not based on the Word. Yet, he makes this claim at the close of his paper, "My brothers, we need to restudy from Scripture our entire approach to fellowship, and we need to come up with answers which are evangelical. And our people are going to start demanding these evangelical answers".<sup>36</sup> As will be shown in the events that unfold, this is exactly what the Southeastern Wisconsin District Praesidium did with him. Again, it is left up to interpretation what is meant by his use of the word "evangelical."

As Pastor Gruen closes the paper he expresses the pain and difficulty he has endured over this matter and the writing of his paper. He closes by expressing genuine love for his brothers in the ministry and for the WELS. At this point he expresses no desire to leave the WELS. He closes by stating:

1) All truly repentant believers in the blood of Jesus are our brothers and sisters in the Lord, whatever their denomination.

2) We are to do all that we can, without compromising the truth, to uphold the unity of the body of Christ.

3) In dealing with others, we must remember that they are not emotionless robots, but human beings with limited minds and heart-felt emotions. Remember to deal kindly and gently with them.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 7-9.

<sup>36</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Gruen, 10 January 1995 Paper, 12.

Pastor Gruen, however, makes statements in his paper far beyond the scope of the preceding three points. This may be evidence that he did not truly land on one side or the other of the issue at this point. The WELS would agree<sup>38</sup> with the three points he makes at the end of the paper, but in his applications he goes far beyond these statements.

The 10 January 1995 Paper by Pastor Gruen was not received well by his brothers in the Southern Conference as one would expect. Many concerns were raised as a result of the paper. But, at this point Gruen was willing to receive instruction concerning the doctrine of church fellowship and how to practically apply the biblical principles of fellowship.

The matter was first dealt with on a circuit level. The circuit discussed the paper and their concerns with it as well as holding six monthly Bible studies on the topic of church fellowship during the spring of 1995.<sup>39</sup> Throughout this process Pastor Gruen declared that he had not yet come down on one side or the other of the issue. He asked for an extension to make a decision and it was granted by the circuit.

All of this was kept from the members of Faith up to this point in an attempt to let Pastor Gruen work out the issue with his brothers in the circuit. That was soon going to change. September 1995 would prove to be the month that gasoline was poured on the fire to set the controversy ablaze.

On 1 September 1995 Pastor Darald Gruen sent a second paper to the pastors in the Southern Conference. This paper, though he still held to the position of being undecided, was much stronger than the first and claimed many of the WELS fellowship practices were unscriptural. "No, Dave, I have not absolutely landed. The only truths upon which I have

---

<sup>38</sup> If the terms "brother" and "sister" are used in the wide sense in order to refer to all believers and not the narrow sense referring to those with which we practice church fellowship.

<sup>39</sup> Hermanson Interview.

absolutely landed are the clear truths of God's inspired Word. This letter represents my current thinking. However, I realize that my heart is sinful and my brain is limited in intelligence and culturally bound. Therefore, I am open to discussion and the guidance of others. I am not too proud to admit my mistakes and change if I can be shown from Scripture where I am wrong".<sup>40</sup>

This paper, however, was also written with a great deal of emotion that clouded Pastor Gruen's judgment.

My soul and my heart are sick! I am sick of telling the LCMS woman with terminal cancer that she cannot partake of communion with her sister who is a member of our church! I am sick of telling brides that they cannot have their cousins sing in our church because they are not WELS! I am sick of hearing WELS pastors call sincere God-fearing pastors in other denominations "servants of Satan" and "false prophets"! I am sick of being told that, if I pray in private with a Baptist pastor, I am sinning!<sup>41</sup>

In his second paper Gruen focuses on the WELS unit concept of fellowship and the possibility of applying incorrect exegeses to the passages the WELS uses to establish its stance on fellowship. He presents three questions for discussion.

- I. Isn't it possible that, in our zeal for correct doctrine, we have lost the basic principle of Christian fellowship thereby leading to an incorrect approach to our brothers and sisters in the *Una Sancta*?
- II. Isn't it possible that, in our zeal for correct doctrine, we have made incorrect exegeses and applications of various passages with the result that we restrict spiritual fellowship beyond Scripture's restrictions?
- III. Isn't it possible that, in our zeal for correct doctrine, we have begun a descent from a balanced evangelical theology into a fundamentalistic theology?<sup>42</sup>

In his answer to the first question Pastor Gruen returned to the same reasoning he had displayed before; if the statistics are not in favor of the WELS then something must be wrong. He argues

---

<sup>40</sup> This quote is taken from a cover letter written by Pastor Gruen that accompanied his 1 September 1995 Paper. This cover letter was sent to Pastor David Rutschow, District President of the Southeastern Wisconsin District. Hereafter this source will be cited as Gruen Cover Letter.

<sup>41</sup> Gruen Cover Letter

<sup>42</sup> Gruen, Pastor Darald, Paper to the Southern Conference 1 September 1995, 1. Hereafter this source will be cited as Gruen, 1 September 1995 Paper.

that the WELS comprises only .0003 of Christianity. How can this .0003% divide themselves from the rest of Christianity? The WELS must be wrong because the numbers do not support their stance. “It has led us to the point where we, who comprise approximately .0003 of Christianity, state that it is against God, against Scripture and therefore sinful for us to practice any kind of spiritual fellowship (whether it be pulpit, altar, prayer, or cooperation in acts of charity) with the remaining .9997 of Christianity”.<sup>43</sup>

It is important, however, that one stands up for the truth of Scripture no matter what the statistics tell us. What if Luther had simply gone with the majority as many had done before him? Luther risked everything, even his life, in order to stand up for the truth that Scripture declared loud and clear. Our human logic and emotion tells us that we must be wrong. How can everyone else be wrong and such a small group like the WELS be right? It is when our sinful flesh raises doubts such as these that we draw our strength not from what our logic tells us, but from what Scripture declares to us. It is not right because that is what the WELS teaches. It is right because that is what Scripture declares. We look to those that God has sent before us to defend his Truth and follow their lead in the face of adversity.

The second question Pastor Gruen presents in his second paper deals with the issue of incorrect exegeses of passages the synod uses to defend its stance on church fellowship. He claims, “We must carefully restudy all the passages that we use in connection with fellowship and carefully delineate about whom the Scripture is speaking – unbelievers or believers with whom we have doctrinal disagreements”.<sup>44</sup> He states that this must be done, but nowhere in the paper does he offer an exegeses of the passages. Rather he presents them as open questions by using the statement “Isn’t it possible that...” throughout the paper when referring to what

---

<sup>43</sup> Gruen, 1 September 1995 Paper, 1,2.

<sup>44</sup> Gruen, 1 September 1995 Paper, 8.

passages of Scripture mean. Throughout the paper he quotes various Bible passages in English and presents them as either open questions or in support of his position without doing any true exegeses.

The third and final question of the paper asks whether or not the WELS has gone from a “balanced evangelical theology into an extreme fundamentalist theology.” He presents the argument of whether or not the WELS has lost love as it carries out its practice of doctrine. His final plea is that pastors in the WELS may become like the Pharisees.

The second paper was much stronger than the first. The 10 January 1995 Paper was much more on an emotional level. It was a plea from the heart concerning practices that troubled Pastor Gruen as he wrestled with this issue. But nine months later, even after going through a Bible study on church fellowship with the circuit, it seemed that Pastor Gruen was solidifying his position. At this point, however, he still declared to be undecided on the issue.

As one would expect Pastor Gruen’s second letter caused great offense with many of the pastors that received it. The district praesidium met with Gruen on 19 September 2005 in order to discuss and clarify the issue at hand. This was the first of many meetings between the praesidium and Gruen. At this meeting Pastor Gruen assures the praesidium that this matter is only being dealt with on a pastoral level and the congregation does not have knowledge of it.<sup>45</sup> In response the praesidium expressed concern that the congregation would soon find out about what was taking place.<sup>46</sup> Two days later Pastor Gruen surprisingly announced the situation to Faith’s Church Planning Council.

---

<sup>45</sup> Praesidium Presentation Chronology Handout, 27 September 1995, 1. Hereafter this source will be cited as Praesidium Chronology. This is a chronology of events that was given to the Church Planning Council and Board of Lay Ministry of Faith by the praesidium for a presentation on 27 September 1995. This was to get the leadership of the congregation up to speed with the events that were taking place up to that point. A copy of this document is attached at the end of this paper.

<sup>46</sup> Praesidium Chronology 1.

On 21 September the Church Planning Council was holding a regular monthly meeting. At the end of this meeting Pastor Gruen told the council that he was meeting with the district praesidium and he would probably be removed from the ministry within a week because of his stance on church fellowship. The council was shocked as would be expected.<sup>47</sup> The Executive Committee<sup>48</sup> of the Church Planning Council held an emergency meeting to discuss the matter. The Executive Committee placed Pastor Darald Gruen on a leave of absence from the pastoral ministry. It was intended for Pastor Gruen to remain on a leave of absence until the doctrinal matter was sorted out, but it was soon discovered that this was no small matter that would be over in a few weeks or a month.

The next week the district praesidium met with the Church Planning Council at the Executive Committee's request.<sup>49</sup> Prior to that meeting Gruen wrote a letter to the members of the praesidium requesting five freedoms to be granted to him in the area of church fellowship. These are important because they show where Pastor Gruen stood at this point in the proceedings. They are as follows:

1. My soul desires the freedom to practice an evangelical close communion in which we would practice close communion because of the seriousness of the sacrament but in which we would also be able to make evangelical exceptions at the discretion of the pastor.<sup>50</sup>
2. My soul desires the freedom to pray with any Christian I choose to pray with.
3. My soul desires the freedom to allow non-WELS organists and soloists at such services as funerals and weddings if they are the family or friends of the people involved. At such times it seems best to consider the emotional needs of the people.

---

<sup>47</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>48</sup> This committee consists of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc. of the congregation. This is the head committee of the Church Planning Council.

<sup>49</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>50</sup> This point is ironic to note here because, as will be pointed out later in the paper, he seems to have gone far beyond this statement in his practice of communion when his independent church is started after his removal from Faith.

4. My soul desires the freedom to talk about what is holy, good, and right in non-WELS pastors, the freedom to distinguish between false prophets and true men of God who have some errors in their theology.
5. My soul desires the freedom to deal with each human being according to his/her need as a precious soul won by the blood of Jesus regardless of his/her synod or denomination.<sup>51</sup>

On 27 September 1995 the district praesidium met with the Church Planning Council of Faith in order to inform them where things stood with the discussions between Gruen and the praesidium. The praesidium made it clear that Pastor Gruen was not forbidden from exercising his freedom in points four and five above. The praesidium was very clear in stating that the process was in the dialogue stages only. No action was being taken at this time, despite the impression Pastor Gruen gave when he spoke to the Church Planning Council. "Gruen not "in trouble" with praesidium nor love for synod questioned. Gruen not placed under "take-it-back" edict by praesidium. Gruen not threatened with suspension by praesidium".<sup>52</sup>

At this time, however, the praesidium did voice strong concern with Gruen's papers and the offense they caused. This is documented in a letter written by Pastor Rutschow, who was the Southeastern Wisconsin District President, to Pastor Gruen.

We recognize the length of your journey. We realize you have experienced great turmoil along the way, and we certainly regret any offense some among us may have caused and the anguish it has caused you. Too, we believe your letter is something of an anguished cry. At the same time, we feel bound by Scripture and conscience to point out the offense your letter has caused.

As stated in our Milwaukee meeting, we are willing to discuss and study the content of your letter with you. If that is to happen, however, we likewise feel bound to request that you attempt to remove the offense by informing those to whom you have sent your letter that you are withdrawing your letter as premature.

As noted above, your letter seems to draw conclusions that sound final. It outlines positions that sound fixed. Yet you have indicated to us that you would like to study and discuss with us the matters your letter touches on.

---

<sup>51</sup> Letter written by Pastor Darald Gruen to the District Praesidium. Actual date is not known, but was written sometime between 21-27 September 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Praesidium Chronology 2.

Then it would seem you are not at the point of drawing conclusions that are final. Nor are you at the point of fixed positions. Then much of your letter is really premature, in which case you need to write to the recipients of your letter, telling them that.<sup>53</sup>

Pastor Gruen obliged with the above request by the praesidium and retracted his 1 September paper as premature via a letter mailed to those that received the paper. He continued to meet and study with the praesidium concerning church fellowship.

It was during the last week of September 1995 the news broke to the congregation that a pastor who served them for eighteen years was placed on leave of absence. This sent shockwaves through the congregation. Many in the congregation had no idea this was coming until it happened. One member of Faith writes, "It did surprise me that he was suspended without any prior leak to the congregation before it became public. It was kept totally quiet up to that point. In my opinion, the vast majority of the congregation was totally surprised".<sup>54</sup>

As this broke to the congregation it was not only surprised, but fear and anger came along with the surprise, which made for a very delicate situation. Lines were being drawn on both sides of the issue. Some thought it was a personal clash between their pastors; others were not sure what to think at this point. Many people wondered if these proceedings were making a mountain out of a mole hill.<sup>55</sup> The situation was confusing and frightening. Therefore, an open forum meeting for the congregation was scheduled for 8 October 1995. The district praesidium would be present.

An entirely new dynamic was added to the situation. The issue was no longer dealt with only on the pastoral level, but now the congregation was involved, although not in a direct

---

<sup>53</sup> Taken from a letter written by District President Pastor David Rutschow to Pastor Darald Gruen dated 29 September 1995.

<sup>54</sup> Personal Letter 2.

<sup>55</sup> Hermanson Interview.

manner.<sup>56</sup> Each member of Faith was forced to open God's Word and see for themselves what Scripture said on the subject. Pastor Hermanson made use of an opportunity to do this very thing. In the spring, after Gruen's 10 January 1995 Paper, Hermanson led a Tuesday night Bible study on church fellowship. It was an opportunity to review the truths of God's Word concerning church fellowship in an objective way according to what God says.<sup>57</sup> This study would prove to be very practical concerning the events that would unfold in the coming months.

Starting in October both Pastor Gruen and Pastor Hermanson would lead the Board of Lay Ministry through a Bible study that outlined their teachings on church fellowship. The basis for these studies would be Scripture. It became clear to the council that this issue would not be resolved in a short amount of time, but was going to be a lengthy process if a resolve could be made. After approximately one month on leave of absence Pastor Gruen was reinstated as a pastor at Faith. However, he was not to preach or teach concerning the doctrine of church fellowship on any level. During the period of time he was reinstated into the ministry these matters were only dealt with by the praesidium and the Board of Lay Ministry. Gruen was not to attempt to sway the congregation in an effort to bring it with him.

This was a very difficult time for Pastor Hermanson to carry out his ministry at Faith. "It made it a very sad time for me and very difficult for me to do ministry and stay optimistic. It was a very depressing time, a lot of stress and pain".<sup>58</sup> This stress and pain came in many forms. There was the stress of working with an associate that did not agree with him on a very important

---

<sup>56</sup> The Church Planning Council made it clear that this issue was not going to be debated openly within the congregation, and for this action they are to be applauded. Debating this issue openly in the congregation would have only involved more emotion and caused unnecessary damage. Pastor Gruen was to deal with the praesidium and the Board of Lay Ministry. These are the places this battle was to be fought. The Board of Lay Ministry's duty is to oversee the spiritual welfare of the congregation and they carried out that duty honorably throughout the controversy. It was the Board of Lay Ministry's goal to objectively look at what Scripture had to say on the subject of church fellowship. It was only from Scripture that church fellowship principles and application were to be drawn, not emotion.

<sup>57</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>58</sup> Hermanson Interview

doctrinal issue. There was the stress of dealing with those that accused him of trying to get Pastor Gruen removed because of personal differences.<sup>59</sup> There was the stress of dealing with those who were undecided on the issue; Hermanson would have to speak to them in an evangelical way that would not pierce tender hearts. There was the stress and pain of seeing people that he truly loved and cared about endure the same stress and pain.<sup>60</sup>

Time passed, during which Pastor Gruen was still meeting with the district praesidium. On 22 February 1996 Gruen delivered his last paper to the Southern Conference. It offered apologies for the strong wording of his first two papers, but continued to voice the same concerns about the doctrine of fellowship that he had been voicing all along. He did, however, include a very interesting paragraph concerning the circumstances.

Second, I wish to thank publicly my spiritual forefathers in the WELS for their faithfulness to Scripture and the spiritual warfare which they waged on my behalf. They did not give in to false doctrine or compromise. Thus I was not taught Roman, Calvinist, Arminian, or liberal theology in my formative years. I was taught the truth according to the Word of God and the nine historical Lutheran Confessions which are in total harmony with that Word. Thus I hold my spiritual forefathers in the WELS in the highest of respect. In fact, there are no men I hold in higher respect.<sup>61</sup>

These spiritual forefathers are to be given a great amount of respect for what they have done to preserve the truth of Scripture throughout the history of the WELS. They fought against the very thing that Pastor Gruen was trying to do. One of the main issues involved with the split

---

<sup>59</sup> At this time members of the congregation began to realize that Pastor Hermanson and Gruen did not agree on many aspects of ministry, however they were not always doctrinal disputes. Therefore some came to the conclusion that this only concerned personal differences and really was not that important of an issue, but simply an attempt by Hermanson to remove Gruen.

<sup>60</sup> This author was a sophomore at Luther Prep when these events took place so he did not deal with the realities of it firsthand. However, as he researched and wrote this paper the emotion and heartbreak of the situation became his own. One can only imagine the level of pain and heartbreak of those directly involved. This author has learned a greater appreciation for all those that experienced this situation firsthand and the manner in which they conducted themselves.

<sup>61</sup> Pastor Darald Gruen, Paper to the Southern Conference 22 February 1996, 1,2. Hereafter this source will be cited as Gruen, 22 February 1996 Paper.

between the WELS and Missouri Synod was church fellowship. These men fought against the movement to unite with those that were not in full doctrinal agreement with the WELS. If those men were involved in this situation they would have taken a stand against Pastor Gruen.

In this last paper he expresses the same concerns about certain passages that were stated in his second paper, but in more of an evangelical way. He does not make biting accusations; rather they are presented as concerns. However, there is one important observation to be made in his last paper. In the first two papers he stated that there were those that taught wrong, however this was not a reason to exclude them from church fellowship. In the last paper he explains this simply as a different understanding of Scripture in a number of places. “I still have a deep concern about how we use certain Bible passages to defend our rigorous and near total separation from other Christians *who understand some of the doctrines of the Scripture differently than we do*” (emphasis mine).<sup>62</sup> Again he states, “Is it legitimate for us to use these two verses<sup>63</sup> to cut ourselves off from everyone who belongs to a church body *which understands certain portions of Scripture differently than we do*” (emphasis mine).<sup>64</sup>

It is true that other church bodies do understand portions of Scripture differently than we do, but these differences are significant and are false doctrine. We show love to them by telling them these false teachings are injurious to their faith and we cannot extend the hand of fellowship to them as long as they hold onto those false teachings, not by practicing fellowship with them and pretending the error is not that important.

Throughout all that has taken place up to this point Gruen still desired to remain a pastor in the WELS. Although the WELS and he did not see eye to eye on the doctrine of fellowship,

---

<sup>62</sup> Gruen, 22 February 1996 Paper, 4.

<sup>63</sup> The verses Gruen is referring to here are Romans 16:17,18.

<sup>64</sup> Gruen, 22 February 1996 Paper, 5.

and throughout this time period seem to be growing farther apart, he expresses a desire to stay in the WELS.

For a while I wasn't even sure that I wanted to stay in the WELS. But that internal battle is over and my mind is convinced – yes, I desire to stay in the WELS. This is where God has placed me. This is my church body. This is where I hope to spend the rest of my life. I want to belong to a church body which holds to classic, historic Lutheran theology and takes inspiration and doctrine seriously. And that is the WELS.<sup>65</sup>

All would learn in the next few months that the above statement would never become a reality. The district praesidium and Pastor Gruen continued to meet and study the issue over the next few months but it became apparent that the two sides had reached an impasse. Pastor Gruen acknowledged this impasse in a letter written to Pastor Rutschow on 14 July 1996. At this point Gruen suggests inviting the congregation into the discussions.

I, therefore, invite you to contact our congregational executive director and arrange for a congregational meeting at which time the members of the praesidium could publicly bring their charges against me for all the members of Faith to hear. It is only right that these matters now be presented publicly before the very people who called me to be their pastor. I would suggest a meeting for the afternoon of August 18 or 25 since most of the members of Faith would be finished with their vacations by then and it would give sufficient time for all of them to be notified of the meeting.<sup>66</sup>

Pastor Rutschow's response to the letter must have shocked Pastor Gruen. He counseled Gruen to resign from the ministry immediately. Pastor Rutschow informed him that the members of Faith have had multiple opportunities to hear his position. There was no need to call a special congregational meeting concerning this matter.<sup>67</sup> There was no new information to present to the congregation. It was not to be debated on the congregational floor. He was to

---

<sup>65</sup> Gruen, 22 February 1996 Paper, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Taken from a letter written by Pastor Gruen to Pastor Rutschow on 14 July 1996. The reason the sentence about the date Pastor Gruen suggests is included is to give a reference to the time table he was thinking about.

<sup>67</sup> Taken from a letter written by Pastor Rutschow to Pastor Gruen on 16 July 1996. Hereafter this source will be cited as Rutschow Letter 16 July 1996.

simply resign in the best interest for all who were involved. “Once again, for the sake of all involved, we counsel you to resign immediately and to inform me of it by phone and FAX. Should you choose not to do so by 9 a.m. Thursday, July 18, our district praesidium will at that time remove you from the pastor roster of our synod. That action will mean you are no longer eligible to serve as a pastor at Faith congregation or in any congregation within our fellowship”.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, the situation outlined above is exactly what took place. 9:00 a.m. 18 July 1996 came and went without any form of communication by Pastor Gruen to Pastor Rutschow. After a year and one half this struggle that caused so much stress and pain came to an end. Pastor Gruen was officially removed from the pastor roster of the WELS, since Faith was a WELS congregation he was to no longer serve as Faith’s pastor. It had been a long, difficult situation that came to an emotional and sad ending.

At 6:00 p.m. on 18 July 1996 Pastor Gruen submitted a letter of resignation to the Board of Lay Ministry. “It was with sad and heavy hearts that the Board of Lay Ministry accepted his resignation in their meeting on Thursday”<sup>69</sup> Many could not believe what had transpired during that week. One member laments, “When it came to the end, and it was clear he was being asked to resign, it was difficult to believe it was happening. Not many had ever been through the removal of a called worker before, nonetheless, a Pastor!”<sup>70</sup> The man that had preached sermons, taught catechism classes, administered the sacraments, counseled through trauma, buried loved ones, and showed a genuine love for the congregation for the past eighteen years was now removed. He was no longer their pastor. Even though many members felt he was

---

<sup>68</sup> Rutschow Letter 16 July 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Taken from a report given to the congregation by the Board of Lay Ministry, dated 21 July 1996.

<sup>70</sup> Personal Letter 1.

wrong, it was still an emotional time for everyone. The official events of the controversy had come to an end, but the effects would be long lasting.

Although there was no open congregational meeting to debate the issue prior to Gruen's removal, there was an open forum conducted by the district praesidium for the congregation on 28 July 1996. The day after his removal Gruen delivered a letter to the members of Faith that summarized his position throughout the controversy.<sup>71</sup> He states in this letter that his reason for providing the congregation with such a document is "so that you may pray and think about them [the issues], so that you may get more out of the open forum".<sup>72</sup>

The open forum meeting on 28 July 1996 was tense. One member describes the scene, "Everyone was very attentative and listened very carefully with many taking notes. Some were appalled that anyone who knew Pastor Gruen could accuse him of false teachings and that we should be ashamed that these proceedings were even taking place!"<sup>73</sup> There were many open wounds and emotions that were brought into that meeting, but it served its purpose simply as an informational meeting about what had taken place.

Now the pieces had to be put back together, but it would take a long time and a lot of hard work. During this time Faith experienced a significant drop in membership. In 1994, before the controversy broke, Faith's membership stood at 958 souls with an average Sunday attendance of 479. In 1997, when the dust settled, Faith's membership was 875 souls with an average Sunday attendance of 365.<sup>74</sup> Not only was Faith's membership affected, but also the average attendance on Sunday. There was a significant group of members that left when Pastor Gruen was removed, but many of those that remained at Faith were undecided even though they

---

<sup>71</sup> A copy of this letter is attached at the end of the paper. It provides a good summary of Pastor Gruen's position throughout the doctrinal controversy.

<sup>72</sup> Taken from letter written by Pastor Gruen addressed to the members of Faith, dated 19 July 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Personal Letter 1.

<sup>74</sup> WELS Statistical Reports 1994, 1997.

were still members at Faith. For those people coming to church became a painful and emotional event. It brought back memories of what had happened.

There were some that rode the fence for a while. They were not sure which side they would land on. Pastor Hermanson worked with these people in a very patient and loving manner and for this he is to be applauded. He was careful not to push the issue too far and offend those that were undecided. He let them work the issues out in their own time because a person cannot ride the fence for very long before it becomes a painful process.<sup>75</sup> Eventually they will come down on one side or the other. Much damage could have been done if Pastor Hermanson pushed the congregation faster than it was willing to go.<sup>76</sup>

The congregation was in a state of disbelief and confusion for a time. Three months after Gruen was removed from the WELS he started an independent church in Antioch, Illinois. Pastor Gruen and the members of Faith that followed him established Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church only three months after he was removed from the WELS. It was during this time that Gruen spoke more plainly about his beliefs of church fellowship. "I know that there are some differences between WELS and Missouri. And there are some differences between WELS and ELS, and differences between the WELS and the Baptists, and the Evangelical Free. I know that. But I cannot use the Lord's Supper as a way of enforcing those divisions that unfortunately already exist. But I must use it as a way to unite Christians".<sup>77</sup> His true beliefs came as a shock to many people. This helped bring some understanding to the issue with those that were undecided at this point.

---

<sup>75</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>76</sup> In researching this aspect of the controversy this author has learned from a very good example on how to conduct oneself in these kinds of situations. Pastor Hermanson showed a great deal of patience and love to the congregation. It would have been easy for him to force those people to make a decision before they were ready to make that decision, but he worked with them patiently using God's Word, which showed a great deal of pastoral care.

<sup>77</sup> Taken from a sermon preached by Pastor Gruen at Beautiful Savior on I Corinthians 11. Although the exact date is not known, it was one of the first sermons that Pastor Gruen preached at Beautiful Savior.

It helped the members of Faith move along in the mourning process. “There was a specific mourning time for this congregation where they were sad and were crying and grieving and all of the sudden it was like someone flicked a switch and said, “OK now we’re getting on with life.” And that was actually good.<sup>78</sup> The members of Faith saw that Pastor Gruen was moving in a separate direction and that helped them move along with their congregational life.

There was a lot of pain and suffering caused from this controversy, but there were also many ways the Lord blessed Faith throughout this process. The congregation learned firsthand what it meant to be a confessional church and not just to go along with certain doctrines because that is what the church teaches. Members searched God’s Word on their own and made the truths of Scripture their own. Bible study attendance was on the rise. They learned firsthand the effects of false doctrine and the devastation that it can cause in the lives of God’s children.<sup>79</sup>

As the congregation moved forward they began the call process in order to replace Pastor Gruen. This was a bittersweet time for Faith. While they were moving ahead this process also reminded them of why they were calling another pastor. Faith extended five calls throughout the next year; each one was returned.<sup>80</sup> During this time a senior assistant from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was assigned to help lighten the load for Pastor Hermanson.

Faith decided to turn to the graduating class of 1997 from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for their next pastor. On 13 July 1997 Aaron Christie was ordained and installed as a pastor of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. He was the breath of fresh air the congregation needed. When he began his ministry at Faith it was as if a weight was lifted off the congregation’s shoulders.<sup>81</sup> “Then Pastor Christie came and then it was like a breath of fresh air.

---

<sup>78</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>79</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>80</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>81</sup> Hermanson Interview

Now we can start with our future. It was almost overnight. Now we can stop worrying and get on with things and there was a whole new optimism that came in the congregation”<sup>82</sup> A testament to this feeling in the congregation was how well the Christies were received when they arrived at Faith. “I remember I was absolutely shocked by how well we were received. To this day I think it was largest potluck dinner I have ever seen in my life. The energy level of the congregation was just so high. My first observation is that it was relief that they finally had a pastor because they had been said no to for an entire year”.<sup>83</sup>

Pastor Christie knew the situation he was stepping into. The situation at Faith was known around the senior class at the Seminary and the students knew the congregation was calling. Those calls were being returned one by one.<sup>84</sup> In the early days of his ministry Pastor Christie had to tread lightly, but was always clear on what Scripture stated.

In 1993 Faith voted to start a building project. This would be no small endeavor. The congregation worked hard at paying off twenty-seven acres of land at a price just under one million dollars. The church building Faith would need to build in order to meet their needs would run several million dollars in addition to the purchase of the land. Then the controversy broke in 1995 and the project was for all practical purposes put on hold, except for paying the mortgage on the land. In the spring of 1997 Faith’s ministry began to come back into full swing.

One aspect that certainly aided this process was the working relationship between Pastor Hermanson and Pastor Christie. Both would agree that there is an excellent working relationship between them and their views of ministry are much the same.<sup>85</sup> The congregation perceived their

---

<sup>82</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>83</sup> Pastor Aaron Christie, Personal Interview 19 November 2005. Hereafter this source will be cited as Christie Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>85</sup> Christie Interview, Hermanson Interview. As an observer of the ministry at Faith one can see that there is a good, strong working relationship between the two pastors. Some members of Faith have commented that throughout the controversy Pastor Hermanson appeared burnt out and it showed through in his preaching and teaching. While the

pastors were truly getting along and were committed to moving forward with the work of the church.

There was, however, some apathy concerning the building project. Some were not sure if they would be able to gather the funds needed to support such an endeavor. But, as many would come to realize after the land was paid off the logical and practical next step was to start exploring architectural firms for the design of the new church.<sup>86</sup>

Faith hired an architectural firm called Peter Schwabe Inc., which is a design-build firm from Big Bend, Wisconsin. Peter Schwabe Inc. did not have a liturgical design architect on their staff, so that portion of the design was hired out to Crawford Murphy in North Carolina.<sup>87</sup> Crawford Murphy's firm fell apart due to personal issues that were taking place in his life. As one could imagine this was not good news for the members of Faith. At this point Faith had approximately \$30,000 invested in Peter Schwabe Inc. and the plans were beginning to unravel instead of coming together. While it was seen as a huge setback in the building project at that point<sup>88</sup>, in retrospect it was viewed as a huge blessing.<sup>89</sup> The architect that designed and regulated the construction process of their current church building designed a church that truly is a beautiful space to worship the Lord.

There were many decisions to be made during the building project process. The congregation had to come to a consensus of what their needs were and what the new church

---

author interviewed Pastor Hermanson he also agreed that he was burnt out during that time period as one would expect. But, those same members that noted Pastor Hermanson's burn out also describe him as a new pastor now. The spark he had for the ministry before 1995 is now back and then some.

<sup>86</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>87</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>88</sup> It would be an understatement to say that Faith had been through a few major setbacks concerning not only the building project, but as a congregation. Four years after the congregation decided to build a new church and school one of their pastors was removed from the ministry for doctrinal reasons. This created questions of whether or not the building project would become a reality or if it would only remain a memory logged into the minutes of voters meetings. Now, that the project was starting to move forward again and people were becoming excited about the new church they lost their architect and were forced to start over from square one.

<sup>89</sup> Christie Interview

building would include to help meet those needs.<sup>90</sup> There were debates over whether or not to build a one or two story building, whether to build the school or the church first.

A survey of the congregation was taken concerning which option they favored; build the church first, or the school first. Four options were presented to the congregation on 21 November 1999. Option one: build church and gymnasium, forty-one votes. Option two: build school and gymnasium (worship in the gymnasium), thirty-one votes. Option three: build smaller version of both, 119 votes. Option four: build nothing now, sixteen votes.<sup>91</sup> The clear consensus at this time was to build a smaller version of both the church and school. However, it was unclear if that option would be practical for the congregation. One of the challenges Faith faced was to get everyone on the same page and behind the project.<sup>92</sup>

As time passed the view in the congregation changed to wanting to build the church first by an overwhelming majority. A WELS church very close to Faith served as a reminder of what can take place when a church builds the school first and plans on building the church at a later date. It is now thirty years later and that church is still doing “Sanctinasion” worship.<sup>93</sup> As open forums were held and feedback was given from the congregation it soon became clear that the people desired to construct the church and then build the school.<sup>94</sup>

As the building project was moving along the need for expanding Faith’s staff in order to accomplish more ministry became apparent. Some areas of Faith’s ministry were falling through the cracks. Now there was a larger emphasis on growing and expanding, especially with the

---

<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note that many of the things that were perceived as needs in 1993 when the building project started were included in the church building that was built in 2004.

<sup>91</sup> Information gathered from survey results for the first phase of building 21 November 1999. This was a handout given to the Land and Building Development Committee.

<sup>92</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>93</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>94</sup> Faith could not build both at the same time, as most congregations Faith’s size cannot, because of the cost of constructing such buildings.

building project in the picture.<sup>95</sup> It was clear that the areas of evangelism and youth ministry needed more attention. That simply was not possible with only two full time ministers serving nearly 1,000 souls.<sup>96</sup> “In May of 2000, the congregation voted to fulfill a need for our youth and evangelism. We placed a request to our synod call committee for a staff minister. Our prayers were answered with a call assignment granted to our congregation”.<sup>97</sup> Staff Minister Mr. Michael Manthei was assigned to serve Faith. He served his Lord and Faith congregation faithfully while he served as Faith’s staff minister. The Lord, however, led Mr. Manthei to seek another vocation and to use his gifts in a different capacity in service to his Lord.

The evangelism and youth ministry needs were still left unfulfilled. The next step the congregation took to fulfill this need was to request a vicar for assignment from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. However, it was soon realized that the vicar program would provide no continuity in these ministries. It is difficult to begin a strong evangelism and youth program when a new person is arriving year after year and starting fresh.<sup>98</sup> Faith had to find a way that would meet these ministry needs as it planned to expand and relocate not only their church building but also the ministry carried out in that building.

The plans for that new building were not progressing well.

Our preliminary schematic design was done by Mr. Crawford Murphy, many of you have met Crawford when we held our special coffee hours between services giving you the opportunity to meet and ask questions of the architect. Mr. Murphy has changed employers a couple of times since he began working with us and for performance reasons, the Land and Building Development Committee has elected not to continue with Mr. Murphy for final design. The Committee has

---

<sup>95</sup> Hermanson Interview

<sup>96</sup> At this time Faith’s membership not only rebounded to the level prior to Pastor Gruen’s removal, but had exceeded that level. This again, shows the tremendous grace of our Lord.

<sup>97</sup> History of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church 5.

<sup>98</sup> This author can relate to this point firsthand. After a year of experience in dealing with youth a person learns what was done well and much more of what was done poorly. So a person looks forward to the next opportunity he will be given to correct the mistakes he made the first time, however in a vicar situation a person does not have an opportunity to do that in the same place.

interviewed a number of other architects and is currently in contract negotiations with Groth & Smies, Architects, LTD. of Milwaukee.<sup>99</sup>

Although it would mean taking a huge step backward and prolonging the reality of setting foot into the new church, Faith hired Groth & Smies, Architects, LTD. In hindsight this would prove to be one of the greatest blessings to Faith during the entire project.<sup>100</sup> This was a firm that understood Lutheran liturgical architecture. It was a firm that realized the importance of the sacraments and gathering around them. This was exactly what Faith needed as it looked to finally break ground and start the construction process. Groth & Smies, Architects, LTD. provided Faith with its final design and plans.

As construction of the church finally got underway there were many more challenges that would present themselves to the congregation. Faith broke ground for the new building in May of 2003, yet construction did not start until the last week of July 2003.<sup>101</sup> This was due to Lake County, Illinois rejecting Faith's application for a building permit four times. Each time the application was resubmitted there was another problem that arose. As the building permits were being rejected again and again the projected duration of actual construction time was pushed farther back, which placed much of the construction during the winter. This was another problem, and added expenditure for the project.

It was quite a sight for the members of Faith to see a structure begin to be erected on the land they had purchased in 1993. After ten years Faith's new church was no longer a vision written on a piece of paper, or an architectural concept drawing that had no life to it. The plan was actually beginning to take shape in steel, brick, concrete, and wood. What a house of worship this building would become!

---

<sup>99</sup> Taken from a Land and Building Development Committee update summary, dated 4 February 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>101</sup> Christie Interview

As one walks toward the church he or she cannot help but notice the tower and spire that point heavenward. A cross adorns the top of the spire for all to see. Before entering the doors of the church the cornerstone proclaims a message loud and clear. It reads U.A.C. 2004, which stands for Unaltered Augsburg Confession 2004. Cornerstones with the initials U.A.C. have been present in confessional Lutheran churches for centuries. It is with this same Lutheran confession that Faith aligns itself.

Those that have accepted a call to be a pastor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are asked if they will preach and teach in accordance with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, among the other Lutheran Confessions, at their ordination. This cornerstone serves as a public testimony to what will be preached and taught within the walls of that building. The truth of God's Word will not be compromised in this place. The confession of our spiritual fathers nearly 500 years ago is still our confession today because it is in accordance with God's Word. It serves as a reminder of our Lutheran heritage and that we are not alone, but join together with the saints that have gone before us in worshiping our Savior. It serves as a reminder not only to those men that promised to preach and teach in accordance with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession on their day of ordination, but also to the members of Faith as they come to worship every Sunday. It reminds them what kind of church body they are and the doctrine that they believe and teach.

Above the doors of the sanctuary sits the stained glass Luther seal from the former church. "Once again this serves as a reminder that the truths of the Reformation are important to us: grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone will be taught and prayed in this place!"<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place: A guide to the Buildings, Furnishings, and Art of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church, Antioch, IL, dated 24 July 2005 2. The was a booklet given to the members of Faith explaining the symbolism and meaning behind the new church building. Hereafter this source will be cited as How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place.

As one enters the sanctuary their eyes are drawn to the chancel area and the symbolism present there. A crucifix suspends from the ceiling above the freestanding altar, displaying the humiliation of Christ and what he did in order to pay for our sins. Directly behind the altar is the triptych. The center painting is the resurrected Christ showing his hands to Thomas with the Bible passage, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”<sup>103</sup> This proclaims Christ’s resurrection and the reason for the joy that we have in our hearts in artistic form.

Each Sunday worshipers cannot help but see this beautiful physical reminder of our Beautiful Savior. The side panels of the triptych are on hinged doors. These panels are removable and are changed as the seasons of the church year change. Many have noted that triptychs are not common in the United States and they would be right in that assessment. But, they are common throughout historical Lutheranism. “It is our goal to “bring back” some of the best of our Lutheran heritage in our new church! Our triptych is one such item”.<sup>104</sup> This piece of artwork certainly serves to beautify God’s house and reminds the worshipers what the focus of their faith is.

The former church had a pulpit/lectern setup for reading and preaching the Word. Again, in an effort to return to the Lutheran heritage an ambo is present in the new church building. The ambo represents a single place that the Word is delivered from. “We have opted for an ambo – a single “place of the Word,” whether read or preached. When we see the ambo, may Peter’s words ring in our ears: *“Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*<sup>105</sup>

Finally, the baptismal font is present. It is not pushed over in a small, dark corner of the church, but is placed in a prominent spot that cannot be missed. All who come to church on a given Sunday will see the baptismal font and will be reminded of their baptism. It is a font with

---

<sup>103</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place 3.

<sup>104</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place 4.

<sup>105</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place 4.

constant running water symbolizing the “living water” that Jesus gives us. Inside, on the bottom of the bowl is found a symbol of the Holy Trinity.<sup>106</sup> What a fitting symbol to remind us that this is not some empty ritual taking place in the front of church that lengthens the service! But, before our very eyes the Holy Trinity is at work, bringing a person to faith in Christ. There is true power here. The Word is at work with the water. Let the importance of the sacrament of baptism be displayed through the physical symbolism in the sanctuary. This principle is displayed very well in the new church building. The triptych, ambo, and baptismal font were all designed and hand crafted by Nathan Pope of Avingnon Art Studio in Racine, Wisconsin.<sup>107</sup>

As the brick and steel was erected during the later portion of 2004 and first half of 2005 the members of Faith could finally see all of the hard work, planning, and discussions paying off. The house of the Lord that they had hopes of building for so long was finally becoming reality. It was physically here, not just on paper.

One can only imagine the emotion during the dedication service on 24 July 2005 at 9:00 a.m. As the triptych was opened during the first hymn of the service many people were brought to tears.<sup>108</sup> “It was truly an overwhelming day for a lot of people”.<sup>109</sup> Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church went from worshipping in a V.F.W. hall in 1951 to dedicating a church that cost over five million dollars in 2005. The Lord has truly blessed this congregation in its fifty-four year history. As the congregation worships in the new church building it is reminded that they are part of a much larger group. They join together with Christians throughout the ages to praise and worship God. This is a concept seen not only in the architecture of the building, but in the

---

<sup>106</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place 4.

<sup>107</sup> How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place 3-5.

<sup>108</sup> Christie Interview.

<sup>109</sup> Christie Interview.

worship of the people as well. The following is taken from the dedication service bulletin concerning thoughts that guided the congregation's worship on that day.

Jesus, the Lamb, has redeemed his creation, recreating it in his image and likeness by the riches of his grace. His gracious presence has always been, and always will be, with his people. Our Liturgy today bridges the gap between the past, the here and now, and the eternal rest of heaven. Looking to the past, we see what Christ has done to accomplish our salvation. Living in the present, we enjoy his presence through his Word and Sacraments. Anticipating the future, we yearn for the everlasting worship of heaven. Our assembling together here in God's house helps us encourage one another as we look for the great day of our redemption. Our worship today seems common and earthly. But look again! Jesus is here in our midst with his special presence. And then look up! Jesus right now enjoys the worship of those that have gone before us.

In our lessons from Revelation today, we get a glimpse of what worship is like in heaven—believers gathered around the Lamb, proclaiming his praise. Christ the Lamb, who was slain, reigns. Christ the Lamb, who has been present with the world from the beginning of time, was slain to buy us back from sin, death, and the devil through his own sacrificial death and resurrection. It is this atoning sacrifice and resurrection that we gather together to proclaim, and that connects us to the whole of the people of God giving us all equal status as beloved children of the Father. Power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, blessing, and glory belong to the Lamb! Therefore, the whole people of God, those on earth and those in heaven, along with the whole of creation, join, in this our hymn, today: *Worthy is the Lamb!*<sup>110</sup>

As Faith saw a unique opportunity before them, they put a plan in place to take advantage of that opportunity. The congregation realized there would be many visitors coming to see what this new church was all about. Even though the money was not there in the budget the voters' assembly passed a motion to call a third pastor to specifically lead Faith's evangelism efforts. In August of 2005 Faith called Pastor Edward Ungemach to serve as their Resident Missionary. The congregation began to display a new zeal for outreach to the community, even at the added expense of a third pastor while paying for a new church. The members realized that a third full-

---

<sup>110</sup> Bulletin, Dedication Sunday: A Service of Thanksgiving to Almighty God upon the Dedication of the New Sanctuary, Gathering Area, Chapel and Christian Life Center at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church and School, 24 July 2005 9:00 a.m. 3.

time called worker needed to be added to the staff. Pastor Ungemach accepted the call to fill that role in Faith's ministry.

As Faith looks for ways to reach out into the community it has not overlooked technological ways to accomplish this task. In June of 2004 99.9 WFEL hit the airwaves.<sup>111</sup> This is Faith's radio station, which is broadcast from a member's home. The station plays a selection of classical, oldies, and rock (with some Christian rock) for the musical section of the broadcast and also broadcasts sermons preached at Faith and devotions throughout the day. Members of Faith that tune into the station have reported that they have heard it played at local businesses around Antioch.<sup>112</sup> This is another tool that Faith is utilizing in order to get its name out into the community.

The second aspect of technology that Faith makes use of is its website. The website is [www.faithantioch.org](http://www.faithantioch.org). It is a very professional and well designed website where much information about the church is available to those who view the site. Those that visit the site can hear sermons preached, not just read them off the screen, through pod-casting technology. Faith has displayed a desire to reach out to the community in ways that were not done in the past. They know what Christ has done for them and want to spread the gospel to as many people as it can.

The members of Faith have been through a lot during the past decade. It is never easy going through the removal of a pastor, especially in a situation where members leave the church as well. It was a heartbreaking experience for everyone involved. There was much sorrow and pain for a long time after the situation was settled. People were not sure if the congregation

---

<sup>111</sup> This is a low watt radio station that runs at 50 watts. It has a radius of approximately five miles from the home where it is broadcast in Antioch. It cannot be broadcast in a more extensive area because of frequency problems with other stations.

<sup>112</sup> Christie Interview

would be able to support a building program after Pastor Gruen was removed. There was much confusion and uncertainty.

This period of time, however, also served for the good of the congregation in many ways. People read passages such as Romans 8:28, which says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." But they find it difficult to actually trust in God's Word and the fact that the situation will work out for good. The history of Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois, from 1995-2005 is an example of God keeping this promise to his children.

Through the doctrinal controversy that took place with Pastor Gruen Faith discovered a specific identity. It discovered what it truly meant to be a confessional Lutheran church. It discovered what it meant to mine the Scriptures and not just accept something because a pastor says it is so. Bible class attendance was, and still is, much higher than it had been in the past.

Faith has come a long way since 1995. It now has two campuses; one being the new church building, the second being the school at the same location. There is a strong emphasis on spreading the gospel, as is evident by the calling of a third pastor to serve as Resident Missionary. It is a congregation that truly reflects their Savior's love and loves one another.

As Faith presently sits it has a number of challenges that need to be addressed in the future. The building plans do not end with the church, but are to continue with the school when it is financially feasible. The congregation will face a mortgage over four million dollars from the church and will need to build a school onto the new church, therefore joining the church and school at one campus once again.

As the school and church grow, staffing needs are going to continue to grow as well. Teachers will have to be added to the staff and additional staffing may be needed to properly

carry out the ministry of the church. These are challenges that Faith faces in the future, but they are challenges because the gracious Lord has chosen to bless his children as he sees fit.

God's people must always strive and pray to remain faithful to the Word and Sacraments. It is only through the Means of Grace that Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people. "If you are continually looking at what is important, the Word and Sacrament, in your earnest in them and your earnest in sharing them, sleep well knowing the Holy Ghost is doing his work".<sup>113</sup> As the group of 988 souls<sup>114</sup>, which is called Faith Lutheran Church, looks forward to the next decade and beyond may they always remember to remain faithful to the Lord that has blessed us with all that we have.

---

<sup>113</sup> Christie Interview

<sup>114</sup> Bulletin from Dedication Sunday, 24 July 2005 19.

Bibliography

- Board of Lay Ministry Report to Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. 21 July 1996.
- Christie, Pastor Aaron. Personal Interview. 19 November 2005.
- Dedication Sunday Bulletin of Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. 24 July 2005.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Cover letter accompanying the 1 September 1995 Paper to Pastor David Rutschow. 1 September 1995.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Letter written to the District Praesidium. 21-27 September 1995.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Letter written to Pastor David Rutschow. 14 July 1996.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Letter written to the members of Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. 19 July 1996.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Paper to the Southern Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District. 10 January 1995.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Paper to the Southern Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District. 1 September 1995.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Paper to the Southern Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District. 22 February 1996.
- Gruen, Pastor Darald. Sermon on I Corinthians 11 preached at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. October 1996.
- Hermanson, Pastor Greg. Personal Interview. 5 November 2005.
- History of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church. Antioch: Faith Lutheran Church, 15 April 2001.
- How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place: A Guide to the Building, Furnishings, and Art of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. Antioch: Faith Lutheran Church, 24 July 2005.

Land and Building Development Committee Update Summary for Faith Lutheran Church,  
Antioch, Illinois. 4 February 2002.

Personal letter written to the author #1. 13 November 2005.

Personal letter written to the author #2. 13 November 2005.

Praesidium presentation chronology handout given to the Church Planning Council of Faith  
Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois, 27 September 1995.

Rutschow, Pastor David. Letter written to Pastor Darald Gruen. 29 September 1995.

Rutschow, Pastor David. Letter written to Pastor Darald Gruen. 16 July 1996.

Survey results for building project of Faith Lutheran Church, Antioch, Illinois. 21 November  
1999.

WELS Statistical Report. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1994.

WELS Statistical Report. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.

Praesidium Presentation  
Church Planning Council & Board of Lay Ministry  
Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Antioch  
September 27, 1995

I. A chronology

Jan./Feb., 1995: Letter to Southern Conference et al.  
Questioning WELS fellowship practices  
Welcoming comments and instruction  
Two personal meetings of Gruen and DP

Late winter-summer: Pastors of circuit meet with Gruen individually  
Circuit holds six monthly Bible studies on issues  
Gruen suggests early-June "deadline" for landing  
Gruen requests and is given extension

September, 1995-

1: Gruen sends second letter to conference et al.  
Letter affirms and is stronger than first  
Calls unit concept of fellowship "unscriptural"  
Suggests current close Communion practice is too close  
Urges learning from and prayer with heterodox clergy

19: Praesidium meeting with Gruen in Milwaukee  
Asks questions and seeks clarification from Gruen  
Gruen states:

1. Letter is out only at pastoral level
2. Congregation does not know about it

Praesidium communicates:

1. Concern that congregation will soon know of it
2. Agreement/sympathies/regret on certain issues
3. Willingness to study/discuss more
4. Concern about offense raised by letter
5. Promise to advise Gruen about dealing with it
6. Hope Gruen will work with us/keep us informed

21: Gruen tells Church Planning Council:

1. Of letter and meeting with praesidium
2. That Praesidium gave "recant" order
3. That he will very likely be suspended from WELS

Executive Committee of CPC via Pastor Hermanson requests:  
1. District praesidium to meet with church council  
2. Explanation of issues and process

Gruen letter to praesidium: "I need the freedom..."

1. "...to practice an evangelical close communion in which I am free to give the Lord's Supper to people whom I believe can correctly receive the sacrament regardless of their synodical affiliation."
2. "...to pray with any Christian I choose to pray with."
3. "...to allow non-WELS organists and soloists at such services as funerals and weddings."
4. "...to talk about what is holy, good and right in non-WELS pastors and churches, the

*1st time →  
Gruen told cong.  
Pastor. He didn't know  
this was going to happen.*

- freedom to distinguish between some prophets who have some errors and false prophets."
5. "...to deal with each human according to his/her need as a precious soul won by the blood of Jesus regardless of his/her synod or denomination."

## II. What has not happened

Gruen(or anyone else) not forbidden:

1. to talk about the good and right in non-WELS clergy and churches
2. to distinguish between prophets whose teaching is in error in some points and prophets whose entire teaching is in error
3. per se to deal with people, their needs who are of other denominations

Gruen not "in trouble" with praesidium nor love for synod questioned

Gruen not placed under "take-it-back" edict by praesidium

Gruen not threatened with suspension by praesidium

## III. Where things stand

Praesidium concerned about offense/division/impressions of finality created by his letter(s)

Finalizing recommendation for effort by Gruen to address offense/divisions/impressions

Ready to continue study/discuss with Gruen issues raised by letter(s)

July 19, 1996

Dear Members of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
my brothers and sisters in the Lord,

As most of you know, in January of 1995 I wrote a letter to some of my fellow WELS pastors which I also sent to our synodical and district officials. In this letter I stated my disagreement with various aspects of our WELS doctrine of church fellowship. As a result, the district president requested that I step down from various positions I held in our synodical structure, and I willingly complied. In September of 1995 I sent out a second letter to the same pastors. At this point the three members of our district presidium and I entered into a series of intense discussions. We spent many hours reviewing various Bible passages. All of us sincerely attempted to resolve these issues. It finally became clear that we had reached a definite impasse on various points of the doctrine and practice. Consequently, the members of the district presidium demanded that I either recant or resign from my ministry in the WELS. In good conscience I could neither recant nor resign. Thus yesterday morning, July 18 at 9:00 a.m., I was removed from the ministerium of the WELS. Since Faith Ev. Lutheran Church is a WELS congregation, and since Faith would be forced into a decision which would be very detrimental to its future, I felt it best to resign from my public ministry at Faith last evening. Both the Board of Lay Ministry and the Church Planning Council accepted my resignation.

I am told that, because there are questions in the minds and hearts of the members of Faith, arrangements are being made for the members of the district presidium to conduct an open forum for the entire congregation on Sunday, July 28, at 7:00 p.m. This is excellent because we have found that when we have failed to openly address issues, it leads only to gossip, disinformation, suspicion, and anger. However, when issues are openly discussed, as long as it is done in a loving manner, then accuracy of information, informed decisions, and a certain measure of peace result. Even if everyone does not agree, people at least have the assurance that the issues were openly and honestly discussed. It is in that light that I am writing this letter so that you may be aware of some of the issues in advance, so that you may pray and think about them, so that you may get more out of the open forum.

What are the issues that finally led to an impasse between the district presidium and me? I will try to list them as best I can, but please understand that the list is mine. The presidium may come up with a similar but slightly different list. To the best of my knowledge the presidium and I came to a definite impasse on these three points.

I. Our WELS doctrine on church fellowship uses as the foundation for our separation from all non-WELS/ELS Christians the following passages: Matthew 7:15; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10 & 11. I refuse to use these passages in the way the WELS requires.

In order to understand our disagreement, please read the attached *1970 Doctrinal Statements of the WELS Evangelical Lutheran Synod* before your participation in the open forum. To facilitate your understanding of this document, I will summarize the basic tenets of this doctrine.

1. There is a holy Christian Church comprised of all true believers in Jesus Christ.
2. This holy Christian Church is invisible since only God knows who the true believers are.
3. Since we cannot tell who the true believers are, we can only go by a person's doctrinal confession.
4. The doctrinal confession of the individual is normally the doctrinal confession of his church.

5. Since false doctrine is harmful, we must mark and separate from all pastors and church bodies that teach contrary to God's Word. (Matthew 7:15)
6. The divisions in the church are caused by those departing from the truth (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10), not by those holding to the truth.
7. Since Christians are exhorted not to support false teachers (2 John 10 & 11), we are not to practice church fellowship with those who align themselves with and support erring church bodies.

Now it seems to me that there are several slips in logic and Biblical interpretation in this set-up. But the most serious difficulty I have encountered in the document is that it forced me, as a WELS pastor, to use passages which clearly talk about separation from unbelievers to defend and demand a separation from other believers. Please take your Bible and read these passages now. Read also the five verses or so before and after each verse in order to understand the context. Now let's look at each:

To the best of my understanding, Matthew 7:15 is talking about unbelieving prophets who are not really leading people to God through repentance and faith in the Messiah. I personally believe that the term "false prophet" is a technical term for an unbelieving man who uses the name of God only for his own personal advancement. It is not referring to men of God who have some mistakes in their theology. The WELS understands this passage to be a warning against all false doctrine and that whenever a man teaches any false doctrine then to that degree he is a false prophet. The problem with that interpretation is, since we do not agree totally in doctrine and practice with the LCMS, Baptist, and Evangelical Free churches, I am virtually required to teach that all LCMS, Baptist, and Evangelical Free pastors are false prophets to varying degrees. I simply cannot do that. *But that is what they are.*

The same is true for Romans 16:17-18 and Titus 3:10. In my judgment, these passages are identical in meaning. The Apostle Paul is discussing people in the congregation who are divisive, individuals who deliberately create trouble because their hearts are evil. The Apostle Paul is instructing the congregation to practice church discipline on such people. Again, I simply cannot apply these passages to genuinely repentant believers in other denominations.

I have a similar problem with 2 John 10 & 11. When you read the preceding verses you will recognize that the Apostle John is telling people not to support false prophets who deny that Jesus is true God come in the flesh. It is, in my opinion, incorrect to use this to deny fellowship to a Missouri Synod Christian because there may be some false doctrine and practice permitted in some places in the Missouri Synod.

Thus we came to an impasse. The members of the district presidium demanded (and logically so) that I teach the WELS doctrine of church fellowship exactly as delineated in the *1970 Statements* with the same passages and the same sequence of thoughts. Since, in my opinion, this requires me to use passages which call for spiritual separation from unbelievers to demand and promote separation from fellow believers in other denominations, I could not. I believe that lines do have to be drawn. We must proclaim the Word in its truth and purity to the best of our ability to understand it. But I could not agree with the way this statement uses the above-mentioned passages.

II. We are at an impasse on the issue of organists and soloists at weddings and funerals.

I ask you to turn now to the end of this letter and read the copy of a page from the *Northwestern Lutheran*. This explains our synod's approach to this issue. As you can see the question is about why we cannot have non-WELS/ELS relatives sing for a wedding or a funeral. In response, Prof. Brug

states that "Biblical principles teach us that we are not to worship or pray with individuals who adhere to false teachings." As proof he gives Romans 16:17, 2 John 10 & 11, and Titus 3:10. He concludes the article by, in effect, equating disobedience to this rule with disobedience against God Himself.

Now imagine this: A man has died. The family comes in to meet with the pastor for funeral arrangements. The family would like the granddaughter, who is a sincere believer in Jesus Christ but who belongs to the Evangelical Free church, to sing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" at the funeral. Can the pastor legitimately use these three passages to deny her that opportunity? Can the pastor say to her, "I'm sorry, but Romans 16:17-18 tell us to watch out for divisive people who are not serving our Lord Christ but their own appetites. Therefore, you cannot sing."? Can the pastor say to her, "I'm sorry, but 2 John 10 & 11 tell us not to support the wicked work of deceivers. Since you support the wicked work of your deceiving pastor, you cannot sing."? Can the pastor say to her, "I'm sorry, but Titus 3:10-11 tell me to warn a divisive person and then have nothing to do with him. Since you hold to Evangelical Free theology, you are divisive, warped, and self-condemned."? No, he cannot legitimately use those passages to deny her that opportunity to sing at her grandfather's funeral. I repeatedly told the district presidium that when we in the WELS use these passages in this manner against sincere brothers and sisters in the Lord in different denominations, we are misusing these passages and insulting fellow Christians.

I have repeatedly told the presidium that I am willing to say this, "Different church bodies teach differently. These doctrinal differences are real and they do matter. The Bible commands us to teach the truth without compromise. To maintain that clear confession of truth, it is obvious that lines have to be drawn somewhere. And here is where our church chooses to draw the line. Please respect that." That is how I have taught this point in the past. But the district presidium found this unacceptable. They demand that I teach this point exactly as Prof. Brug's article states. I must use those passages, the same line of reasoning, and conclude that this is the God-ordained, Biblical line and that disobedience to this is disobedience to God.

Once again, we are at an impasse.

There is an interesting aside to this in that I am told by various ELS pastors that the ELS does not have such a rule. My question is: How can the WELS hold that this is a God-ordained rule while the ELS does not have it and the two be in doctrinal fellowship?

III. There is another impasse in the issue of holy communion. The difference is between a strictly close (closed) communion where communion must be distributed only along denominational lines and what could be called "evangelical close communion."

To illustrate this point permit me to share with you two real life situations which have confronted me in my ministry at Faith. Both families have given me permission to share these stories with whomever I wish.

The first example involves a lady in our congregation in her 70's who has a sister about the same age. The sister is a life-long member of an LCMS congregation about an hour away. This sister, who now has terminal cancer, often visits our member for the weekend and comes to worship with her. Years ago this LCMS sister humbly asked if she could go to communion with her sister. I said, "No", and I explained the best that I could why not. Though deeply hurt and confused, the LCMS sister still regularly came to worship with her sister. However, she never asked to receive the Lord's Supper from

*Is he asking to allow for doctrinal freedom in his church body?*

us again. Year after year whenever the two sisters have come together on a communion Sunday, the WELS sister can attend the Lord's Supper, the LCMS sister cannot. For a number of years my heart and my soul have ached over this, and I have wondered if we are really right in being so totally restrictive along synodical lines. Do I really have the right and duty to deny the Lord's Supper from this humble, sincere daughter of God who believes basically as I do just because she is the wrong synod? When I asked the members of our district presidium, "What would Jesus do in this situation if Jesus were a WELS pastor?" I was told, "If Jesus were a WELS pastor, He would not give the LCMS woman communion." This is what has been tearing at my heart and soul. What would Jesus do? Would Jesus who came to seek and save the lost, who reached out in compassion to prostitutes, tax collectors, and thieves, who reached out and touched the leper, would this Jesus really refuse the LCMS woman His supper because she was the wrong synod?

The second example involves a woman in our congregation who has three sons from a previous marriage. The three sons were living with the father who sent the oldest son to confirmation classes in a Missouri Synod church. After the son was confirmed, the mother said to me, "Pastor, can my son receive communion with me when he comes to visit me for the weekend? He believes the same thing I believe." After talking with the young man, I said, "Yes", and I gave him communion. I did this repeatedly for him and then also the second son after he was confirmed. When this was reported to our district president, he told me (and I quote exactly), "You are violating WELS fellowship principles. You are disobeying Holy Scripture." That is exactly what tormented me. What passage was I to use to forbid this young man? Romans 16:17&18? Was he causing divisions and putting obstacles in our way because he was LCMS? Was he serving his own appetites instead of Christ? Or was I to use II John 10&11 and refuse him because he was in league with Christ-denying prophets? Was I to use Matthew 7:15 or Titus 3:10? What was I to use to forbid him? I could not find one example, not even one, in all of the New Testament where someone was refused communion under similar circumstances. (By the way, these three brothers have now come to live with their mother and step-father and have joined our congregation. They can now receive the Lord's Supper in our midst with the synod's blessings, but has anything really changed for them except their synodical uniform?)

That is exactly why I have trouble with the communion statement we use in our bulletin:

#### HOLY COMMUNION

In accordance with the teachings of the Word of God both on true doctrinal fellowship (Romans 16:17; John 8:31&32; II Thessalonians 2:14&15; Galatians 2:4&5) and on the nature of Holy Communion, (I Corinthians 11:27-29), we serve the Lord's body and blood only to our communicant members and the communicant members of those churches which believe and teach the same as we do, that is, members of WELS and ELS congregations.

The Scriptures show us that the New Testament Christian Church celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Communion only within the context of doctrinal unity (Acts 2:42). That church had a close communion because they were one in doctrine and faith. That church did not practice open communion.

I wrote this statement years ago in accordance with the way I was taught. At the time I truly believed it was correctly written. But I sincerely apologize to you because I no longer believe the statement should be written this way. To illustrate what I mean imagine that you are the LCMS mother of a member of Faith. You come to visit your daughter numerous times during the year and, when you are here, you come to church with her. As far as you are concerned, the two churches are very similar. However, you

read that you cannot take communion with us. Proof passages are given so you take out your Bible and look them up. Romans 16:17&18 instructs the Christians in Rome to watch out for people who cause divisions and put obstacles in the way of their faith. You wonder, "How does this passage prohibit me from receiving the Sacrament?" Then you turn to John 8:31&32. Here you see Jesus telling his disciples to hold to His teaching. You say, "I am following Jesus. How does this passage prohibit me from receiving the Sacrament?" Then you open to 2 Thessalonians 2:14&15 which tells us to hold firmly to God's Word. You say to yourself, "How does this passage prohibit me from receiving the Sacrament?" Then you study Galatians 2:4&5 which talks about Paul not giving in to the Judaizers, and you ask, "How does this passage prohibit me from receiving the sacrament?" And lastly you turn to Acts 2:42 which says that the New Testament Christians were faithful to the Lord, and you ask, "How does this passage prohibit me from receiving the Sacrament?" You don't know. But it must since you can't partake of the sacrament. What would you be thinking as your daughter received the sacrament? *what?*

Years ago a former member who had spend some years in the Missouri Synod used to say to me concerning this statement, "Pastor, those passages just don't fit." And we'd argue. But now I've come to realize that he, the layman, was right, and I, the pastor, was wrong. And I have told him so.

In the practice of a Biblical, evangelical close communion I freely admit that I don't know all the answers. I'm just learning myself. But this is important to me because it touches the heart of the Gospel. I understand the need for pure doctrine. After all, false doctrine hurts people, sometimes even fatally. But we are not talking here about giving in to false doctrine. Our church is not going to start rotting spiritually if we show compassion and allow someone outside the WELS to commune with us. In fact, I think we have a greater risk of rotting spiritually if we don't show people the compassion of God. Look at the face of Jesus. Look at the face of Him who came to seek and save the lost. He has rescued us from the depths of hell with His perfect life and sacrificial death, and He has given to us a new life with His glorious resurrection. We have been saved by the pure grace and mercy of God. And now He has placed in our hands the glorious liberating Gospel and the sacraments which are our God-given tools to bring His grace to others. Can we be so miserly with them? Can we keep them locked up for WELS only? Some have said to me, "This young man didn't need to take communion with his mother. He could have taken communion in his own LCMS church. You are only giving in to sentiment." To that I say, "Read James 2:14-17. I saw a young man who believes in Jesus Christ and who is walking in the way of Jesus. I saw a young man who has been deprived of so much time with his believing mother. I had the opportunity to give this young man the body and blood of Jesus which were given and shed for the forgiveness of his sins. I had the opportunity to give this dear woman and her son a spiritual experience together. And I could not deprive them of that. Before God I tell you that I could not." I have come to the point in my life where I believe that denying someone the Lord's Supper solely because he is the wrong synod is acting contrary to the Gospel of Jesus.

Thus we reached a third impasse.

*— Their synodical  
affiliation proclaims what  
they believe.*

There were a number of other problems as well. One was the use of the word "brother" in our doctrinal statement. The 1970 doctrinal statement says that, unless we are in full doctrinal agreement, we cannot call someone our brother. The presidium insisted that the word brother there meant "full partners in ministry." I could agree with that concept since I would not want to have a principal who taught evolution nor fellow pastors who defend abortion. But since Biblically all repentant believers in Jesus are my brothers and sisters in the Lord whether or not they agree with me on every point of doctrine, I contend that the word "brother" in the 1970 document is used in a way which is non-Biblical and could subliminally give people a totally wrong view. I also stated that I am leaning toward the conviction that

our synodical material has misused two other passages on communion for years: I Corinthians 10:17 and 11:29. But time does not permit a discussion on those other topics.

My brothers and sisters, I know that I have laid a heavy burden on your hearts. You love your Lord and His Bible, your congregation and synod and everyone in them. Your congregation is your spiritual family and your church has been a haven to you in the storms of life. Believe me, I have no desire to hurt you. I have spoken out on this issue and have written this letter for your ultimate, spiritual benefit. You see, truth is rarely reached through censorship. Rather truth is reached when Christians are free to discuss these points openly while examining the Scriptures to see what is true and what is not. And you, as the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation, have the Holy Spirit, the Holy Bible, and your own hearts and brains. And you should be able to realize that no visible earthly church or synod is infallible. Even very solid evangelical church bodies can have blind spots in their theology and practice. The important thing is that, when we realize that something is incorrect, we have the wisdom and courage to change it, to line it up with Scripture.

My brothers and sisters, it is obvious that Faith is at a most critical time in her history. This is and will be a very emotionally charged issue because it strikes at the depths of our hearts. How you, the members of Faith, react now will determine much of Faith's future. It is absolutely essential that you handle this correctly. This means that, first of all, each one of you must seek the Lord in prayer. Go to Him, as His precious child in Jesus, and seek His wisdom and guidance. As you pray and meditate on these points, God will answer your prayer and give you wisdom (James 1:5). Secondly, remember that you are all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. God has adopted you into His family through Jesus' blood. I beg you, please love each other. As God has loved you, love each other (John 13:34). And remember that genuine Christian love is the one major characteristic of the child of God (John 13:35). As part of this love, truly listen to each other. Be more eager to listen than to speak. Hold on to each other. Even when you disagree, hold on to each other in love. Do not break off from each other or cut each other off. Keep on communicating and praying until God gives you His solution. Be patient. Give Him time to reveal His will in each person's heart.

*What was he expecting to do? Praying with church with him?*

James 1:19-20: My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

James 1:26: If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

I Corinthians 1:10: I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

In Jesus our Savior,



Darald Gruen

P. S. My wife wishes me to relate to you that she is totally united with me in this. Also, I want you to know that this letter was printed and mailed totally at my expense as has been the vast majority of costs in this entire matter.

B. To designate certain nonfundamental doctrines as not being divisive of church fellowship in their very nature:

C. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a church federation, in a church agency, in a cooperative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradually increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice.

#### CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

(This is the presentation of our Wisconsin Synod Commission on Doctrinal Matters, discussed by the Joint Doctrinal Committees of the Synodical Conference)

##### Preamble

Church Fellowship is a term that has been used to designate both a status and an activity. Both usages lie very close together and one flows out of the other. The two usages follow the general dogmatic distinction of in acta primo et actu secundo.

Church Fellowship can be defined as the status in which individuals or groups on the basis of a common confession of faith have mutually recognized one another as Christian brethren and now consider it God-pleasing to express, manifest, and demonstrate their common faith jointly.

Church Fellowship can also be defined as the activity which includes every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians (individuals or groups) on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another. (Mutual recognition of one another as Christian brethren is itself one such "joint expression" of common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.)

For very practical reasons we have preferred to treat Church Fellowship in our Theses as a term designating an activity since the inter-synodical tensions have to do more with Church Fellowship as an activity than as a status. Both as a status and as an activity Church Fellowship needs to be distinguished from the spiritual fellowship of faith in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta) which it is meant to reflect but with which it cannot simply be identified. For in the case of hypocrites, who have not yet been revealed, Church Fellowship is still called for, though the fellowship in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta fellowship) is actually not existing. On the other hand, people may in God's sight be united in the fellowship in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta fellowship) and yet not have warrant to practice Church Fellowship here on earth.

We also felt that our definition of Church Fellowship was general enough to include both proper and improper practice of Church Fellowship, for the definition itself does not specify what constitutes an adequate confession on the basis of which individuals or groups may properly find themselves united in a common faith. For is there not in all Church Fellowship the assumption present that an adequate confession exists? Our presentation under the points of B sets forth what constitutes a proper confession, the marks of the Church (notae purae), on the basis of which Christians may properly find themselves united in a common faith.

### The Theses

Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.

#### A. How Scripture leads us to this concept of church fellowship.

1. Through faith in Christ the Holy Spirit unites us with our God and Savior. Gal. 3:26; 4:6; I John 3:1.
2. This Spirit-wrought faith at the same time unites us in an intimate bond with all other believers. I John 1:3; Eph. 4:4-6; John 17:20, 21. Compare also the many striking metaphors emphasizing the unity of the Church, e.g., the body of Christ, the temple of God.
3. Faith as spiritual life invariably expresses itself in activity which is spiritual in nature, yet outwardly manifest, e.g., in the use of the means of grace, in prayer, in praise and worship, in appreciative use of the "gifts" of the Lord to the Church, in Christian testimony, in furthering the cause of the Gospel, in deeds of Christian love. John 8:47; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:11-14; Acts 4:20; II Cor. 4:13; I Pet. 2:9; Gal. 2:9; 5:6.
4. It is God the Holy Ghost who leads us to express and manifest in activity the faith which He works and sustains in our hearts through the Gospel. Gal. 4:6; John 15:26, 27; John 7:38, 39; Acts 1:8; Eph. 2:10.

5. Through the bond of faith in which He unites us with all Christians the Holy Spirit also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians according to opportunity: as smaller and larger groups, Acts 1:14, 15; 2:41-47; Gal. 2:9; as congregations with other congregations, Acts 15; I Thess. 4:9, 10; II Cor. 8:1, 2, 18, 19; II Cor. 9:2. (Before God every activity of our faith is at the same time fellowship activity in the communion of saints. I Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-16; Rom. 12:1-8; II Tim. 2:19.)

6. We may classify these joint expressions of faith in various ways according to the particular realm of activity in which they occur, e.g., pulpit fellowship, altar fellowship, prayer fellowship, fellowship in worship, fellowship in church work, in missions, in Christian education, in Christian charity. Yet insofar as they are joint expressions of faith they are all essentially one and the same thing, and are all properly covered by a common designation, namely, church fellowship. \* Church fellowship should therefore

\*) Full attention needs to be given in this statement to the limiting terms: "insofar" and "joint." The "insofar" is to point out that it is indeed only in their function as joint expressions of faith that the use of the Means of Grace and such other things mentioned as Christian prayer, Christian education, and Christian charity all lie on the same plane. In other respects the Means of Grace and their use are indeed unique. Only through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, does the Holy Spirit awaken, nourish, and sustain faith. Again, only the right use of Word and Sacrament are the true marks of the Church, the marks by which the Lord points us to those with whom He would have us express our faith jointly.

For anything to be a "joint" expression of faith presupposes that those involved are really expressing their faith together. This distinguishes a joint expression of faith from individual expressions of faith which happen to be made at the same time and at the same place.

Certain things like the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the proclamation of the Gospel, and also prayer are by their very nature expressions of faith and are an abomination in God's sight when not intended to be that. When done together they are therefore invariably joint expressions of faith. Other things like giving a greeting, a kiss, a hand-

be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith. Hence Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease, Rom. 16:17. Hence Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship, Gal. 2:9, and in greeting one another with the fraternal kiss, Rom. 16:16; on the other hand, it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them Godspeed, II John 10, 11. Cf. III John 5-8.

B. What principles Scripture teaches for the exercise of such church fellowship.

1. In selecting specific individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith, we can do this only on the basis of their confession. It would be presumptuous on our part to attempt to recognize Christians on the basis of the personal faith in their hearts. II Tim. 2:19; Rom. 10:10; I John 4:1-3; I Sam. 16:7.

2. A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God. The denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief. John 8:31; Matt. 5:19; I Pet. 4:11; Jer. 23:28, 31; Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19. We recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept His entire Word. Com-

shake, extending hospitality, or physical help to others are in themselves not of necessity expressions of Christian faith. Hence doing these things together with others does not necessarily make them joint expressions of faith, even though a Christian will for his own person also thereby be expressing his faith (cf. I Cor. 10:31). These things done together with others become joint expressions of faith only when those involved intend them to be that, understand them in this way, and want them to be understood thus, as in the case of the apostolic collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem, the fraternal kiss of the apostolic church, our handshake at ordination and confirmation.

3. Walthers' "Theses on Open Questions," Thesis 7: "No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or nonfundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or of practice, to historical items or other matters subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters."

Actually, however, the faith of Christians and its manifestations are marked by many imperfections, either in the grasp and understanding of Scriptural truths, or in the matter of turning these truths to full account in their lives. We are all weak in one way or another. Phil. 3:12; Eph. 4:14; 3:16-18; I Thess. 5:14; Heb. 5:12; I Pet. 2:2. Compare Walthers' Thesis 5: "The Church militant must indeed aim at and strive for absolute unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one." Cf. Thesis 10.

4. Weakness of faith is in itself not a reason for terminating church fellowship, but rather an inducement for practicing it vigorously to help one another in overcoming our individual weaknesses. In precept and example Scripture abounds with exhortations to pay our full debt of love toward the weak.

a. General exhortations. Gal. 6:1-3; Eph. 4:1-16; Matt. 18:15-17.

b. Weakness in laying hold of God's promises in a firm trust. Matt. 6:25-34.

c. Weakness with reference to adaphora in enjoying fully the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Rom. 14; I Cor. 8 and 9. The public confession of any church must establish, however, which things are adaphora so that it may be evident who are the weak and who are the strong. Rom. 14:17-23; I Cor. 6:12; 10:23, 24.

d. Weakness in understanding God's truth, and involvement in error. Acts 1:6; Galatians (Judaizing error); Colossians (Jewish-Gnostic error); I Cor. 15; I Thess. 4:10-12, 14; II

Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; Acts 15:5, 6, 22, 25. Note how in all these cases Paul patiently built up the weak faith of these Christians with the Gospel to give them strength to overcome the error that had affected them. Compare Walther's Theses 2, 3, 4, and 8.

5. Persistent adherence to false doctrine and practice calls for termination of church fellowship.

a. We cannot continue to recognize and treat anyone as a Christian brother who in spite of all brotherly admonition impenitently clings to a sin. His and our own spiritual welfare calls for termination of church fellowship. Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:1-6. (Excommunication.)

b. We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it. Gal. 1:8, 9; 5:9; Matt. 7:15-19; 16:6; II Tim. 2:17-19; II John 9-11; Rom. 16:17, 18. If the error does not overthrow the foundation of saving faith, the termination of fellowship is not to be construed as an excommunication. Moreover an excommunication can only apply to an individual, not to a congregation or larger church group. The "avoid them" of Rom. 16:17, 18 excludes any contact that would be an acknowledgment and manifestation of church fellowship; it calls for a cessation of every further joint expression of faith. Cf. I Cor. 5:9-11. Compare Walther's Theses 9 and 10.

c. Those who practice church fellowship with persistent errorists are partakers of their evil deeds. II John 11.

From all of this we see that in the matter of the outward expression of Christian fellowship, the exercise of church fellowship, particularly two Christian principles need to direct us, the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Con-

scientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice also in facing many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry.

On the basis of the foregoing, we find it to be an untenable position

I. To distinguish between joint prayer which is acknowledged to be an expression of church fellowship and an occasional joint prayer which purports to be something short of church fellowship;

II. To designate certain nonfundamental doctrines as not being divisive of church fellowship in their very nature;

III. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a church federation, in a church agency, in a cooperative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradually increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice.

# Church teachings and church fellowship

John F. Brug

*Why can't WELS members have Christian friends or relatives who are not WELS sing at their funeral or wedding? Can we judge who is a member of God's church or not?*

Biblical principles teach us that we are not to worship or pray with individuals who adhere to false teachings (Romans 16:17, 2 John 10-11, Titus 3:10). If we worship with them, we fail to give clear testimony against doctrinal differences that separate us. It is our practice, therefore, that only fellow Christians who are in doctrinal agreement with our church will lead us in worship.

Christian weddings and funerals are not private, personal ceremonies held to honor the wedding couple or the deceased, but are services directed to the glory of God and based on his Word. Therefore, those who lead worship during a wedding or funeral must meet the same biblical standards of doctrinal unity with us that apply to other services.

We cannot judge who is a member of the "invisible church of all believers" since membership depends solely on the presence or absence of faith in Christ. Only God can detect this faith with certainty and can judge who will enter heaven.

God commands us, however, to judge a person's doctrine by comparing it with Scripture. In public worship, we must use the confession of the individual's church membership to determine whether

we may join in church fellowship with that individual. If people are members of a church that adheres to false doctrine, we may not invite them to take a leading role in our services without compromising our testimony to the truth.

Family ties cannot set aside this rule. When there is conflict between ties to family and friends and obedience to God's Word, God's Word must always take priority (Matthew 10:32-39).

This is hard to accept and practice, but God clearly says he will not take second place in our lives. Obedience to his Word must come before every human loyalty.

---

*When there is conflict between ties to family and friends and obedience to God's Word, God's Word must take priority.*

---

## ***What are the beliefs of the Quaker religion?***

The Quaker religion gives greater priority to following a common life-style and style of worship than to doctrinal statements. For Quakers, religious experience is more important than creeds. The basic principle of Quakerism is that God communicates with people through the "Inner Light," a form of direct revelation, apart from the written Word and sacraments.

Historically, Quakers were very

negative toward pastors, church buildings, liturgy, and the sacraments. In the typical Quaker meeting, the members sat around waiting for someone to receive a revelation from God. Quakers strongly advocated social reform, and opposed all war and all oaths.

More recently, Quakers have been strongly influenced by evangelical Protestantism. Many of their services differ little from evangelical Protestant worship, and their theology ranges from fundamentalist to liberal.

Today it is difficult to say what the Quakers' position is, even on such basic issues as the Trinity, the Bible, and the sacraments, because there is no unanimity. Nevertheless, the basic premise remains the same: the "Inner Light" is sufficient to lead people to salvation, even without knowledge of the facts recorded about Christ in the Bible.

This belief separates them sharply from Lutherans who emphasize the importance of the Word and sacraments. Lutherans are also separated from Quakers by our insistence that the historic acts of redemption by Christ take priority over and are the basis for our personal religious experience.

*John Brug is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.*

*Have a question? Send it to Questions, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; fax 414/256-3899.*