

ST. MATTHEW EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin:

The First Ten Years

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April 18, 1984

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

CONTENTS

Preface

I. St. Paul's

II. St. Matthew's

III. The Watertown Case-1924

IV. The Fort Atkinson Case-1925

V. The Beitz Paper-1926

VI. Pastor Hass

End Notes

Bibliography

PREFACE

When I was seven years old, my family moved into the Ixonia area of Wisconsin. For the next twenty years I was a member of St. Matthew's congregation of Oconomowoc. During all of that time and in fact until just a few months ago I assumed that this congregation was begun in 1932 with the coming of Norbert Paustian. While there is some basis for such a claim (as history will show) St. Matthew's roots go back much farther. In the booklet prepared for the church dedication in 1952, Pastor Paustian writes, "The history of St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Congregation is lengthy and interesting. Space and discretion, however, dictate brevity in this booklet as far as its earliest history." If I had been sitting in his chair, I think I would have written the same thing.

The first ten years of St. Matthew's center around two major controversies. Both of these had Pastor W. P. Hass in the center. Because history involves families who were split over the church problems, I have chosen to omit names wherever possible since these families still exist in the Oconomowoc area. It is not my intent to rekindle old feelings but rather to present the facts in the hope that we may learn from our own past.

The main sources for this paper are the Protestant magazine Faith-Life and the Waukesha County Court Records. In regard to the first, it is important to keep in mind

the journalistic style of the time. Much of what was written then would be in danger of slander lawsuits today. Personal feelings are always evident. If anyone would read some of these, please do so with charity and a discerning eye for the facts buried in the rhetoric. Of the many articles concerning Oconomowoc, the best is from Pastor Hass' own pen entitled, "Adieu to St. Matthew's." These twenty pages of small print are his personal history of the time from 1922 until about 1930. They contain many letters and objective facts but, especially toward the end, they are extremely biased.

As to the court records, this is the only source outside of personal remembrances that I have found to be of any real help concerning the split from St. Paul's in Oconomowoc. Included in these records are a number of minutes from congregational meetings at St. Paul's before the split. For the true history buff these are a must. But now let us go back into history.

ST. PAUL'S

W. P. Hass was born on October 29, 1886 in Merrill, Wisconsin. He graduated from Northwestern College in 1909 and from the Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa (now Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon) in 1912. He then served as pastor in Clarkston, Washington-Lewiston, Idaho. On August 25, 1918 he received a call to serve St. Paul's

in Oconomowoc.¹ What the W. P. stood for is somewhat of a mystery. In every record, even the legal ones, only the initials are used. Elisabeth Jaeger Lind (daughter of Teacher Jaeger who served at the same time as Hass) thinks that his name was probably William Paul.

St. Paul's until 1928 was an independent congregation not affiliated with any larger church group. This was not all that unusual at that time, especially considering the large reorganization of our own Wisconsin Synod in 1917. St. Paul's had been calling pastors who were trained by the Wisconsin Synod. When a Board of Arbitration was formed to examine the charges against Pastor Hass, the ordained men on this board were all from the Wisconsin Synod. If the affair of 1921 had not happened, in all probability St. Paul's would have joined the Wisconsin Synod.

The unfortunate happenings of 1921 began on February eleventh at a congregational meeting.² Several sources agree on the basic facts. Teacher H. A. Jaeger had been assisting the church treasurer by accepting church and school dues. Gossip had been going around that he was not turning these over to the treasurer. This was finally brought out publicly at the meeting on February eleventh. The following heated discussion resulted in the revelation that the church books had not been audited for years. Teacher Jaeger volunteered to pay back any money if it should prove to come up short. (Apparently he was a better teacher than bookkeeper since he did pay the \$25.00 error back.)³

Unfortunately this was only the beginning. Hass spoke up in defense of Jaeger and reminded the members that a serious charge of theft should not be made without proof. In defense of Jaeger, it seems he was acting in good faith as an unofficial helper and such talk was out of place, especially with no proof. The deep feelings involved showed themselves when E. Otto began a legal suit against St. Paul's in this money matter. This suit was later dropped.

In the history of St. Paul's, written in 1978, they sum up this initial action rather well.

An audit of some of the books showed a discrepancy. The errors were made over a number of years and the total amount was negligible. It was apparently more an error of poor record keeping than a willful misappropriation of funds. The party involved apologized and the congregation voted to forgive and forget the matter. Nevertheless, the affair was the spark that set off the disagreement that nearly destroyed the church. It brought into the open resentments that had been festering for some time.⁴

On Good Friday, March 25, 1921 an injunction was served against Hass prohibiting his further acting as Pastor. He was still allowed to conduct funerals. Reading services were held in the church and Teacher Jaeger also conducted services in his backyard for those who backed Hass. Later services were held in the church conducted by Professors J. Meyer, Henkel, Wente (or Wendland) and Pieper. Since the Waukesha County Judge disqualified himself from the case because he knew too many people involved, it was transferred to Juneau, Wisconsin. There, on May 25, 1921 St. Paul's lost its injunction. Perhaps this was the impetus

that brought about the five formal charges. Nevertheless, Hass did not preach at St. Paul's even after this date.

In an effort to resolve this matter, on August 1, 1921 the congregation decided to call a Board of Arbitration. This procedure was spelled out in the church constitution and specified that it would consist of seven members. Four were to be pastors and three were to be laymen. The chairman of this board was Pastor J. Brenner. The decision of the board was advisory only, although on this point there is some question. Five charges were brought against Hass.

1. Pastor Hass has had no Christenlehre. This was a religious instruction class for young people (perhaps an instruction class before confirmation.)
2. Pastor Hass agreed to the legal suit brought by E. Otto.
3. Pastor Hass admitted E. Otto to the Lord's Supper after this lawsuit was begun. If this were true Otto would have been wrong to participate since this would have been against Scripture. (I Corinthians 10:17, 11:27, 28)
4. The fourth charge was so unclear that the Board did not even treat it.
5. Pastor Hass was accused of saying, "In our school every subject is religious, arethmatic (sic), writing and so forth. What is the result of our public schools? What are the public schools? They are nothing but breeding places, nuisances and immoral purposes. Where otherwise would all these divorces come from?"⁵

Pastor Hass said that there were no requests for the Christenlehre; that he had not agreed to the suit; that the suit was not public at the time he gave Otto the Lord's Supper; and that he never said that about the public schools.⁶ The general theme of "willfully unfaithful" was the indictment against Hass.⁷ Two members stated that they had not

been visited when they were sick but these were not included in the official charges.⁸ Perhaps there was a good reason for Hass' not visiting. At the time he had no transportation and the one man lived five miles out in the country.⁹

By this time the point of no return had been reached. In the next few meetings these charges were refined before officially giving them to the Board of Arbitration on October 7, 1921. In their preliminary opinion the Board had stated that "the law of love has been violated in the congregation."¹⁰ The treasurer resigned but his resignation was unanimously refused. E. Otto apologized for his lawsuit at the October seventh meeting but at this same meeting the charges were adopted and given to the Board by a vote of 64-44.¹¹ An interesting note in the October twentieth meeting said that there would be no peace until Hass took a call. The very fact that he was considered eligible for a call someplace else seems to point to the feeling that the problems were personality conflicts and not doctrinally oriented. Elisabeth Jaeger Lind summed up Haas, "in my estimation, (he) was somewhat of a deep thinker, a scholar of history, but did not have the knack of dealing with the people of the congregation and they wanted him to leave."¹² Other sources would seem to support her opinion. Then came October 27, 1921.

At their congregational meeting the Board of Arbitration gave its report. They found Hass to be innocent of all the charges. At this point it was pointed out that the

Board decision was not binding because it was not properly set up. What that remark meant or what was improper was not explained. The motion was made to reject the report and to press the charges. By a vote of 75-63 Pastor Hass was dismissed from his position. Teacher Jaeger was then also dismissed by a vote of 72-60 because "he was not a proper person for the position as shown by his handling of money." On a third vote of 68-61 Miss Edna Fritz, the other teacher, was also dismissed. They were allowed the use of church housing until December 1, 1921.¹³ On October 29, 1921 an injunction was served against Hass and Jaeger forbidding them to continue serving the congregation except in the event of a funeral. On November third the sheriff locked the school. Hass and Jaeger refused to leave.

In their defense, there were no Biblical reasons raised for their dismissal. According to the congregational minutes of October twenty-seventh, it is clear that some members were not concerned with that aspect but simply wanted Hass to be gone. As a result of their refusal to leave, the matter went to the circuit court on November 17, 18 and 21, 1921. Two names well known in Wisconsin Synod history also testified. Professor John Koehler and Professor August Pieper of the Wauwatosa Seminary testified concerning the nature of a Pastor's call. In spite of some excellent testimony, the judge ruled that the call is not divine but only a temporal contract. The final judgment also ruled that St. Paul's had voted by a majority to dismiss Hass, that this was according to the church constitution and Hass had to go.

Jaeger received basically the same verdict in his trial. The verdict stated that no decision was made concerning the religious matters but only whether St. Paul's had acted according to their constitution. Court costs of \$122.48 were to be paid by Hass.¹⁴

The circuit court judgment was rendered in late December of 1921. Hass' appeal to the State Supreme Court was filed on December 30, 1921 and on April 11, 1922 that Court upheld the decision. Hass moved to 109 S. Park St. in Oconomowoc where he bought a house. Jaeger bought a house on the corner of South and Locust. So ended their association with St. Paul's.

ST. MATTHEW'S

Sometime early in 1922 a number of members began meeting at the home of E. Otto to organize a new congregation. "The name of St. Matthew's for the new congregation was chosen with an endeavor of placing the imposition of the troublemakers in St. Paul's with the charge that they had not acted according to Matthew 18 in their dealing or maneuvers."¹⁵ With the 20/20 viewpoint of history it is hard to see that Hass and Jaeger were properly dismissed according to Christ's command in Matthew 18. Articles of incorporation were filed on July 8, 1922 and soon a barracks type church building was obtained and erected on the West Wisconsin site the church now owns. W. P. Hass was called as pastor and Mr. Jaeger and Miss Fritz as teachers.

There were quite a few members who were a part of this new church. The Wisconsin Synod Records list St. Paul's in 1920 as having 800 souls, 675 communicant members, 200 voting members and 50 women who were not represented by a male. In 1922 St. Matthew's is listed as having 350 souls, 225 communicant members, 70 voting members and 15 women not represented by a male in their family. Their first order of business was to get a school going. The following is a notice in The Northwestern Lutheran.

St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, dedicated its school building to be a workshop of our gracious God for its children and for the children of others entrusted to the care of the church, on September 3rd.

Professor E. E. Sauer of Northwestern College preached the dedicatory sermon and in the afternoon the Rev. O. Kuhlow of Waterloo served us.

After a "forced" vacation we are again at work in a new school, in a new colony, our hearts filled with the buoyancy of spirit peculiar to the pioneer. At this writing 57 children have been entrusted to the care and guidance of two teachers. H. A. Jaeger and Miss Edna Fritz and the adding of the planned 9th grade will increase their number.

May the Master-Teacher be with St. Matthew's Church school that it may never fall a prey to the fads and fancies and vagaries of the educationist on the outside, that it may never lose sight of the aim for which it was established, to-wit: To make children wise unto salvation, to produce salt of the earth.

May the Master bless abundantly St. Matthew's members, who in the face of many obstacles rallied ungrudgingly to the erection of this new building to put into effect the unanimous resolution: "School first."
W. P. HASS.¹⁶

The results of this split were felt for many years and in some areas perhaps still are. In his history of the Western Wisconsin District, Dr. E. C. Kiessling writes,
Accepted into membership was St. Matthew's of

Oconomowoc, a minority group that withdrew from St. Paul's after a rancorous split within that congregation. Since the majority group had called a pastor from the Missouri Synod, with the obvious consent of the officials of the South Wisconsin District of that synod, our District sent a protest to the Missouri officials. For the next seventeen years the often acrimonious intersynodical negotiations concerning this matter were reported regularly in District meetings. Finally the District half-heartedly acquiesced in the declaration of the Missouri negotiators that after such a long time it would be impossible and unprofitable to try to resolve the trouble or to place the original blame and that Christians could remain brothers even though they had once quarreled.¹⁷

For the next few years peace and growth reigned and things settled down. For a time, until the church was ready, services were held at a number of different places such as City Hall. The custom that exists yet today, that of guest preachers from Northwestern, was then in use for special occasions.

Since it is my intent to consider the two controversies rather than the growth of the congregation, I suggest reading Mrs. Lind's remembrances of the twenties and any others that can be found. The history of that first chapel is recorded elsewhere and except for the comment that this was a hardworking group intent on peace I feel compelled to leave it at that. On to April, 1924.

THE WATERTOWN CASE-1924

A certain spirit was rising in the Wisconsin Synod in the early twenties which came into the open with the Watertown Case in 1924. The end result of this action and the two others which will be related was the formation of

the Protes'tants. The name they adopted comes from the verb protest, which they certainly did and still do. This is not the same as the term Protestant used commonly today. The accent is on the second syllable for this small group who finally left the Wisconsin Synod. For the recounting of the Watertown Case I quote from Professor E. E. Kowalke:

Toward the end of March, 1924, twenty-seven boys, more than 10% of the dormitory residents, were found guilty of stealing at Northwestern. Of these, eighteen were ninth and tenth graders. Most of the thefts were of small items taken from downtown stores and from other boys in the dorm. A ring of three tenth graders had, however, accumulated loot amounting to about \$80.00. Some of this thieving had been going on since the previous September.

When the tutors found out about the scandal, they immediately started an investigation that lasted through the night of Friday, March 28. A severe snowstorm cut off the electric current and left the dormitory dark on Saturday night, so that the inquest could not be resumed until Sunday evening. It continued until all guilty parties and suspects had been identified. On Monday morning Pres. Kowalke was informed for the first time that the nocturnal investigation had taken place.

The faculty dismissed classes on that Monday-- March 31--and sat all day and far into the night and again the next day and part of that night considering each case separately. One of the guilty boys--the arch-culprit, in fact--had been allowed to go home on Saturday to make a confession to his parents. As he had not yet returned, the faculty decided to telephone the father to come to Watertown with his son. But the telephone service was still disrupted from the Saturday storm and the father could not be reached. The boy returned alone shortly afterward.

Each boy eventually confessed his wrongdoing, and the faculty then imposed the following punishments. Seven boys were expelled indefinitely. (An eighth left school at the beginning of the trouble but would have been expelled had he stayed.) Dr. J. H. Ott read into the motion of expulsion for the first two boys the phrase "subject to the approval of the board." According to the statutes only the board had the final right of expelling, but it had not used its prerogative in seventeen years. The next eight boys were suspended until the following school year, when they might re-enter, but with the loss of a year of study. Dr. Ott voted

against this provision, deeming the punishment too severe. The rest of the boys were placed on probation, given campus arrest and the like.

The faculty had instructed Pres. Kowalke to inform the parents of each boy of its action as soon as possible. But the notifications did not travel as fast as the expelled students, and most of the parents were taken by surprise when the sons arrived home with stories of how they had been awakened in the middle of the night by upper classmen and brought before the tutors, who cross-examined them, allegedly, for hours in some cases. The stories grew in the retelling until soon the false rumor began to circulate that third degree methods had been employed.

Pres. Kowalke immediately appraised the board of the faculty actions, but several affected parents had already appealed to that body, and the latter met in special session on April 3. It at once became apparent that the board would support the faculty. It also became apparent that the faculty would not yield an inch. The faculty insisted that the discipline of the school belonged to the teachers, that they had dealt justly, that the evil had to be cast out root and branch for the good both of the school and the sinning students, and that the statutes which gave the board the right to expel were a dead letter. The board wanted the faculty to reconsider for the following reasons: the parents had not been heard before action was taken by the faculty; several of the parents and certain ministers were demanding reconsideration; the punishments were too severe, considering the youth of most of the offenders; the method of investigation by the tutors had been improper; there must have been faulty supervision in the dormitory to permit stealing to spread so widely for so long.

The matter hung fire for three weeks over the Easter vacation until the board met with the faculty again. This time the demands were more insistent, and angry words were bandied back and forth. Certain professors accused the board of being incompetent to judge. One of its lay members had said that the thefts were no worse than climbing over a fence and stealing a few apples. The synodical president--ex-officio member of the board--reputedly said: "It is high time that the law is laid down to this faculty."

The board then deliberated separately and delivered its ultimatum. The eight boys suspended until the following year were free to return, subject to whatever punishments the faculty wished to impose, short of expulsion. Five of them did return. A sixth--a ninth grader--was back the next September, taking the ninth grade a second time.

Concerning the boys suspended, indefinitely, the board reaffirmed that the faculty had no right to expel without board approval and that therefore each of the

seven cases was to be reconsidered separately and individually by the faculty. The parents of this latter group were, it seems, informed by both the secretary of the board and the president of the college that the cases of their sons might be reopened, but they failed to respond. Two of these boys applied for readmission at the beginning of the next school year, but were refused.

The faculty had "stood aghast" when it heard the board's resolutions concerning the expellees. It pleaded with the board to withdraw its decrees for the sake of maintaining discipline in the school. It might, if it so desired, denounce the faculty's action and record its disagreement in its report to the Synod. But the board refused to consider the plea. Professors Karl Koehler and Herbert Parisius now submitted their resignations. They informed their colleagues that they would be glad to help them out by teaching without pay for the rest of the year, and the faculty accepted their offer gratefully. But when members of the board heard about it, they not only terminated the services of the two men but intimated that the faculty had arrogated to itself some of their right to hire and fire. A committee of the board tried to deal with the two professors in the hope that they might rescind their resignations, but the cleavage had grown too wide, especially between certain members of the board and Prof. Koehler.

Koehler, the son of the Seminary professor, was a gifted, strong-willed man who had very definite views on education and a minimal tolerance for synodical officials. One of the latter had previously protested his nomination for the professorship at Northwestern because of a quarrel he had had with the administration of Bethany College, Mankato, while teaching there. His friend, Dr. T. C. H. Abelmann, the only member of the college board who sided wholeheartedly with the faculty, made this revealing remark about him while speaking in his defense: "I think if a Koehler would not have been involved in this, the controversy would not have been at all." Later on Koehler became a kind of elder statesman among the Protestants and the editor of their paper, Faith-Life.

The action of the board in overruling the faculty decision concerning the two professors was the high mark of contention between the two groups. From now on both sought to conciliate each other. Committees were appointed by the Synod to work out a new set of statutes and a better relationship, but it took years before mutual trust was restored. Before that time arrived two other professors and two tutors--not the investigators but their successors--had resigned.

In the meanwhile the affair had produced repercussions throughout the District and the Synod, and a rift

formed between those who commended and those who condemned the action of the board. Some of the outraged members of the latter group met in the home of Seminary Professor G. Ruediger and arranged to call a meeting on Commencement day at Watertown to consider the case and seek redress for the two professors. One young pastor, apparently on his way to the meeting, referred to it with relish as a "meeting of the Bolsheviks," and such it turned out to be. The still extant transcript of the stenographic minutes of this meeting reveals that the leaders--mostly younger men--were not interested in pouring oil on the troubled waters but in denouncing the college board. They scorned the idea of reconciliation with men who had committed such "damnable deeds." Their radical attacks against the establishment, to use a current term, alienated many who had been sympathetic to their cause and many also of the very faculty they had wanted to vindicate. The result of this unfortunate meeting was the formation of a so-called "third party," which eventually became known as the Protestants. Yet it is unlikely that this party would have endured or that wiser counsel would not have prevailed, if another troublesome affair had not arisen later in the same year at Fort Atkinson to supply fresh fuel for the fire of discontent.¹⁸

THE FORT ATKINSON CASE-1925

The second action at St. Paul's in Fort Atkinson involved two women teachers there, Miss Gerda Koch and Miss Elizabeth Reuter. These two took it upon themselves to condemn the congregation and its Pastor, A. F. Nicolaus concerning a number of things such as short dresses and bobbed hair, the music the church choir was singing and a general attitude of concern more with social matters than with Scriptural. All but one of their charges were in the area of adiaphora (i.e., neutral things neither forbidden or commanded by God.) That one real charge was that the church choir was about to accept an invitation to sing at St. Paul's in Oconomowoc. Since the matter at this congregation was

still not resolved this would have been wrong. The choir never did sing there. The first error of these two was to call these matters of adiaphora sin. The second was to label their pastor a false prophet. In the course of their actions they had advised the children in their classrooms to stay away from church services even as they were doing.

Obviously this matter could not be overlooked. As the congregation was about to take action--in January of 1925, the two teachers accepted calls to Marshfield and found a spokesman to defend them in Pastor O. Hensel of Immanuel in Marshfield. St. Paul's in Fort Atkinson refused to give them an honorable dismissal. The two teachers then gave charges against St. Paul's to District President Thurow who took them to their former congregation which they had accused. During the negotiations that followed the two teachers were allowed to teach, one in Wauwatosa and the other in Milwaukee. This upset St. Paul's in Fort Atkinson so that they resigned from the District.

In the District convention in Beaver Dam in 1926 the real problem was revealed in this matter when it was stated "We believe that this case is only a part of the bigger problem."¹⁹ The bigger problem was the charge of officialdom. Some felt that Synod officials were using authority they did not have in this and other matters. This is a central issue in all Protes'tant dealings.

The Fort Atkinson case went on for many years, but was not the real issue involved any more. As to the women,

Miss Reuter married Pastor Hensel and after his death taught college in Oregon. Miss Koch remained militant. She appeared in Time magazine (December 10, 1965) as the director of Christian Research. The report states that she was fined \$20,000.00 for libeling a Minnesota professor and legislator as "a Communist and a member of the Jewish usury group."²⁰ In a letter appearing in Faith-Life in March, 1939 she confessed, "I am not guiltless in these matters (Fort Atkinson Case.) I believe that if I had steered my own vessel better and in clearer waters, it would not now be thus."²¹ If this case was only fuel for the fire already burning, then the Beitz paper was gasoline thrown on that fire.

THE BEITZ PAPER-1926

At a pastor's conference held September 14-15, 1926 Pastor William Beitz read a paper entitled, "God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith." This paper was written in a free style which rendered the subject matter, in certain instances, to be understood in two ways. In other points it was clear that he was condemning the Seminary and its methods of instruction and the Synod as a whole for being dead in its faith. The sides in the smoldering Synodical incidents mentioned before were now being clearly drawn in the controversy concerning this paper. Some (the Protes'tants) claimed that it was right and finally refused to yield any point of this paper. After several readings of this paper (which always caused controversy)

District President Thurow sent it to the Seminary Faculty for their opinion. The reply, called the Gutachten, was returned on June 7, 1927. In this opinion the paper was rejected for a number of reasons. One of the faculty, John Koehler asked that the Gutachten not be released until he had an opportunity to speak with Beitz face to face. Whether Thurow released the opinion too soon or if Koehler delayed his meeting too long is a matter of opinion. Nevertheless, when Koehler got to Beitz's house the Gutachten was already there. Koehler returned claiming that he had been betrayed. As a result of this Gutachten the Protestants again raised their charges of officialdom. By this point some pastors were being suspended from the Wisconsin Synod.

Just a word of defense for both Thurow and Koehler. Thurow had a hot issue on his hands which he wanted to end. He surely hoped the Gutachten would do that. Koehler was busy with the design and building of our new Seminary in Mequon. Might this have delayed his trip to see Beitz? This summary does not include every aspect of the situation but hopefully enough to give the feeling of the time.

PASTOR HASS

Into this world steps St. Matthew's. Pastor Hass was on the Protestant side of the fence. The first mention in any records of the congregation's concern over this matter came on November 27, 1927 at a congregational meeting concerning a new organ. To get a better picture,

here is a list of significant dates before this meeting:

1926

September 14-15	First reading of Beitz' paper
October 3	Missionfest at St. Matthew's-- Pastor Koch preaches
November 4-5	Pastor-Teacher Conference at which Thurow questioned Beitz's doctrinal soundness. St. Matthew's teachers were present.

1927

February 24	Hass called to Watertown and questioned concerning his Protes'tant leanings.
June 7	<u>Gutachten</u>
June 26	Koch suspended (cf. Oct. 3)
July 20	Letter to Hass and others warning of possible suspension
July 21	Beitz suspended
August 6	Letter warning Hass of suspension from Thurow
November 27	Congregation Meeting

Hass made no secret of his support of the Protes'tants but would never put it into clear words. Pastor Koch is listed above as an example of those with whom Hass associated.

At the November 27th meeting it was brought up that there were rumors concerning Hass' suspension. In order to answer and explain the situation another meeting was called for December 4, 1927. At this meeting Hass explained his stand and suggested that everyone get a copy of the Beitz paper and read it for himself. That was the decision of the congregation but before they (the papers) were available Thurow met with Hass (December 9, 1927). Hass sent a letter to Thurow stating his objections to the Synod stand

in the Fort Atkinson Case (December 13, 1927) and the Peace Committee met with Hass twice (January 24 and February 7, 1928). This committee was set up by the Synod to try and resolve the problems on an individual basis. None of these meetings accomplished anything.

In the meanwhile a new organ was dedicated on January 22, 1928 only two months after the first meeting concerning it. This testifies to the spirit of the congregation at that time. Of course the fact that Teacher Jaeger worked part-time as a salesman for an organ company probably didn't hurt either.

The next three months were packed with events. As with the last list, these are gleaned from Hass' own history:

1928

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| February 12 | Beitz paper made available to congregation |
| February 15-16 | Part of the Church Council met with Synod officials at Watertown at a regular Synod meeting. There was no result from this other than a clarification that it was the congregation's request for the Beitz paper. |
| February 17 | Hass recounts meetings with several members of St. Matthew's who were opposed to him. |
| March 13 | At a council meeting a letter from Synod officials is read which asks for a congregational meeting for them. There was a deadlock vote over this. |
| April 19 | At a council meeting there is a motion to have a Synod-Congregational meeting. Hass agreed to this but protested what he termed Synod dictating. |

April 22 At the quarterly congregational meeting two Synod officials are present but the members vote that they be asked to leave. The motion to have a Synod-Congregational meeting is made but never voted on.

April 23 There is an unofficial meeting of Synod officials and some of the members of St. Matthew's.

APRIL 25 HASS SUSPENDED FROM WISCONSIN SYNOD.

What seems to be happening during this time is that some members were consulting with Synod representatives over what was happening and how to best handle this situation. These meetings were held privately and when Hass heard of them he accused these people of going behind his back.²² As with the St. Paul split, now personal feeling got into the picture and it is probably better to stay with facts then get into feelings. The congregation was already splitting over this matter. Some members were transferring to other Oconomowoc churches. Two camps were emerging; those who supported the Synod stand and those who supported Hass. Mrs. Lind recalls, "that he (Hass) repeatedly said that the congregation must get smaller and smaller and that true believers would stick with him."²³ Without a doubt it did get smaller. It seems that many of Hass' old problems of relating to members were rising again here at St. Matthew's.

Did Hass resign at this time? He says he tried to and was refused. It is unclear on this matter and probably always will be since the minutes of the congregational meetings of St. Matthew's in the twenties are missing. What is available is Hass' account. On June 3, 1928 a motion

at a congregational meeting of Synod on Hass was never voted on. In July a committee was set up to handle petitioners and others who were making claims against St. Matthew's as former members. Finally on November 29, 1928 the Wisconsin Synod suspended St. Matthew's because Hass was still their pastor. Please note that this was suspension and not excommunication even though part of the debate over the years has been just what the suspension meant.

What happened in 1929 and 1930 is very hard to reconstruct. There were in effect two St. Matthew's. One was in the building on West Wisconsin and the other met at the Community Hall and other places. On April 27, 1930 the West Wisconsin group voted to support Hass against a complaint filed in County Court by Gustav Timmel against Hass on March 28, 1930. In this complaint it said,

Wherefore plaintiff demands judgment that the defendant, W. P. Hass, be removed as pastor of said congregation and that the property rights of this plaintiff and all others, who may join herein in the property own by said congregation be determined and for such other relief as may be just and equitable together with the costs and disbursements of this action.²⁴

The basis for this complaint was that Hass had not obeyed the constitution and by-laws especially in Article II--Article of Faith. Hass' reply to this was his formal resignation dated April 27, 1930.

So ended Hass' official position at St. Matthew's. Mrs. Lind remembers that he still came to church as a laymember but would interrupt the reading service with personal remarks. Because of this and the general situation

the congregation drifted and ended up in a dormant state.

As for Teacher Jaeger--(reprinted from The Northwestern Lutheran, April 13, 1930)

The Central Conference feels in duty bound publicly to declare that teacher H. Jaeger of Oconomowoc has severed brotherly relations with us, because in spite of all admonitions he continues to render service to a congregation which has refused to hear Synod and because he continues to uphold brotherly relations with a pastor who has justly been suspended by us in a doctrinal controversy.²⁵

Jaeger resigned from teaching then and went on to pursue other means of employment.

For a time now there really was no St. Matthew's at all. A number of members got together after a time and began to investigate the possibility of beginning again. During the summer of 1931 Pastor Lorenz was granted the privilege to serve St. Matthew's in addition to his own congregation, St. Luke's in Watertown.²⁶ Although I have no proof, I suspect he served as a type of vacancy pastor. In this effort to regroup Pastor Eggert of St. Mark's in Watertown should also be mentioned since it seems he also was of great aid. After meeting with Pastor Nommenson (now President of the District) St. Matthew's was granted mission status and in September of 1932 Pastor Norbert E. Paustian began his work, fresh from the Seminary. On the basis of this history, there is validity in claiming two different dates for the beginning of St. Matthew's. It is also understandable why many records would be missing since for many years the members, for good reason, wanted to look forward, not back.

What happened to W. P Hass after his final dismissal from St. Matthew's? The following is from Victor Otto's account:

Thereupon about six families left the congregation, and my father purchased a small piece of land on the corner of Park Street and Highland Avenue in early 1932, where a small combination church and school building was then built. There Rev. Hass conducted regular services on Sunday mornings, and Mrs. Hass played the organ and she also taught school on weekdays. After the court's action of the injunction, which was upheld, Rev. Hass rented a small tract of land from one of his adherents on which he tried to produce for his family's livelihood.

Following my father's (E. O. E. Otto's) passing, (1936), the small church was abandoned due to various pressures, and for a short time a few of us remaining gathered at Rev. Hass' home Sunday morning to worship.²⁷

If there is one important lesson from this history it is the importance of God's Word at St. Matthew's. When St. Paul's majority went against that Word the founders chose God over their roots and life-long church. When their pastor went astray again they chose God's Word as the final guide. It has not been an easy path and there are many family problems and heartaches seen between the lines of history but God has blessed those who knew the "one good thing" and clung to it. May those who follow these founders ever do the same.

END NOTES

- ¹"W. P. Hass, 1886-1953," Faith-Life, XXVI, #8, p. 3.
- ²W. P. Hass, "Adieu to St. Matthew's," Faith-Life Supplement, April 1932, p. 1.
- ³Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, September 11, 1921.
- ⁴The History and Present Family of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School, 1978, p. 16.
- ⁵Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, September 11, 1921.
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, February 21, 1921.
- ⁸Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, September 25, 1921.
- ⁹Victor Otto, "As I Remember," Faith-Life, XL, #1, p. 17.
- ¹⁰Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, September 25, 1921.
- ¹¹Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, October 7, 1921.
- ¹²Personal Recollections of Elisabeth Jaeger Lind, July 18, 1981.
- ¹³Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meeting, October 27, 1921.
- ¹⁴Judgment in the Case of W. P. Hass, Waukesha County Court Records, December 22, 1921.
- ¹⁵Otto, p. 17.
- ¹⁶Northwestern Lutheran, October 1, 1922, p. 319.
- ¹⁷E. C. Kiessling, The History of the Western Wisconsin District, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁸Kiessling, pp. 12-15.
- ¹⁹Kiessling, p. 20.

²⁰Kiesling, p. 20.

²¹Kiesling, p. 20.

²²Hass, p. 13.

²³Personal Recollections of Elisabeth Jaeger Lind, July 18, 1981.

²⁴"What Will This Lead To?" Faith-Life, III, #7/8, p. 15.

²⁵Faith-Life, III, #9/10, p. 6.

²⁶Church Records of St. Luke's of Watertown, Wisconsin, 1930.

²⁷Otto, p. 18.

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4. Minutes of St. Paul's of Oconomowoc Congregational Meetings--August 11, September 11, September 25, October 7, October 16, October 20, October 27, 1921.
5. Otto, Victor W. "As I Remember," Faith-Life, January/February, 1967.
6. Otto, Victor W. "What Will This Lead To?" Faith-Life, III, #7/8.
7. Waukesha County Court Proceedings of November 17-19, 1921.

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2. "Dedication of School," The Northwestern Lutheran, October 1, 1922.
3. The History and Present Family of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School, 1978, p. 16.
4. "The Oconomowocers," Faith-Life, III, #15/16.
5. "The Oconomowocers Again," Faith-Life, V, #3.
6. Paustian, N. E. "History of St. Matthew's," Dedication Booklet of St. Matthew's of Oconomowoc, 1952.
7. "What It Has Led To," Faith-Life, III, #9/10.
8. "W. P. Hass, 1886-1953," Faith-Life, XXVI, #8.
9. Statistics of the Western Wisconsin District of 1920, 1922.

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2. Seminary Faculty. "The Opinion ('Gutachten')," Faith-Life, LI, #5.