

The Lord Has Done Great Things For Us

WELS Michigan District Convention, June 13-15, 2000

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"Forward in Christ!" That slogan, borne upon banners and bulletins and a brand new name for our church publication, announces the optimistic attitude with which the WELS is approaching its celebration of 150 years as a synod, 150 years as a beneficiary of God's free and faithful grace. Services of celebration, like the ones enjoyed by too few members of our own district in Ypsilanti this past weekend, inspire us to look forward with faith and hope, and take up the task God gives us to do as we move into the future.

With all this looking forward, with our entire synod seemingly striving to move forward, I had to appreciate the irony of being asked by our district's praesidium to deliver an essay that looks *backward*.

Yet who would argue that those who wish to move ahead must have some sense of what they leave behind. That doubly so for those who wish to move forward "in Christ," because what it means for confessional Lutherans to be "in Christ" is the product of long years of God's goodness down through the course of history.

History, of course, is something that we in Michigan have in good supply. The first Lutheran missionary to reach the American midwest began his work here in Michigan. The oldest Lutheran congregation in our Wisconsin Synod was actually founded here in Michigan. If one is looking for colorful characters and controversial events, there is no shortage of them in the history of Michigan. But the purpose of this essay will not be to focus merely on milestones of human achievement, but rather on gemstones of divine blessing. Like the psalm writer Asaph of old, I will appeal for your attention not so that you may hear what I have to say but so that, together, we may recall *"the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done."* (Ps 78:4)

In that frame of mind, then, let us give attention to the first portion of the theme for this 100th Convention of the Michigan District, according to the outline:

THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

- 1) That we might KNOW the Truth
- 2) That we might STAND UP for the Truth
- 3) That we might REACH OUT with the Truth
- 4) That we might PASS ON the Truth
- 5) That we might TELL the Truth



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

I. That we might KNOW the Truth

It is typical of the great things God does that when he first gave his Truth to Michigan, he also gave Michigan ears that were ready to hear it.

Prior to the turn of the 19th century, what we call Michigan was simply counted within that vast and largely unexplored region west of the Appalachians known as the Northwest Territory. Following the French and Indian War, the British took charge of the three French perimeter strongholds at Detroit, St. Joseph, and Sault Ste. Marie, but settlement of the interior of the region proceeded only slowly, due in no small measure to the uncordial attitude of the local Indians who were kept well stocked by the Brits with both firepower and firewater.

Then, in 1794, U.S. general "Mad" Anthony Wayne succeeded in defeating the Indians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers near present-day Toledo. The victory both opened the door for wider settlement and effectively closed the door on Britain's occupation of the region between the three Great Lakes. In July of 1796, Lt. Col. John Hamtramck led his U.S. troops into Detroit, struck down the *Union Jack* and replaced it with the *Stars and Stripes*. So was the path set toward statehood for Michigan.¹

No single event would be as significant in pushing Michigan to the end of that path than the completion, in 1825, of "Clinton's Big Ditch" -- the Erie Canal. This 400-mile wonder of 19th-century engineering linked Lake Erie to the Hudson River and, in effect, turned Detroit into an Atlantic sea port.² The city quickly became a crossroads of both commerce and settlement. Boatloads of immigrants now made the trek from New York's harbor to Syracuse and from there down the canal and across the lake to Detroit. From that point, those seeking warmer climes elected to turn south and west, but for those accustomed to the heartier environment of northern Europe -- especially the Hollanders and Germans -- the rolling hills and thick forests of southern Michigan looked invitingly like home. Their scattered settlements soon congealed into towns with shops and businesses and taverns and jails -- but few churches.

It was with the goal to help fill that need that, on the afternoon of Friday, August 16, 1833, a young German missionary found himself standing on the deck of the steamboat "Florida" as it paddled its way across Lake Erie toward Detroit City. Nearly three months earlier, Friedrich Jacob Schmid had left his family home in Waldorf, Wuerttemberg, Germany, having accepted the assignment of the Swiss mission institute at Basel to carry the Truth to a group of his fellow Wuerttembergers settled in the American wilderness.³

After his long and difficult journey, one can imagine with what anxious anticipation Schmid stepped off the boat onto Detroit's dock. Was this, in fact, where God wanted him to be, where God wished the Truth to be told? It didn't take long for Schmid to find his answer. In a letter home, he later wrote:

"On the evening of my arrival I came to know several Germans who had heard of my

coming. They bade me stay with them over Sunday and said they had not heard a German sermon in three to five years. ...Sunday arrived and you should have seen how the forsaken and spiritually perplexed sheep came to the gathering from distances up to five and six miles; and how eager they were to hear the Gospel!⁴

An equally eager and enthusiastic reception awaited Schmid when he reached his ultimate destination, the German settlement on the outskirts of the village of Ann Arbor. There he was met first by Jonathan Henry Mann, a prosperous German tradesman who had taken the lead in writing to Basel for a pastor. It is well worth noting how open-handed this layman was in his efforts to provide for the spiritual well-being of his family and community. It was Jonathan Mann who provided Schmid his first home, first horse, and first suit of new clothes in the New World, and who ultimately became Schmid's father-in-law when the missionary married his daughter, Louise, in 1834. So we need not doubt that Mann's welcome of Schmid on that first August afternoon was a warm one.

When Sunday arrived there, Schmid could again report, "It was with pleasure that I spoke and was permitted to experience how earnestly these people sought the Word of God which they hadn't heard for so long a time."⁵

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder" is an axiom that seldom holds true when it is God's Word from which one is absent. The sinful nature too quickly conspires to crowd out the Truth, leaving room in the heart only for Satan's lies. In ways now known only to him, however, God managed to preserve in these, our Michigan ancestors, a love for his Word and an eagerness to hear it preached. Clearly, it was God who cultivated that soil so that Schmid could sow the seed and see it grow. Among all the great things God has done for us in Michigan, there was perhaps none more historically essential than this -- that from the very first word of the Truth spoken by the very first pastor to speak it, there were ears able to hear and hearts moved to believe.

Had God not done this great thing -- graciously creating ears and hearts open to his Truth -- no Lutheran church could have begun in Michigan. And had God not continued to do this great thing, no Lutheran church would remain in Michigan. That we are here today is evidence of the single strand of God's free and faithful grace that has stretched from 1833 to 2000, binding each of us to Jonathan Mann and his family and friends and neighbors, joint beneficiaries all of the greatness of God's grace that opens ears and opens hearts so we might KNOW the Truth.



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

II. That we might STAND UP for the Truth

One great blessing of working on a mission field is that the need for and value of one's work is in evidence wherever one chooses to look. This blessing Friedrich Schmid certainly experienced as he took up his labors in Michigan. His letters describe what he saw

as he looked about:

There is plenty of work here. There are some twenty children that are not yet baptized, some of them more than a year old. In fact, there are some people here sixty years of age that are not baptized and have never received confirmation instruction. ...I met a man of some fifty years, a right decent sort of a man -- he is neither baptized nor confirmed, neither can he read or write, nor has he partaken of the Lord's Supper. ...He is the father of nine children, of whom the youngest is five years of age, and none are baptized yet. These people are very happy that they are going to be able to receive instruction in the Word of God.

...There are also a few Indians around here, but some forty-five miles from here there are many. They are brown in color; have silver and lead rings hanging from their ears and their noses, and have long, black hair. Most of them are quite naked, some entirely. ...Pitiful creatures they are. When you speak to them concerning God, they always speak of a great spirit and point towards the heavens. ...When I observe how the Indians go about in such a needy manner, and how they often are thankful for a single piece of bread, and how in particular they know nothing about our Savior, who also became their Savior, I am often desirous of bringing the Gospel to them; of course, I do not know their language and they do not understand much English. But the Lord can accomplish great things in a short time in his Kingdom.⁶

Great things are what the Lord did accomplish as he led Missionary Schmid to take up his work with enviable energy and vitality. Not content with only feeding that first little flock gathered in and around Scio Township, Schmid soon saddled his horse and set out to carry the Truth to the countryside roundabout. From one side of his saddle he hung an ax to use to chop his own paths through thick forest undergrowth. From the other side hung a satchel of bibles and catechisms he would leave with fathers to use in teaching their families. Over the course of his mission ministry, the Lord allowed Friedrich Schmid to gather together scattered individuals and families into more than twenty Lutheran congregations in south and central Michigan, including those still proclaiming the Truth today in Dorr, Grass Lake, Lansing, Monroe, Plymouth, Saline, and Sebewaing, as well as two in Ann Arbor. With such a wide-open field before him, Schmid experienced early and often the blessing of being able to share the life-giving message of the Gospel with people who did not know it and who desperately needed to hear it.

However, the devil, in his cleverness, can at times twist that very blessing into a temptation. A missionary on a foreign field works, day after day, with people for whom each new word of Scripture is a fresh discovery and to whom even the most basic points of doctrine are challenging and unfamiliar. In such an environment, the lure can be strong to sift through the Scriptures and select only those nuggets of the Truth that seem most essential to salvation, setting aside the others as of secondary importance. As Schmid set out to serve his parishes of settlers, souls who had for so long been separated from the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, it is easy to imagine how he could have convinced himself that what his people needed was the sincere milk of the Word, with little attention given to the meat of confessional orthodoxy.

Add to this situation the pressures of isolation that are an unavoidable reality of foreign mission service. That Schmid felt such pressures is clear from a letter he wrote during his second year in Michigan:

Alone and apparently forsaken by my brothers who were with me in that house of

peace where we prepared ourselves for our holy mission service, I stand here in the fields of America; and who would blame me, for oft I yearn for one or another (of them), in order to cool myself from the heat of the day and the heat of the battle in the lovely shade of brotherly communion. But I know very well that oceans separate us; I stand alone in this huge continent; not one of the loved ones from the Basler Mission Home is to be met.⁷

Without the salutary counsel and support of brothers in the ministry, any called worker can easily fall victim to the errors of sin-weak reason. In Schmid's case, any fair assessment of his ministry will need to acknowledge that, while his zeal for missions can not be questioned, his commitment to confessionalism must be. As Prof. John Brenner has summarized,

Schmid's letters to Basel reveal his pastoral heart, his love for souls, and his zeal to proclaim the gospel. But they also reveal his lack of a clear understanding of the scriptural principles of church fellowship. He wanted to be a Lutheran but really didn't know how. He understood the need for a sound Lutheran confession in sectarian America... However, since he was raised in the "mild" Lutheranism of Wuerttemberg and trained by the unionistic mission society of Basel, his practice did not always conform to sound Lutheran principles.⁸

It was Schmid's easy acceptance of doctrinal compromise that led to his break with the Franconian pastors sent from Bavaria to Michigan by J. K. Wilhelm Loehe. In agreeing to share with the Frankens responsibility for mission work among the Indians, Schmid had assured them "no missionary is to be sent to the heathen who does not subscribe to the Book of Concord of the Lutheran Church."⁹ However, pressed by the shortage of available pastors, Schmid later accepted a Basler missionary named Dumser who openly rejected the Lutheran confessions, and sent him to work among the Indians near Sebewaing. The Frankens objected as a matter of conscience, correctly declaring that "true pure doctrine and adherence to the Word and Holy Sacraments according to the confessions of our Lutheran church"¹⁰ is the only proper basis of church union. They withdrew from fellowship with Schmid and eventually went on to help found the Missouri Synod. How the history of Lutheranism in America might have been different if Friedrich Schmid had been strong enough to stand up for the Truth.

But what Michigan lacked in Friedrich Schmid, the Lord provided. For years, Schmid had appealed to Basel to send more missionaries to help him serve the congregations he was planting. Few had been sent, and none remained in Michigan for long. But, in 1860, the Lord called two young pastors from the Basel Mission House who would come to stand as confessional keystones in the building of the Lutheran church in Michigan.

Stephan Klingman and Christoph Ludwig Eberhardt were gifted classmates, both of whom had turned from secular trades (Eberhardt as a weaver, Klingman as a comb maker) to prepare for missionary service. The two also shared a common hope of being called into the growing mission field in southern Africa. When their assignments pointed them instead toward Michigan, Koehler notes that, at first, they felt "as having been found wanting by the Lord for the greater sacrifices of the African service."¹¹ History makes it clear, however, that God found little wanting in these two faithful servants, for he asked great things of them.

Klingman, the slighter and more bookish of the two, was burdened with health

problems that had dogged him since his childhood.¹² While this handicap required his ministry to be more sedentary, it reduced its energy and influence but little. Most of Klingman's public ministry was spent as pastor of the Scio congregation that Schmid founded, but the district's historical record also notes his service to the churches in Ann Arbor, Adrian, and Monroe.¹³ In addition, he served the Michigan Synod eleven years as vice president and fourteen years as president, being Schmid's successor in that office.

Eberhardt, the heartier of the pair, accepted the role of traveling missionary (*Reiseprediger*) and the scope of his service is the stuff of legend. Using St. Paul congregation in Hopkins as his "home base," Eberhardt developed a string of congregations in Allegan, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties, a circuit of over 350 miles which he managed to cover once every three weeks -- on foot! Eventually he extended his reach into Clinton and Saginaw counties and even made a sojourn to the Upper Peninsula where he found and preached to souls eager for the Gospel as far west as Superior, WI.¹⁴ The furious pace eventually took its toll. After a bout of illness and exhaustion, Eberhardt accepted the call as pastor of St. Paul's congregation in Saginaw, a pulpit he filled until shortly before his death in 1893. During those years he, like Klingman, was called upon to lead his synod, for eleven years as vice-president and for ten as president.

We are most indebted to this pair of pioneer pastors, however, and we thank God for their service most heartily because what propelled them in their work was not just a zeal for missions or for outward growth, but a zeal for the Truth. This grace-born conviction God used to set a confessional course for the new Lutheran synod in Michigan.

Friedrich Schmid and most of the pioneer pastors who came after him to the Michigan mission field were products of the mission houses of Basel and Chrischona where the pietism and unionism of Johann Bengel and Christian Friedrich Spittler held sway. No matter how much he traveled, Schmid's heart was never far from Basel.¹⁵ Already in the first half of the nineteenth century, much of Lutheranism in America was leaning in the sort of loose and mild direction with which Schmid felt very comfortable. He would have been content to lead Michigan down the same path.

For Klingman and Eberhardt, however, the Scriptures dictated another direction. Koehler reports that "under the leadership of Klingman, confessional practice became more and more the rule, over against the laxity and indefiniteness that had gained ground under Schmid's praesidium."¹⁶ And the course set by his classmate was continued with, if anything, ever greater commitment by Eberhardt.

The presidencies of Klingman and Eberhardt, stretching from 1867 to 1890, virtually bracket the history of the Michigan Synod from its days as a fledgling church body, to its founding membership in the General Council, to its difficult role as the sole voice for confessional Lutheranism in that body, to its eventual withdrawal from the Council and entry into the Synodical Conference, the prelude to Michigan's federation with the Lutheran synods of Wisconsin and Minnesota. These decades offered the Lutheran flocks of Michigan ample temptation to stray from the Truth. Mercifully, God supplied shepherds who took a better path.

Initially, membership in the *General Council of Ev. Lutheran Churches in America* seemed to hold out great hope for Michigan. The proposed union of more than a dozen Lutheran church bodies, including those from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, and Missouri, presented not only a rare and precious opportunity for fellowship and joint mission work, but also a possible source for something the congregations of Michigan desperately needed -- faithful, well-trained pastors. The hope of addressing that dire need was, in fact, the single most pressing reason that the Michigan Synod sustained its stress-filled relationship with the General Council for over two decades, long after other conservative Lutheran bodies had withdrawn.

It took not nearly that long for Michigan to realize that the General Council would not offer them all they had hoped for. The Council's first convention in 1867 accepted a request from the Ohio Synod to study and clarify its position on four points of doctrine, concerning millennialism, lodgery, and altar and pulpit fellowship. In preparation for the next gathering of the Council, the Michigan Synod received and soundly endorsed an essay by Christoph Eberhardt which took its stand squarely on the truths of Scripture. However, the 1868 Council convention offered resolutions concerning the "Four Points" that were too broad and vague to be of any confessional value. In his report to Michigan, Pastor Klingman, in just the second year of his presidency, urged, "Let us not yet give up hope that the indefinite and misleading language of the proposed resolutions regarding the 'Four Points' may still be given a clear and positive expression."¹⁷

Michigan would continue to clutch desperately at that straw of patient hopefulness over the next two decades as the "Four Points," and particularly the issues of fellowship, would continue to be studied, discussed, and debated, but never resolved. Throughout those years, Klingman and Eberhardt after him held the reins of a church body whose pastors continued to come from a distressing disparity of theological backgrounds. The products of at least four different European mission houses, novice pastors from the fledgling training programs of the General Council, and cast-off workers from various other church bodies all struggled to find a place and fit together in Michigan. Pastor Oscar Frey correctly comments, "In such a conglomerate body, composed of men of such vastly different theological training, unity in doctrine and practice was hardly possible, and it was probably only that by the grace of God it had such leaders as Klingman and Eberhardt in those critical years that orthodox Lutheranism did win out in the synod."¹⁸

At last, after decades of firm but fruitless confession within the General Council, President Eberhardt urged in his 1888 report to the synod, "We must publicly declare our position over against the General Council by severing our connections with that body. Until we take that step, we shall rightly be regarded as un-Lutheran by positive Lutherans."¹⁹ The synod responded with resolutions that declared, as a "firm testimony against un-Lutheran courses of action,"²⁰ that the Michigan Synod was withdrawing itself from fellowship with the General Council.

The Council experience was a baptism of fire for the young Michigan Synod, a period which left the synod not unscorched but certainly tested and tempered. Pastor Frey reflects:

While the synod should not have let itself be appeased time and again with nice sounding resolutions, the union may nevertheless have been a blessing in disguise in that the practice in the Council made the discussion of certain doctrines, as those mentioned in the Four Points, a burning issue and forced its pastors into intensive study of God's Word and Lutheran practice which, of course, resulted in furtherance in knowledge of pure doctrine and correct practice."²¹

That the desire to conform both doctrine and practice to Holy Scripture was more than just a pious wish is evident in the way the Michigan Synod followed its withdrawal from the General Council with the instigation of a synod-wide program of visitation. A synodical Board of Visitors was established in 1889, each member accepting the duty of personally visiting each of his assigned congregations at least once every three years to observe and inquire after the confessional health of the congregation in areas such as preaching, the education of children, church discipline, stewardship, Gospel outreach, and other matters of congregational practice. The visitor's role was neither to criticize nor to compare congregations, but rather to offer the congregation's members the chance to encourage, correct, and support each other. The program, which continued into the next century, did much not only to nurture but to unify the synod in its stand for the Truth.

Of course, those who stand upon the Scriptures will never stand alone when the chance exists to stand together. Hence, having left its union with the General Council, the Michigan Synod was quick to seek a broader fellowship of like-minded believers. It found what it was looking for in the Synodical Conference, a union of Lutheran bodies that included state synods from Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, as well as the Norwegian Synod.

The first step leading Michigan into the Synodical Conference fold was again taken by two classmates -- not Klingman and Eberhardt this time, but C.A. Lederer, Eberhardt's successor as Michigan Synod president, and his Chrischona classmate, C. J. Albrecht, president of the Minnesota Synod. As the sainted Prof. Edward Fredrich explains,

Minnesota was enjoying good results from its working relationship with Wisconsin (*i.e. in the Synodical Conference - mpm*) during the previous decade. Michigan had finally terminated its restive General Council membership in 1888 and was understandably lonely. How natural that the two old friends would develop plans for an association that would involve, Wisconsin, Minnesota's partner, and the neighbor of both.²²

Prof. Fredrich, in another writing, maintains that Michigan may have moved too hastily in its efforts to unite with Wisconsin and Minnesota and, as a result, suffered through years of turbulence and tribulation before settling, early in the new century, into its role as one district of a larger synod. To be sure, Michigan paid a price for some instances of pettiness and poor judgment in its early Federation years, but perhaps the synod can be forgiven for embracing too eagerly the opportunity, at last, to stand shoulder to shoulder with fellow Christians whose confessional feet were firmly planted on the bedrock of biblical Truth.

The middle decades of the twentieth century found the spiritual and historical descendants of Klingman and Eberhardt laboring earnestly to practice what their Michigan forefathers had preached. Indeed, as the wrenching confessional struggle with the Missouri Synod ran its course in the late 1950s, the district that lay east of Lake Michigan was often criticized by those to the west for conduct that, in fact, closely mirrored the attitudes of both

Klingman and Eberhardt. As Prof. James Tiefel explains in his concluding essay of our district's 1985 *Festschrift*,

(The Missouri Synod's) Michigan District was... among the most conservative of her districts. There were, in fact, local Missourians who joined us in protesting the actions coming out of their synod. They were sympathetic to the stand Wisconsin was taking and encouraged her to take it more boldly. ...it's no wonder that Michigan District pastors and laymen had problems at first when they heard sentinel voices in the west calling for severance of fellowship.²³

Michigan's men were no less committed to the Truth of Scripture than any other members of the WELS, but perhaps they felt more acutely than most the determination to overlook no opportunity for reconciliation. One can almost hear the words of Stephan Klingman echo from the past, "Let us not yet give up hope..."

Ultimately, however, when the time came to take action as a synod to withdraw from fellowship with the Missouri Synod, Michigan did not waver in its support of a firm stand for the Truth. The clear voice of Christoph Eberhardt also still rang true: "We must publicly declare our position...". With the WELS, Michigan did just that.

It is interesting to note that the Michigan District, which at mid-twentieth century was charged by some as being a bit too limply liberal, now enters the twenty-first century with a reputation among some for being a bit too stiffly conservative. Has the confessional position of Michigan changed? The record will show it has not. Our district still stands where Eberhardt and Klingman stood, solidly upon the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Michigan's beliefs have not changed.

What has changed, perhaps, or what has at least developed over time, has been our district's willingness to stand up boldly -- some might say brashly -- for what it believes. Recent decades offer ample evidence of Michigan's willingness to let its voice be heard. Permit the mention of three brief examples.

In the late 1960s, concerns were raised in Michigan and elsewhere about our synod's practice of accepting and even soliciting funds from several fraternal insurance agencies. The issue became the focus of considerable study and discussion in district assemblies, supported in no small measure by then district president, Rev. Waldemar Zarling. In response to these concerns, the synod appointed a committee to review Scriptural principles of stewardship as they applied to the matters in question. In 1978, the *Report of the Committee on Grants* was submitted to the districts for consideration. A Michigan pastor of that day records, "Encouraged by the strong sentiments of its district president, the (Michigan) district expressed its dissatisfaction with the report because it failed to review more explicitly the disadvantages and dangers of receiving such grants."²⁴ Though the synod took no direct action in response to Michigan's protest, it may be noted that at least one of the companies involved was prevailed upon to revise its bylaws to alter areas of concern. It is also safe to say that this issue continues to have its watchdogs in the Michigan district today.

In 1976, this writer attended his very first pastoral conference while serving his vicarship in a Northern Conference congregation. A paper delivered at that conference dealing with church discipline offered a brief quote from the pastoral theology text, *Shepherd*

Under Christ, printed by our synod's official publishing house. Men of the conference took issue with the quote which seemed to offer suspension from membership as an acceptable alternative to excommunication. The conference's discussion of the paper and particularly of that brief quote developed into a fourteen-year dialogue between the Michigan district's Constitution Committee and the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Ultimately, those discussions led to a revision of the text.

In 1978, the leadership of the WELS made the dubious decision to engage a secular consulting firm to develop a capital funding initiative for the synod. The result, a program known as *Reaching Out*, garnered much money but more controversy across the synod. Many voices were raised in protest of the fund-raising methods encouraged by the *Reaching Out* materials; many districts passed resolutions objecting to portions of the program and urging greater care in future efforts. But only the Michigan District assembled a formal committee, drafted a clear, Scripture-based position paper, and engaged the leadership of the synod in pointed discussions about what the district viewed as the abuses present in the *Reaching Out* program. Though not solely as a result of those discussions, the synod's leadership subsequently determined that the WELS should not again engage secular consultants to advise it in spiritual matters.

These are examples of Michigan's willingness to speak. Are they examples of a willingness -- and an ability -- to speak the Truth? The answer goes beyond the scope of this paper, but the question is integral to its theme. For if, at any time and in any issue, God's Truth is not the heart and core of what Michigan has to say, then our speaking is no more than a sounding gong and a clanging cymbal and our voice is an offense in God's ears. But to the measure that what we say is a confession of God's Truth, we may know that we speak with the voice of angels.

History teaches us what great things the Lord has done for us so that we might STAND UP for the Truth. As we cherish our heritage of doctrinal faithfulness and confessional courage and, even more, as we cherish that Truth from which our doctrine and confession are drawn, let us each recommit ourselves to speak only that upon which we may stand, and to stand only upon that which God has spoken.



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

III. That we may REACH OUT with the Truth

All who have received from the Spirit the breath of eternal life will know that as faith in God's Truth is the inhale, so bearing witness to that Truth is the exhale. Where the first exists, the second is sure to follow.

How evident this is in the lives of Michigan's early Lutherans. We have already heard how Friedrich Schmid turned away from his father's blacksmithing trade to pursue a mission

ministry. It is instructive, however, to see just how inclusive Schmid hoped to be in his efforts to reach out with the Truth. In one of his earliest letters back to the Basel Mission House, he writes: "There is an immense unworked Mission Field here in which many souls can be led to the Lord in the power of his grace. Just so that souls are saved and led to the Lamb, be they white, black, or red pagans, it is all the same. Each soul is precious in his eyes..."²⁵

Though called and commissioned to serve the German Lutherans in Michigan, Schmid soon recognized the potential for work among those who were most native to the region. In that same early letter he appealed:

Now, dear Elders, I come to an important subject which I would like to present to you for fatherly advice... Not without deep sympathy did I observe, since my arrival, the poor Indian folk which lie buried in deep heathenism. ...These poor pagans who live without God and without hope... often rest heavily upon my heart, and I have often prayed to the Lord that he should find ways and means so that his Gospel might be proclaimed to these poor creatures. ...I have already started to learn one of the Indian tongues which is still used by many. They do not have an "R" in their language, but have many poly-syllabic words. Dear elders, I am prepared to preach the Gospel to these heathens as soon as the Lord wills it.²⁶

Circumstances offered Schmid little opportunity to pursue his desire to reach out with the Truth to the Indians of Michigan. However, under his leadership both the first union of Lutheran churches in Michigan (founded by Schmid in 1834 as the "Mission Synod of the West") and the later, more lasting Michigan Synod kept outreach to those who had never heard the Gospel a high priority.

It may be said, however, that experience taught Schmid the importance of balance and perspective in mission work. With an insight on "kingdom balance" that remains timely for today, Schmid exhorted his fellow pastors:

I once believed that our Missionary Institution extended only, or should extend only, to the heathen world, but I would now like to acclaim to all missionary friends over there: Can you see your German brothers sink into heathenism while the heathen become Christian? We must, therefore, not let up on spreading God's Word concerning the Cross to both Christians and heathen souls, which the love of Christ, which is universal, commands us.²⁷

Clearly, Schmid recognized that maintaining the faith of those who already know Christ is as essential a part of the Church's mission as is reaching out to those who do not know Christ.

History suggests that an aggressive approach to mission work seldom coexists comfortably with a conservative approach to confessionalism. Even today, some will argue that too firm an emphasis on orthodoxy presents an obstacle to mission work. Sadly, Schmid himself was apparently of this opinion. But the view is amply rebutted by the ministry of Christoph Eberhardt. Not only did the Lord allow Eberhardt's own mission planting to be blessed with the formation of a half-dozen prospering congregations in east central Michigan, but his work as *Reiseprediger* served as a paradigm for others who followed later.

The synod's history records varying degrees of blessing on the work of traveling missionaries Miller, Rau, Boehmer, Haas and, in particular, Pastor Menke, who was based in the Berne area. Of him we hear: "In (Menke) the Synod had a true missionary preacher. For years he labored without rest and repose, with unflagging zeal, urged on by a glowing love to

his Savior, so that he might gather the scattered fellows in the faith and provide them with religious service."²⁸ Menke's travels brought the Truth to an extended sequence of communities situated along the Michigan Central Railroad line, including those at Sterling, Roscommon, Grayling, West Branch, Standish, Pinconning, Caro, and Port Hope.

The confessional stance of Eberhardt and those who served under him was no deterrent to their mission outreach. On the contrary, it offered the supreme motive for it, since the more highly one prizes the Truth, the more eager one will be to give it away. However, the early synod did confront one very real obstacle to mission expansion. It soon became clear that the *Reisepredigers'* efforts to plant churches would be of little lasting value since the synod lacked a steady supply of capable pastors to nurture and tend those planted churches to mature growth. We can detect the frustration in President Klingman's words as he reported to his synod in 1867:

Although our Synod has been active in gaining new members, and has made great sacrifices to that end, we are able to report very few lasting results from this effort. We can not report any significant growth. While other synods in Michigan gain one congregation after another, even here in our own vicinity, our Synod remains at a standstill. It is always the same complaint; we suffer from a shortage of men whom we have trained to be confessionally sound pastors.²⁹

The Michigan Synod had no facility for training pastors or teachers of its own. It looked for workers first to the mission houses of Europe, then to the other Lutheran synods of the General Council. However, both sources proved unreliable and the few pastors they did provide were often unsuitable. No satisfactory solution to this handicap would appear until late in the 19th century when, at last, Michigan would commit itself to preparing pastors of its own. But more on that in a later section.

Along with the lack of sound pastors, a second deficiency undercutting the energetic efforts of Michigan's early missionaries was a lack of funding. In the earliest years, the settlers served by Schmid had little to share by way of income. Schmid's salary came mostly "in kind." As time passed and Michigan's communities grew more stable, mission offerings increased. However, often only a small portion of that income was made available for work in Michigan's mission fields. President Klingman reported in one such year that over \$500 had been raised in "mission" offerings, but less than 15% had been received by the synod's mission treasury. Some of the remaining offerings had been sent to "para-church" organizations like the Lutheran orphanage in Toledo. The bulk of the funds, however, were remitted to the Mission House in Basel. Despite repeated appeals from Klingman and Eberhardt that synod members and congregations cease supporting the unionistic mission houses, moneys continued to be syphoned off for that purpose throughout the 1800s.

In the following century, finances again would play a part in determining the degree to which Michigan's Lutherans could act upon their eagerness to reach out with the Truth. The first decade of the new century found Michigan caught up in the trying transition from being an independent synod to being a district of the larger body we know today as the WELS. In the second decade, efforts were inhibited by the course of the first world war. Postwar America offered new challenges to a church body concerned with missions. The doors to

immigration were swinging closed. Industrialization was drawing a sharply rising percentage of the population off the farms and into the cities. In Michigan, the traditional targets for outreach -- rural communities, and especially the German enclaves in them -- gradually disappeared. The time had come for a new approach to outreach. Notably, Michigan was at the forefront in offering that approach.

Prof. Fredrich records: "The brethren in Michigan were the first to sound the clarion. In 1929 they presented their fellow synodicals in convention a significant memorial, perhaps the most significant of the dozens of Michigan memorials that would dot and clot synodical proceedings in the years ahead."³⁰ That memorial peered back into mission history, referencing the work of the traveling missionaries of Michigan's past. It also pointed ahead to mission possibilities, citing both America's urban growth and its increasing worldliness as reasons to set our mission sights upon the cities.

The memorial was compelling enough; action on it was left waiting, however. Prof. Fredrich explains:

The memorial's date... tells a story of its own. Less than a half year after May, 1929, the Depression set in. It had its beginnings in bank failures in Detroit and ravaged that bellwether city of urbanization in the Midwest in the twenties as few other cities. The sorely needed evangelism in the cities received setbacks in the thirties and early forties as the church body had to cope with the Depression and war problems.³¹

It has become popular among some in our circles to indict the WELS during the first half of the 20th century for a lack of mission zeal. In particular, Synod Presidents Gustav Bergemann and John W. Brenner are frequently chastised for inhibiting mission expansion by the WELS due to their hide-bound fiscal conservatism. Those who make such claims no doubt find comfort in their limited grasp of the facts. What history reveals is that, for the two men who led our synod through the first half of the 1900s, those "Depression and war problems" to which Prof. Fredrich refers were a very dire and daily reality. And the Depression and the war served to deprive our synod of two elements that Michigan's own history clearly demonstrate are essential for mission outreach -- funds to support the work and able-bodied men to do it.

Without detailing the crushing debt that afflicted the synod during the 1930s -- a debt that often prevented the synod from paying the missionaries it did have at a rate any better than fifty to sixty cents on the dollar -- and without cataloging the numbers of prospective pastoral candidates drawn away from such service to the battlefields of the World War, let it simply be noted that Bergemann and Brenner had clearly learned a lesson from history. A flurry of mission activity in the 1920s-40s in the WELS would only have succeeded in reviving the same old frustrations Klingman and Eberhardt battled in their presidencies.

To Michigan's credit, however, it may be noted that the district recognized the burden under which the synod was laboring and took steps to help lift it. Pastor em. Edgar Hoenecke, himself one of the Michigan men of whom he speaks, relates from his own notes:

The members of the Southeastern Michigan Conference were greatly encouraged in their stewardship efforts by the positive, forward-looking address of our synod president. It encouraged them to set up a systematic method for disseminating information, for motivating greater concern for the synod's work program in the congregations, and for

applying evangelical discipline to achieve a more equitable assumption of the financial burden of the synod's budget. ...the program had been refined in Michigan to provide a monthly informational bulletin in addition to original monthly posters which presented the institutions and missions of the synod. Current information was set out on a one-page printed bulletin which also brought pictures of interest... Perhaps the most valuable of the latter was a pen sketch of a the synod, depicted as a steam locomotive pulling a string of cars marked "missionaries" but prevented from reaching the mission fields by a deep wash-out of the right-of-way. As the debt was gradually reduced, the wash-out was being filled with the legend, "Help us get rid of the debt so the synod can get going again."³²

Notice how closely the elements of this strategy mirror the work of our *WELS Connection* today. One might almost be tempted to label those Michiganders of the 1930s as men of vision. At any rate, the Lord blessed their efforts to such a degree that the synod's praesidium requested that the materials developed in Michigan be distributed synod-wide. The effort became known as the "Michigan Plan." Once again, God did great things. At the 1933 convention, President Brenner was able to report to the synod a 14% increase in offerings. At that, Praeses Brenner is reported to have remarked, "I trust that all our members will emulate the "Michigan spirit" and work according to this plan."³³

It would take a decade and much more than merely the "Michigan Plan" to fully dissolve the synod's crippling debt. However, this episode in our district's history well illustrates not only the mission enthusiasm for which the district became known but also the great and gracious way that God has often used the Michigan District to bring blessing to the synod at large.

It was that unbridled mission enthusiasm, however, that led Michigan unblushingly to assert itself as "the Mission District," chiefly because its members often led the way in urging the synod toward mission expansion. The synod's 1945 convention offers a case in point.

With the debt retired and the war winding down, the time appeared right for the synod again to address itself to world-wide mission work. Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, a Michigan pastor then serving as executive secretary for the Apache mission field, chose the occasion of his committee report to the convention to challenge the synod to expand its outreach into foreign fields. Almost at once, the chair declared Hoenecke to be out of order.

President Brenner, who chaired the convention, was entirely correct. For Pastor Hoenecke to insert editorial comment in support of a personal agenda into the context of an official report was disorderly. But Hoenecke's words could be neither unspoken nor unheard. His challenge was before the delegates and the ensuing discussion resulted in a memorial instructing the synod to appoint a committee "to gather information regarding foreign fields that might offer opportunity for mission work by our Synod."³⁴

One consequence of the work of that committee was the exploratory journey to Central Africa under-taken in 1949 by Michigan pastors Art Wacker and Edgar Hoenecke. Their adventures, detailed in Hoenecke's book *The WELS 49ers*, offer compelling reading and again emphasize the hand of God at work accomplishing great things through man's puny efforts. Also clearly witnessed is the readiness of the people of Michigan to back up their mission enthusiasm with action. Briefly, Hoenecke credits: "Members of the District were morally and solidly behind (us), as they had shown their loyalty to the cause (*of missions -mpm*) by

bringing generous offerings for the extraordinary expenses entailed in the exploration, and in arranging for a reassuring conference farewell service for the two pastors before the long and dangerous journey."³⁵

It took only until the next synod convention, in 1951, for the WELS to recognize where the Lord was pointing. The convention authorized two missionaries for Africa and one to begin exploratory work in Japan; and so the synod's work in foreign missions began.

At home in the U.S., the Lord also had a role for Michigan to play in expanding the synod's outreach with the Truth. Due to a 1953 synodical resolution that limited home mission expansion to states bordering those where WELS congregations already existed, the synod was restricted from responding to the nation's population shift toward the Sun Belt. For one member of Michigan's district mission board in particular, this was not a happy situation.

Mr. Louis Ott, veteran lay member of the board, had a winter home in Florida and had long hoped to see the synod begin mission work nearby. With the cooperation (*some would say collusion - mpm*) of his fellow board members, Ott proposed an exploratory mission venture in the area around Tampa/St. Petersburg for the winter of 1954. The Mission Board report in the *District Proceedings* from that year explain:

No funds have been appropriated for an exploration of that state and the matter could not wait until the next general convention might do so. After serious deliberations, the pastor members of the Board agreed to approach their congregations to see if they would be willing to bear the expense of a mission survey in Florida. Without hesitation they too consented, and the exploration took place from February 8 to 17.³⁶

Perhaps the unconventional nature of this effort did not succeed in winning entirely unanimous support. One senses (and wants to smile at) a hint of defensiveness later in the same report as the explorers bristle: "The members of the Board resent the inferences, not all of which were made in jest, that the trip was just an expense-paid vacation in Florida. St. Paul explored mission fields too on expense money provided by the church at Philippi and no one thinks he was on vacation."³⁷

Based on the results of their exploratory work, the district board succeeded in gaining permission from the General Mission Board of the WELS to call one missionary for Florida. That man, former Kawkawlin Pastor William Stieh, arrived in Florida in September of 1954. By December he had organized Faith congregation in St. Petersburg.

It was then discovered that synod's General Board for Missions had made no provisions for either chapel or parsonage in Florida. Once again, Michigan's rugged individualism took charge. "Individual Michigan congregations gathered funds for the distant daughter congregation even though the district itself acknowledged 'that present Synod regulations make our District's financial support of this project an impossibility.' Some \$15,000 were collected to keep the wolf from the door"³⁸ until the Synod accepted the inevitable and absorbed Faith's parsonage and chapel building projects, both already under way, into the WELS Church Extension Fund.

Mission officials at the old Synod Office Building on North Avenue in Milwaukee were less than pleased. "Michigan's mission board earned a stern reprimand from Milwaukee for

moving ahead on these projects without authorization..."³⁹ but, ultimately, all acknowledged that the time was right for this work.

Within four years there were four congregations in Florida. By 1969 the synodical convention authorized the formation of the Gulf-Atlantic Mission District with a separate mission board. The southern congregations were still members of the Michigan District and continued to enjoy the encouragement of the mother district. Less than 20 years after the first pastor arrived in Florida, the new South Atlantic District was established. Michigan's daughter was on her own.⁴⁰

A similar story could be told concerning the Michigan District's role in the birth and formation of what we today call the North Atlantic District. To do so would only re-emphasize what is already clear, that through the past century and a half the Lord has graciously found much for Michigan -- both Synod and District -- to do in promoting the work of missions. It is little surprise, then, to find that when the WELS determined a need to call full-time administrators for its mission efforts, it looked to Michigan for the first such man in Home Missions and the first three in World Missions.

But what vanity it would be for us, collectively, to pat Michigan on the back for the role it has been permitted to play in mission history. Edgar Hoenecke, the synod's first Executive Secretary for World Missions, has never been shy about trumpeting his Michigan roots or his district's achievements. But he is quick to assert that, in every instance where Michigan has been able to serve, it was "the spirit which was laid upon the hearts of his followers by the ascending, triumphant Lord, which carried the day."⁴¹

Hoenecke recognizes what we all must, that not to us, not to us belongs the glory, but alone to our gracious God. For any and all good that has come about in our church's outreach efforts is the result, not of anything we have done, but entirely of the great things the Lord has done for us so that we might REACH OUT with the Truth.



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

IV. That we might PASS ON the Truth

No one could fault the early fathers of the Michigan Synod for failing to preach the Word, in season and out of season. Wherever the opportunity presented itself, they were willing and ready to reach out with God's Truth. The weight of numbers never burdened them in the way it can seem to in our mission efforts today. But a brief look at the numbers from those early times tells a sad and revealing story.

Already we have heard mention of the miles traveled, the places visited, the contacts made, the congregations founded by Friedrich Schmid and by Klingman and, especially, Eberhardt after him. Yet, for all those earnest efforts, at the close of Schmid's presidency in 1867 the Michigan Synod numbered but fourteen pastors serving fourteen congregations and preaching stations. Two decades later as the Eberhardt presidency neared its close, the

number of pastors had grown to only thirty-two. Significantly, fifty-five pastors had come into the synod during the Eberhardt years, but during the same time three pastors had died and thirty-three had either been suspended from their calls or had left the synod to join other, mainly reformed, church bodies.⁴²

Clearly, the synod was suffering not only due to the pastors it didn't have but, in many cases, due to the pastors it did have. With the need for pastors far out-stripping the supply, too often the synod "had to depend on men of whose confession and character it knew practically nothing. As a result, it had many sad experiences for so often men were called to serve a congregation who were not only incompetent, but unfaithful, who disrupted many a congregation or alienated it from the synod."⁴³

The solution needed for this sorry problem was no mystery to Christoph Eberhardt. He understood as his predecessor, Schmid, never did that a church body can not unite around a common confession of the Truth unless its clergy are united in their grasp of that Truth and their ability to pass it on to others. Eberhardt, then, made it his business, wherever opportunities presented themselves at conferences and synod gatherings, to encourage the establishment of a pastoral training program that the Michigan Synod itself could control and support.

In spite of Eberhardt's best efforts, however, decades would pass before the Synod would come to realize the importance of training its own clergy. Why was this such a hard lesson to learn? Were Michigan's immigrant settlers so hesitant to sever spiritual ties with the church in Europe? Were they so lax in their confessional concern that they saw no need for an orthodox source of pastors? Was the cost of maintaining their own worker-training program a burden they were unwilling to shoulder? The historical record offers no satisfying answers to these questions. One point is clear, however -- Michigan's early Lutherans failed, as others have failed since, to recognize the integral role that ministerial education plays in the mission of the church. Missions and worker training ought never compete with one another; they ought to complete one another.

Not until he took office as president did Eberhardt succeed in leading the synod to see these things through his eyes, and to recognize the need to take up the task of worker training. At just his third convention, in 1884, Eberhardt had the joy of hearing a majority of voices affirm the resolution, "That the importance of training pastors be considered, because we must rely on ourselves for such training instead of on others; and that the time is at hand for the practical realization of this desire."⁴⁴

The time was at hand, indeed, for in less than a year the new pastoral seminary was in session. Imagine the exhilaration that must have filled President Eberhardt's voice as he was able to report to his synod in 1885:

(The Lord) has made a number of young men in our congregations willing to be trained to be preachers of God's Word and has aroused their parents to a readiness to make sacrifices for that purpose. The Lord has also sent us a teacher for them, with whom they already have whole-heartedly begun their study. A member of the congregation in Manchester has presented to us, free of charge, the large brick house on his farm. To be sure, the room will not be sufficient for the students; however, he has promised to compensate for these needs in his own residence which is nearby and to find a few other congregation members ready to do the same.⁴⁵

George Heimerdinger, the Manchester member who opened his home to his synod, thus became the first in a long list of laymen whose generous and sacrificial service dot the history of Michigan' seminary. Classes began in his "large brick house" in the late summer of 1885, with Pastor Alexander Lange serving as director and sole instructor of the five students enrolled. Pastor Lange, originally a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod, had served for some years as a professor at the Lutheran seminary in Buffalo, NY. He seemed the perfect choice to lead Michigan's fledgling worker training effort.

Since use of the Heimerdinger house had a two-year time limit, the Synod knew it at once had to address the need for a more permanent location. At the 1886 convention, Adrian, MI, was selected from among a half-dozen proposed sites. However, less than a year later President Eberhardt summoned a special convention, apparently in response to what he saw as dwindling support for the seminary project. That special convention was asked to consider whether the synod was truly ready to accept the responsibility of supporting a seminary, and willing to pledge what was needed to carry out that task. The delegates' response was lukewarm, at best, resolving that the school's mission be ministerial training "for the time being," and giving permission for the synod to accrue no more than \$2,000 of debt in support of the school.⁴⁶

In view of these circumstances, it isn't difficult to understand why Eberhardt urged the synod to reconsider its choice of a school site. With finances being critical, the synod really could not afford to dismiss the offer from the Lutherans in Saginaw of more than \$4,000 in support of a school in their community, double the offer of any other considered site. Moreover, in Saginaw there was land for the school to be had without cost -- land donated by President Eberhardt himself.

With an eye on the bottom line, the special convention moved the seminary site to Saginaw. The new seminary broke ground in the spring and opened for classes on September 20, 1888.⁴⁷ It did so not only on land supplied by Eberhardt, but in response to a the peal of a large bronze bell presented by the synod patriarch to this school that was the fulfillment of his dream. The bell, hung in the cupola of the recitation hall ("Old Main") where its knell could both be heard and felt vibrating through the walls and floors, was inscribed with the words "*Ora et Labora*" -- "Pray and Work!" Perhaps Pastor Eberhardt hoped the bell would summon the students, each day, to a growing appreciation for Luther's own motto, "Diligent prayer is the half of study."⁴⁸

It was a noble goal to set before Michigan's new school. Sadly, the school's director would not remain to lead the students in pursuit of that goal. At the synod's 1888 convention, Rev. Lange declared himself at odds with the Synod over the doctrine of the call. We may note the doctrinal decisiveness of the Synod under Eberhardt in that the Director was dismissed from his office that same month. On the third call, Pastor Ferdinand Huber of Freeland, MI, accepted the position of director and instructor at the Seminary. Pastor Eberhardt and Teacher Sperling of Bay City assisted him with the classes.

The next few years were a period of faithful service and slow but steady growth at the Seminary. Between 1888 and 1892 the Saginaw school sent a dozen young men into

Michigan's harvest fields, among them some -- J. Bodamer, F. Krauss, J. Westendorf -- who would loom large in positions of leadership later on. Those quiet, productive years proved to be the calm before the storm, however, for the Seminary would soon become the center of a dispute that darkened Michigan's history for more than a decade.

As noted earlier, the Michigan Synod's withdrawal from the General Council left it with a hunger for fellowship with others who shared its belief in and confession of the Truth. Membership in the Synodical Conference offered to satisfy that spiritual craving, and federation with the Lutheran synods of Wisconsin and Minnesota was a natural next step.

So natural, in fact, that Michigan may have been too eager and too quick to take it. Prof. Fredrich explains:

For twenty years Michigan was in one theological camp (*i.e. the General Council - mpm*) and Minnesota and Wisconsin were in another, an opposition camp. This twenty-year estrangement would not be easily overcome... It is not an easy step for a synod to move from one ecclesiastical federation to another within the span of a few years, especially when the federations stand opposed to one another. Such a step is even harder when diminution in synodical prestige and enterprise is involved.⁴⁹

The "diminution in prestige and enterprise" to which Prof. Fredrich refers was, of course, the stipulation attached to Michigan's acceptance into the Federation that the theological department of its seminary be discontinued and the school be re-constituted as a secondary-level preparatory school. One can only imagine how "Vater Seminar," Christoph Eberhardt, reacted to this proposal. However, Rev. C. A. Lederer had since succeeded Eberhardt as Michigan Synod president and, no doubt, age had muffled Eberhardt's voice more than a little. Mercifully, as God would have it, the old man would be spared much of the turmoil that would come to surround the school he loved so dearly.

In 1892, the Michigan Synod ratified the articles of confederation, joining itself into a single body with its sister synods in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The following year, the Lord called Christoph Eberhardt to heaven. Thus, the voice that had led Michigan through its thirty most formative years fell silent. Some have said his death came at the worst possible time; but the Lord, who does great things, knew exactly what he was doing in this case. God had lessons for Michigan to learn, lessons that could only be learned the hard way.

Almost immediately after Michigan's entry into the Federation, some in the Synod began having second thoughts about the wisdom of suspending the training of pastors in their own state. That they did is no surprise. Not only the past but even the present offered ample reminders to Michigan's Lutherans of the costs of losing a steady supply of pastors. One could hardly travel from one point in the state to another without passing at least one church that had begun in the Michigan Synod but that left it for another church body in search of a pastor to serve it. No one in Michigan wished to return to those sad times.

Moreover, the most recent experience Michigan had in a larger fellowship had proved stressful and disappointing at best. In spite of years of hopeful promises, membership in the General Council ultimately took from Michigan much more than it gave. What reassurances could be found that union with the states west of Lake Michigan would prove any more beneficial?

The Saginaw seminary was Michigan's rallying point and the well from which it drew its hopes for future Synod stability. Suddenly, Michigan was being asked to cap that well. "Is this wise?" some asked.

Surely, such misgivings could be expected. Also to be expected was that the Synod's leadership would be prepared to answer questions, calm fears, and allay doubts. They were not. Instead, the buzz of discontent was permitted to escalate into factionalism. By 1894, the "save our seminary" faction had grown so strong and vocal that it succeeded in ousting all the sitting Synod leaders and replacing them with pro-seminary men.

Elected president was C. F. Boehner, a man that historians describe with words like *erratic*,^(a) *harsh* and *unbridled*,^(b) and even *stupid* and *crooked*.^(c) 50 In fairness, while Boehner's administration was a singular failure in setting a measured and productive course for the Synod, it is unreasonable to place the entire burden of blame upon his shoulders. To do so, as Prof. Fredrich notes, is "to cast into the role of stooges and dupes such honored men in Michigan as...Bodamer...Gauss...Krauss...and Westendorf"⁵¹, all of whom lent their support to the pro-seminary effort. Many good men in Michigan were convinced that retaining control over the preparation of pastors for their churches was of such great importance that even severing the fellowship but newly made with Wisconsin and Minnesota was not too high a price to pay.

We will not review the entire sorry history of the Seminary conflict, the ensuing Michigan split, the secession of ten pastors and congregations into the so-called *Michigan District Synod*, the Michigan Synod's withdrawal from the Federation in 1896 and its short-lived dalliance with the Augsburg Synod, or, most sadly, the slow but certain demise of the Seminary. Suffice it to say that a noble cause, ignobly served, earns no honor and merits no blessing.

But what men stained with evil, God cleansed with good. It took a decade to soften the hardened hearts and soothe the injured feelings, but by 1904 deliberate efforts were being made to explore avenues for reconciliation. In 1906, a meeting convened in Bay City for which one struggles to find an equal in the annals of church history, for at that meeting the two conflicting Michigan bodies -- Synod and District Synod -- met... and *both* admitted they had been wrong. A statement of six questions and answers, in which the Synod repented of its hasty actions and the District Synod withdrew its harsh accusations, provided the foundation for a renewal of fellowship discussions, and at last a reunification of the Michigan congregations into a single synod. In 1917, this body ratified a new constitution establishing itself as a single district of the united *Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*,⁵² forerunner of what we today call the WELS.

I will remove from them their heart of stone and give to them a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19), God promised through his prophet. When sinful men do something that gives evidence that their hearts are right, it is God's doing. If God would do great things *with* us, he must continually be doing great things *in* us. The lesson we may learn from the Michigan Synod's sad split and repentant reconciliation is how well and how wonderfully God does just that.

The first decade of the new century brought both death and rebirth for Michigan's Seminary. The school whose existence the Michigan Synod paid so high a price to preserve could not sustain itself under a divided church. Enrollments were already fading as the century turned and when Prof. F. Beer assumed directorship of the school, the iron-fist discipline of this ex-military man drove the few remaining students out the door. In 1907, facing a student body of only one, the Board of Control reluctantly declared the Seminary closed.⁵¹ The school facilities were retained, however, for the Synod's new leaders (W. Bodamer replaced Boehner as president in 1898) recognized that the synod was moving toward reconciliation with the Federation, and so the Seminary campus might soon be allowed to take up its new role as a preparatory school.

In the intervening years, care of the campus and buildings was entrusted to Mrs. Dora May and her retired father. Mrs. May is another of the unsung heroes of Seminary history, a laywoman whose years of service allowed the school to continue. Engaged as "housekeeper" for the Seminary in 1896, she remained with the school until it closed in 1907. Then she and her father, "Grossvater Heidenreich," kept the properties in order during the three-year hiatus until the school was reopened. Thereafter, Dora continued to serve as housekeeper and "housemother" for a generation of Seminary students. Though she officially retired in 1929, Dora May remained as nurse and overseer of the "infirmary" until her death in 1932, after thirty-six years of uninterrupted service to her Lord.

No doubt this humble Dorcas was a valued resource and a well of support for the new director called to head the Saginaw prep program. In his own history of the school, that director records:

The second session of the board was held on August 2, 1910 in the recitation hall of the old seminary in Saginaw. ...After due deliberation, Rev. Otto J.R. Hoenecke, pastor of Bethel congregation, Milwaukee, WI, was unanimously called on the first ballot (which, however, did not mean much, since there was absolutely no scramble for the position, but rather just the opposite.)⁵⁴

One can easily understand why there was little "scramble" for this call. The reconciliation of the Michigan Synod with the Federation and the Synodical Conference was not yet finalized. Michigan's support for the Saginaw school in its preparatory role was untested, at best. No plan, structure, or curriculum had been developed for the new school. And the call was being issued in August with an insistence that the school open its doors for students that September. That Pastor Hoenecke viewed the call with some reluctance is reasonable. That he was led to accept it was a leap of faith for him, and a gift of grace from God through his Holy Spirit.

The new school opened inauspiciously. Barely two dozen people attended the opening service in the recitation hall. Of the fifteen to twenty students projected to enroll, only five appeared, one of whom would drop out after the first month. Hoenecke notes with some irony, "The new school was on its way, unsung, and with very little publicity. The building had indeed been renovated, but otherwise very little preparation had been made; yes, the new school had not even been given a name."⁵⁵ That deficiency was not addressed until April of the following year, when WELS president August Ernst would decree that "the word 'Seminary'

was so intimately connected with the history of the Michigan Synod that whatever name would be chosen, the school would still be the 'Seminary' in the hearts and minds of the synod's members. And so, for historical and sentimental reasons, the infant school was burdened with the name *MICHIGAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY*.⁵⁶

An uncertain identity was not the only obstacle Director Hoenecke faced in his early years at MLS. In the days of the Federation, managing the resources needed to support the school also called for some deft juggling since responsibility for expenses was split between the Michigan Synod and the federated "Joint Synod." The Director explains: "This at times... made things somewhat unpleasant for the director, being sent from Pontius to Pilate for articles that had to be bought, with both the treasurer of the Joint Synod and the treasurer of the Michigan Synod claiming an amount was to be paid by the other... As a rule, the bills were finally paid by the Joint Synod, its treasurer having a wider heart."⁵⁷

This rocky start soon gave way to a smoother path, however. The Lord, who does great things, sustained MLS and allowed its director, however reluctantly, to fit exceptionally well into his role. Otto Hoenecke was a man blessed both with a deep love and understanding of the Word and the ability to impart the same to his students. His official portrait that hangs in the MLS board room today pictures a man straight of spine and stern of countenance, but his students also remember him as a man of great passion and energy, and not a little humor.

Let one anecdote suffice to illustrate. The Director was known to be a great fan of baseball, both of Detroit's Tigers⁵⁸ and Seminary's Cardinals. On one occasion, MLS was hosting a visit from the Synod president and the Director thought to entertain him by taking him to a Sem baseball game. As the game progressed with Seminary trailing, the Director became so agitated and vocal in his harangues to the players that the President felt obliged to place a gentle hand on Hoenecke's shoulder to restrain him. No sooner had the Director regained his composure but the MLS center fielder dropped an easy fly ball, allowing a run to score for the opposition. Hoenecke was about to leap to his feet to upbraid the player; then, recalling the President seated beside him, he thought better of it. Settling back into his seat, Hoenecke simply turned to the President, gestured toward the fielder, and remarked ruefully, "*Er ist noch erstützt!*" ("That fellow's still getting student aid!")⁵⁹

Though a Wisconsin transplant, Director Hoenecke soon managed to absorb the history and tradition that made Michigan's Seminary such a vital part of the ebb and flow of district life. In so doing, he became one of the school's staunchest defenders. During its first generation, the prep school's enrollment remained modest, not reaching the 100-student mark until 1944. In those years, many voices to the west clamored for the school's closing. Yet, time and again, Director Hoenecke managed to pull the Seminary's fat from the fire, often by demonstrating that on a percentage basis MLS was providing more students for further ministerial training than either of the Synod's other preparatory schools.

It was also the Director's responsibility to balance the Seminary budget so that tuition costs would provide adequate income for the school without putting MLS financially out of reach for students. In view of the school's often precarious financial position, it is of interest to see Hoenecke's novel approach to student assistance in 1922. He writes: "The tuition for the

first term is \$16.00 and for each of the other terms it is \$12.00. ...There is no tuition for those students who are preparing themselves to serve their Lord as either a pastor or teacher.”⁶⁰ One wonders how the synod would respond if such a measure were proposed today.

Director Hoenecke also kept up a patient struggle to develop the school's physical plant -- and underline that word "patient." Already in 1922 the Seminary appealed to the Synod over the need for a new administration facility... but that need would not be addressed within Hoenecke's forty-year tenure as director. In 1929, MLS petitioned the Synod for permission to construct a gymnasium, a vital facility for a boarding school in an increasingly sports-conscious society. The Synod responded by granting permission for MLS to go out and raise its own funds for the gym through special contributions -- a strategy offering little hope or potential in the year that began America's Great Depression. At last, in 1951, a new administration/gymnasium/classroom facility was built. Perhaps Director Hoenecke enjoyed the irony that this building broke ground a year *after* his retirement from the directorship.

This man through whom the Lord had done so many great things for MLS and for the Michigan District continued to serve his beloved school as instructor and business manager until 1960. Appropriately, it was less than three years later that Old Main, the Seminary's first building, finally came down. The passing of the tower that held Christoph Eberhardt's bell and of the director who revived Eberhardt's legacy was a dual milestone in Michigan's history. Perhaps Prof. Fredrich's eye-witness tribute to the Old Main tower can serve for the Director as well:

Old Main gave way... only reluctantly. On a bitter cold winter morning the demolition crew announced that the tower was ready to tumble. The school interrupted classes so that students and teachers could view the sad proceedings. When the bulldozers began tugging, the tower would not yield, even though many of its beams had already been severed. The bulldozers tried again. More bulldozers added their strength. The students cheered louder than at any football victory when the tower still stood as the students returned to their classrooms. Some time later that day the tower fell, probably through some mean and unfair demolition tactic. The memory of that morning remains in many minds and hearts. Old Main's last hurrah harked back to much earlier days. It was as though it was saying, "You wanted my demotion in 1892 and my demise in 1907 and my demolition in 1963, but you didn't always achieve what you wanted. In a few hours you will probably pull me down, but don't be surprised if you see me surviving, if not in beam and brick, then perhaps in the ivy that enshrouds the walls of a school with revered traditions"⁶¹

Those revered Seminary traditions include more than a little of what the Lord accomplished through servants like Eberhardt and Hoenecke, but the truest of Seminary's traditions rises from the confidence that the school and all it does is firmly founded, not upon the work of any man, but solely on the Word of our gracious God. It was just fifteen years ago that a team of brick masons completed the mural that now graces Seminary's main entrance and puts on display for all to see the words of the school's motto: *God's Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever; To spread its Light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.*⁶² Long before then, however, it became clear to anyone in Michigan who was paying attention that MLS existed expressly for a single purpose -- to pass on God's Truth to a new generation, young people who in turn would grow up to become proclaimers of that Truth to God's people of the future.

This purpose, always central to Seminary life, made it possible for the Seminary's supporters to be sure that all they did for MLS was done, indeed, in service to the Savior. Thus, the school's purpose became the work not just of the few but of many.

We may note how MLS has benefited over the years from the unheralded but invaluable support of lay people of the district. One could point to the ubiquitous presence of MLS Booster Club and Guild members at virtually any official school function, or to the army of volunteers that assemble to help host synod conventions. However, let just two -- "Uncle Rope" and "Aunt Jane" -- stand as representatives for the many.

No record of life at MLS could be complete without mention of Mr. Robert "Rope" Kaschinske. Uncle Rope began his service to MLS in the early 1950s as the school's "bursar" (today we'd say "business manager"). In the years leading to his final retirement in 1994 it would be fair to say that, outside the classroom, Rope filled every staff position that existed at MLS and several that had never existed before. Above all, he was a watchdog for the welfare of the students, and a skilled helping hand wherever there was work to be done. The annual graduation award given to the two seniors who, by vote of the Seminary faculty, best display an attitude of selfless service is named, appropriately, the "Uncle Rope" award.

Jane Larson came to MLS as dormitory housemother in the fall of 1973; immediately she made Sem's students her family and Sem's campus her home. The latter was, in fact, literally true since Aunt Jane resided in a dormitory apartment throughout her twenty years of service to MLS. Anyone who has spent a week riding herd on the population of a teenagers' dorm will marvel at the fortitude of a woman who found joy in doing this for twenty uninterrupted years. But whether dealing with the most cocky senior or the most cringing freshman, Aunt Jane never forgot her Savior's words, "What you do for the least of these, you do for me."

This sort of love for MLS and its purpose of passing on the Truth was shared, not only by the school's lay constituency but also by the called workers who served them. A survey of the roster of MLS instructors down through the years quickly reveals how often pastors and teachers of the Michigan District have given of their time and talent to assist with classroom duties at the Seminary. What the records won't show is how many more hours those willing workers have volunteered to assist with Sem's extracurricular programs, from coaching sports to building sets to sewing choir gowns.

One program, perhaps better than any other, demonstrates the blessed cooperation that MLS has enjoyed for so many years with the pastors and teachers of the district. That program is called *Taste of Ministry*.

Contrary to popular belief, the program did not begin as an idea struck here on Seminary's campus. Rather, an enterprising and creative teacher at St. Paul's school, Miss Lynn Thumme, first contacted MLS for permission to allow some of her former students to visit her classroom and work with her children. She thought it might encourage them to think more seriously about becoming teachers. That effort, begun modestly in 1977, gained such a positive response that MLS asked St. Paul's faculty to consider hosting students in more of its classrooms and St. Paul's teachers graciously consented. So was born a program that today

involves all four WELS elementary schools in Saginaw and serves seventy or more MLS students each year.

In 1988, in the wake of the success of *TOM for Teachers*, it seemed natural to pursue a similar activity for the pastoral ministry. Again, however, it was not MLS but the pastors of the Michigan District that designed the program. Interested pastors were invited to stay for a special brainstorming session following the close of the district conference in Bowling Green, Ohio. It was hoped that a dozen pastors might stay. More than forty showed up. The ideas gathered from the enthusiastic discussion that followed provided the framework that is still used by the *TOM/Pastor* program. And each year, twenty or more Michigan District pastors open their homes and congregations to host MLS senior boys who wish to take an up-close-and-personal look at a pastor's work.

As with many new ideas in our circles, the TOM programs initially met with more than mild resistance from other quarters of the synod. But God took a few simple ideas and did great things with them, so that now programs mirroring TOM can be found at every WELS worker training school and at two-thirds of the area Lutheran high schools across the synod. God's church benefits and God's name is glorified!

The blessings that have made it possible for God's people in Michigan to pass on his Truth have not been limited to or even solely focused on MLS, however. Finally, the Seminary is only one corner of the fabric of Gospel ministry that blankets our beloved district. The very same work takes place each and every day in the 150 congregations that have grown up as part of this district, in the 52 Lutheran elementary schools they support, in the two fine area Lutheran high schools that serve the congregations in the southeast and southwest corners of the state, and in the strong and vocal support that Michigan continues to give to our synod's entire ministerial education effort.

That support was vividly demonstrated in the debate that marked the Wisconsin Synod in the early 1990s over the proposal to restructure its worker-training system and amalgamate four of its training schools into two. Certainly, this was an issue upon which people of faith could honestly disagree. At our district's gatherings, the voice of the majority was one that expressed disfavor for the amalgamation proposal. This sentiment was not unique in the WELS, but Michigan's response was.

This district alone in the synod appointed a formal committee to address concerns about the amalgamation, to catalog objections, and even to offer counter-proposals. The entire report of the *Michigan District Special Synodical School Study Committee* was placed before the delegates to the 1993 synod convention. Though the views of our district did not prevail and the amalgamation ultimately was approved, the committee's report stands as an historical record of the Michigan District's willingness to rise up and to speak up for what it believes to be best for the church.

Significantly, what is best for the church has, for Michigan, always been closely bound to what is best for ministerial education. This is the attitude of a district that has learned well to appreciate the great things God has done for us, that we might PASS ON the Truth.



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

V. That we might TELL the Truth

In considering the great things God has done for us, one final matter calls for comment. It would be unthinkable in any review of Michigan history to fail to address that which is central to the Michigan *mythos* -- namely, the "Michigan spirit."

Even those who know little about our district will have heard those words spoken, with varying degrees of reverence (either genuine or ironic). For some, belief in and demonstration of this "spirit" is the *shibboleth* that determines whether or not one is to be accepted as a *true* member of the district. Yet the phenomenon, though famed in song and story, is extremely elusive to define.

One of the true icons of our district, Lansing Emanuel's sainted pastor, Karl "Soc" Krauss, owned as legitimate a claim as anyone in recent generations to being an exemplar of the Michigan spirit. Yet Krauss himself could identify that force in only the broadest terms. He wrote: "(This 'spirit') is not easy to define; it is something that needs to be experienced. For those of us who grew up in the district, it is even more than an experience; it is a 'flesh-and-blood' thing. We are part of it, and it is part of us. It was stamped indelibly upon our being and life." All this may be a bit too mystical for some tastes, but Krauss grows less abstract when he adds to his explanation, "As I see it, the Michigan spirit was characterized by an almost fierce loyalty, a burning zeal, and a congenial comraderie."⁶³

Brother's Krauss's words strike more than a few familiar chords for those who have lived and labored for the Lord in Michigan for more than just a few years. His words would imply, however, that the spirit of Michigan is largely Mich-ocentric, directed inward more than outward. One might hope for something greater lying at the core of what Michigan is about.

Another widely-recognized mouthpiece for Michiganism is Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, son of the first director of MLS and pioneer world mission developer in the WELS. In an essay on the Michigan spirit printed in the district's 1985 festschrift, *Michigan Memories*, Hoenecke takes a decidedly more outward view in defining the spirit as he knew it. He claims, "...There was far more in the 'Michigan spirit' than good fellowship; there was a powerful inner urge in the pastors, the teachers, and the church members to do the Lord's bidding in missions!"⁶⁴ We aren't surprised, of course, to find Brother Hoenecke making mission work the focus here, as it has been the focus in nearly everything he wrote. We can thank him, however, for broadening the field and demonstrating that Michigan's spirit is one that easily, even eagerly, crosses its own borders.

One can not help, however, feeling the need to blush and fluster just a bit as one reads how both Krauss and Hoenecke elaborate on their definitions. Both claim for Michigan what, in modern parlance, might be labeled a "highly evolved self-image." Pastor Hoenecke sees Michigan as the driving force behind every salutary development in our synod's world mission efforts from 1920 to 1970. Pastor Krauss was not that modest. He unabashedly

claimed, "The fact of the matter is that practically every progressive program in our Synod during these fifty years received its start in the Michigan District."⁶⁵

False modesty is no great virtue, but perhaps Michigan's history is better served by assessments that demonstrate at least a modicum of balance. For this we look to one of the most recent writers to turn his pen to the task of elucidating the spirit of Michigan, current Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor, James Tiefel. In the closing essay in *Michigan Memories*, Tiefel opines, "The 'Michigan Spirit' has nothing to do with progressivism or conservatism at all. Its essence is rather reactionism. At its best, the 'Michigan Spirit' tends to react with a differing point of view to the moods and trends of synodical leadership."⁶⁶

At first glance, it may appear that Brother Tiefel is merely casting Michigan in the unflattering role of synodical gadfly, as a sort of ecclesiastical equivalent of Spiro Agnew's "nattering nabobs of negativism." A fuller read of Tiefel's provocative assessment reveals, however, that he views Michigan as the home of modern-day equivalents of Scripture's Bereans, those noble villagers of Acts 17 who were unwilling to accept even what St. Paul told them at face value, but who *examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*. This disposition has made Michigan the perennial check and balance against any sort of extremism in the synod, whether to the right or to the left.

Again, much in this analysis is attractive and it also explains why histories may be written about Michigan under the headings of both *progressive* and *conservative* without contradiction.

It is this writer's view that each of the earlier commentators on the Michigan spirit have a piece of the answer to what makes Michigan tick. It is, of course, the inalienable right of anyone entrusted with the privilege of the pen or the podium to offer his own take on any issue at odds. I don't presume to have a more complete understanding of that spirit that resides among us in Michigan, but that it does reside here as in no other corner of the synod, I do believe. For that reason I will air my own view on what the "Michigan spirit" is all about. Here it is: Michigan can't shut up!

I do not mean to be flippant. The spirit I claim for those, past and present, who have inhabited this region between the waters is one with a lengthy pedigree of its own. It is the spirit that churned within the writer of Psalm 116, as he reviewed the matchless grace of God and then acknowledged what must be his inevitable response: "*I believed; therefore, I have spoken*" (Ps 116:8+10). It is the spirit that roiled in the apostle Paul, leading him to quote that same psalm writer as an encouragement to all who would serve as God's spokesmen in the public ministry, urging: "*It is written: 'I believe; therefore, I have spoken.'* With that same spirit of faith we also believe and, therefore, speak..." (2 Co 4:13). It is the spirit that prodded Peter and John to stand unflinching before the Sanhedrin and decline its demand for their silence, declaring, "*We can not help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*" (Ac 4:20). It is the spirit that inhabited an upstart Wittenburg monk named Martin Luther as he tacked to the church door his challenge to debate, beginning it with the words, "Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed..."⁶⁷ It is, I maintain, even the spirit that tugged at the heart of an aging Christoph

Eberhardt and led him to bequeath a sizeable block of land he owned in Oakwood Cemetery for use, as long as space remained, by the pastors, teachers, and professors of Saginaw St. Paul's, St. John's, and his beloved Seminary. That was Eberhardt's last will and testament, a posthumous exclamation of what we know as "the Michigan spirit."⁶⁸

Call this spirit a devotion to the Truth, an exhilaration for the Truth, an intentness upon the Truth -- all would be correct, though none is entirely sufficient. Certain it is, however, that the Truth -- God's Truth revealed in Law and Gospel -- is the heart and soul of the spirit that inhabits Michigan. And zeal for the cause of that Truth is what has compelled and continues to compel men from Michigan to speak -- to ask the hard question, raise the unpopular objection, seek the extra detail, demand the full accounting, urge the tough measure, explore the new perspective, offer the fresh idea, all so that the Truth may be preserved and the Truth may be proclaimed. In Michigan, we speak, for better or for worse. And, as much as in us lies, we strive to speak the Truth.

That fix and focus on the Truth is also, I maintain, what makes the comraderie within our district so unique and so precious. In Michigan, many have said, we work hard and we play hard. It's true, but the unique thing is how often the line between those two gets blurred. Listen at the *Gemütlichkeit* tonight to the conversations taking place across the tables and during the sheepshead games and around the food. More often than not, we will be talking about the work, and we'll be enjoying doing it! We can't shut up about it. In Michigan, we speak, for better or for worse. And, as much as in us lies, we strive to speak the Truth.

Listen carefully and you can hear it almost anywhere you go. You can hear it in the congregations where the push toward modernism is tolerated only in so far as it stays servant to the Word. You can hear it at conferences where agendas, though increasingly burdened with the busy-ness of board and committee reports, still focus on essays that venture into Scripture and challenge listeners to grasp all it has to say. You can hear it in the elementary schools and area Lutheran high schools where teachers still believe that listening to, learning, and even memorizing God's Word is the most important part of any day. You can hear it in the halls of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, where students constantly are reminded that the Word is a precious heritage to hold and to pass on. You can hear it in the homes of countless faithful families who consider the Word and those who share it with them to be treasures well worthy of support and even of sacrifice. You can hear it voice to voice and heart to heart as, across a dinner table or outside a meeting hall or around a campfire, brothers offer each other counsel and comfort and loving, Bible-based correction. You can hear it in the harmony of the chorus that sings *Muede bin Ich, Geht zu Ruh* at the funeral of a fellow church worker, and you can hear it in the silence of those who line the walkway for that worker's last passing.

Travel outside our district and you will hear some of the same... but not in the same measure, not to the same degree. Fear and uncertainty and apathy and even the lack of a time-honored tradition do much to muffle voices and make men shy to say what they think. But in Michigan, we speak, for better or for worse. And, as much as in us lies, we strive to speak the Truth.

Let us grant that what is heard from Michigan is not always for the better. Like Peter and Paul and Luther and Eberhardt before them, those who speak from Michigan are beset with the burden of a sinful nature, one that too easily propagates narrow minds, harsh judgments, baseless suspicions, loveless accusations, pointless arguments and other evil offspring that serve to crowd out rather than clarify a testimony of the Truth. Indeed, that over the course of time anything has been spoken in Michigan that merits hearing is a mark, not of Michigan's grandness, but of God's grace.

If in areas of missions or ministerial education or doctrine or practice, if in the past or the present or the days yet to come, if in any way at any time God has used Michigan to speak what needs to be said, then let us recognize that as one more reason to declare: What great things the Lord has done for us that, that we might TELL the Truth!



THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US

Conclusion

As, in Michigan, we seek to move forward in Christ, what will we carry with us from our past -- benefits, or merely baggage? It will be more of the latter unless we will learn what history can teach us.

The fount and source of all goodness and grace remains what it was for our earliest forefathers. *The Word of God is (still) living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit...* (Heb 4:12). Are we setting aside life's petty distractions and rendering mute all lame excuses that keep us from devoting our first and best time to what must ever be our primary task -- doing all we can do better to KNOW God's Truth?

Challenges to that Truth are no less present today than they were when Schmid and Klingman and Eberhardt first set foot on Michigan soil. Neither are the temptations to make compromises with that Truth in the name of accommodating our mission prospects or expanding our fellowship. Are we arming ourselves with the sword of the Spirit and the fortitude only God can give, so that against every assault from without and within we are ready and willing to STAND UP for God's Truth?

Though the red man no longer roams the forests and fields of our state, we need not travel nearly as far as the *Reisepredigers* of old to find mission fields where the Truth is not known and the Savior is not embraced. If the souls we find in those fields are not those with whom we share a familiar culture or color or tribe or tongue, are we steeled with sufficient courage drawn from our Savior's blood to venture into those fields and REACH OUT with God's Truth?

We recognize as one of the most eloquent lessons of Michigan's past that, like hand in glove, a supply of well-trained Gospel ministers is essential to carrying out the church's

mission. Aware of that fact, will we invest in the schools that provide our supply those things that are most precious to us -- our time, our money, our prayers, and above all, our sons and daughters, that they may prepare to be the Klingmans and Eberhardts and Hoeneckes and Krausses of the future? And, in this era that has seen our synod move from seven schools of ministerial education to six, then to five, and today to just four in the name of fiscal efficiency, will we finally rise up and declare "Enough!" Will we do what must be done and supply what must be given to insure our ability, for today and tomorrow, to PASS ON God's Truth?

There are some who suggested that if this paper touched at all upon the "Michigan spirit" it should be to write its requiem. It doesn't matter any more what Michigan says, they claim, because no one out there is listening. Is that what we believe? Shall we stop sending letters, writing papers, authoring memorials, shall we lower our eyes to see only the road that lies immediately before us and let the church around us take any course it may? Is it time for Michigan to be silent? The old adage is true that you have not defeated a man just because you have silenced him. But the devil well knows, when dealing with those who are entrusted with the Truth, if you silence a man there is no need to defeat him. He has defeated himself. Are we ready to resist every self-defeating state of mind and sustain every effort to TELL God's Truth?

No man among us possesses wisdom enough, courage enough, faith enough to give to these questions unequivocal answers. Our spirits are eager to be bold, but our flesh is inclined to be timid. So the most valued lesson our past places before us is to focus our eyes not on what we may do but on what God has done.

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all -- how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things?" (Ro 8:32) That Truth is our answer to every question. For it assures us today, tomorrow, and always, that the Lord who has done great things for us, will continue to do them among us and in us as we move forward in him!

Soli Deo Gloria!

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End Notes

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47. Brenner, p.6.
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