

# Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal

---

Volume 8  
Issue 1 *One Body in Christ*

Article 3

---

6-1-2026

## Sisters Separated: The Past, Present, and Future of the Relationship between the LCMS and WELS

Peter Ross  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, rossp@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ross, Peter (2026) "Sisters Separated: The Past, Present, and Future of the Relationship between the LCMS and WELS," *Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho/vol8/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal* by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).



*Peter Ross is a fourth-year M.Div student at Concordia Seminary. Originally from Kalispell, Montana he moved to White Bear Lake, Minnesota in 2008. He received a BA in History from Concordia University Wisconsin in 2022. His interests include hiking, hunting, fishing, watching sports, researching Lutheran history, and reading books.*

## ***Sisters Separated: The Past, Present, and Future of the Relationship between the LCMS and WELS***

*By Peter L. Ross*

There are two prominent confessional Lutheran synods in the United States, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Yet these two groups are not in altar and pulpit fellowship. It often comes as a surprise to many younger members of Missouri Synod congregations that there was a time when the two synods were in altar and pulpit fellowship. As time has gone on however, there seems to be a general warming in the relationship between the two synods. In light of this warming relationship, it is good to look at the past relationship of the two synods, evaluate where the two synods stand today, and look at what stands in the way of future fellowship between them with an eye toward steps that may be taken toward unity in the future.

### THE FOUNDING OF THE TWO SYNODS

The histories of the two synods are deeply interconnected. In fact, an argument could be made that whether the Wisconsin Synod wants to admit it or not, it has always been defined by its relationship to the Missouri Synod. The two synods were founded around the same time, shared fellowship for nearly 90 years, and to this day often come to the same doctrinal conclusions. Therefore, a retelling and evaluation of the history of the two synods is necessary to understand where they are today and where they are going.

The LCMS was founded in 1847 at a convention in Chicago. However, the origins of the synod date back to the late 1830s when a group of Confessional Lutherans, then known as “Old Lutherans,” led by pastor Martin Stephan began to protest the Prussian Union. The Prussian Union was formed in 1817 in an attempt to combine the Lutheran Church with the German Reformed churches that surrounded it. The Union was marketed to Lutherans as being “merely Christian, or evangelical, or Protestant, or at the very most evangelical-Lutheran.” The method, however, was not

and three other pastors formed the Northwestern Conference with the sole goal of promoting confessionalism in Wisconsin. In 1860, just seven years after he arrived in America, Bading was elected President of the Wisconsin Synod. The turn towards confessionalism was almost complete.

As the 1860s rolled on, the Wisconsin Synod became more confessional. At the 1868 Wisconsin Synod convention, the delegates adopted a resolution to “reject each and every altar and pulpit fellowship with those that believe falsely or otherwise as contradictory to the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Church.” With that the Wisconsin Synod meant to sever ties with the unionist mission societies that had helped found it. But there were other considerations to this decision. The 1868 Convention also sought a closer relationship with the Missouri Synod. This resolution was not just meant to send a message to the founders of the synod but also to inform the Missouri Synod that the time had come for fellowship.

In October of that year, a Wisconsin Synod delegation, led by Bading met with a Missouri Synod delegation, led by Walther at Milwaukee. By that time, the Missouri Synod could concur with the Wisconsin Synod that fellowship was possible. At the meeting, an agreement between the two synods was drafted the first two points of the agreement read “1. Both Synods are happy to recognize as orthodox Lutheran church bodies. 2. Between the two synods pulpit and altar fellowship shall be established.” Walther said after the meeting “We must admit that all our suspicions against the dear Wisconsin Synod have not merely disappeared but were also put to shame . . . God be thanked for His unspeakable gift.” In 1871, the dreams of fellowship became even more of a reality for the two synods. That year, these two synods, along with the Ohio Synod, Norwegian Synod, Illinois Synod, and Minnesota Synod drafted a document that gave a lengthy explanation for organizing as a general body. That same year, the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference in North America was drafted. The next year, the six synods met at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Milwaukee to officially form the Synodical Conference. From that day forward the history of Missouri and Wisconsin would be forever linked.

In the 1880s a controversy arose that looked to destroy the fabric of the Synodical Conference. The issue boiled down to the question of whether someone is predestined to salvation in light of his faith or is he predestined unto faith. The controversy arose when F. A. Schmidt, a professor from the Norwegian Synod who was teaching at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, accused Walther of teaching “new doctrine” and of having an “un-Lutheran tendency.” The next year, at the Missouri Synod’s meeting, the Ohio Synod’s advisory delegation opposed Walther and at its convention denounced “Missouri’s heresy” before withdrawing from the Synodical Conference

altogether. The next year the Norwegian Synod left the Conference and severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod. At that point, Missouri's most significant ally was Wisconsin. At the 1882 Synodical Conference, Bading and Pastor R. Adelberg issued a report supporting the Missouri Synod stating that they found no error in the Missouri Synod's teaching and that all protested passages had "been corrected or explained correctly in other publications of the Honorable Missouri Synod." Thus the relationship of the two synods was further solidified.

### A FRACTURING UNITY

As the nineteenth century rolled into the twentieth century, Lutheranism in America was changing. 1930 saw the combination of the Buffalo, Ohio, and Iowa Synods to form the American Lutheran Church. This was the first truly national Lutheran body in the United States and looked to be the beginning of the end of the synodical alliances that had defined Lutheranism in the nineteenth century. Missouri and Wisconsin were not exempt from these changes. In 1917, Wisconsin merged with the Nebraska, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods to form the Evangelical Joint Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, later the name would be shortened to the modern WELS. There were even points from the 1870s to the 1930s where the Missouri Synod offered to combine with the Wisconsin Synod. But as one WELS member put so well "Amalgamation would mean disbanding the Wisconsin Synod." The Wisconsin Synod had its own history and culture and it wanted to retain it, the merger was never going to happen.

But the new century brought new challenges to the two synods, as well, especially when it came to doctrinal matters. When World War II hit, the Missouri Synod, who had a history of sending military chaplains in times of war all the way back to the Civil War, once again decided to send military chaplains. The Wisconsin Synod, on the other hand thought that sending chaplains would be an opening of the door to unionism and opted to have an organization that daily devotions to WELS soldiers during the war. In the years following the war, the Synodical Conference took up the issue of chaplaincy. The Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod had run into their first major issue.

In the post-war years, another issue that threatened fellowship between the two synods, the issue of scouting. The WELS opposed the scouting movement from the movement's earliest days. In 1914, *The Northwest Lutheran* became the Wisconsin Synod's flagship English publication, in the first issue of the new magazine, the Boy Scouts were compared to fraternal lodges. The Missouri Synod did not have glowing reviews of the Scouts either. In 1925, Theodore Graebner, a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was cited saying that Boy Scouts often required boys to attend

religious services and social functions at other churches. As the scouting movement grew, so did the gap between the LCMS and WELS on the matter. The WELS hardened its position on scouting, while the LCMS softened its position. The primary example of this change was seen in Graebner. From the outset, Graebner saw the Boy Scouts as “a preparatory school for Freemasonry and for the lodges in general.” Already in 1925, Graebner was meeting with scouting leaders to address his concerns. By the end of those meetings in 1927, Graebner concluded that the scouts could function in Lutheran churches provided that the troop committee was made up of members from the congregation and that Lutheran boys were not required to attend non-Lutheran services. At its 1944 synodical convention, the LCMS approved a report that would open the door for scouting in Missouri Synod churches. Mark Braun, a WELS historian claims that this was the first time that the LCMS acted without regard for her sister synods in the Synodical Conference, particularly the WELS and “little” Norwegian Synod. The clouds were gathering for the worst test of Missouri and Wisconsin’s relationship.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, the LCMS became more involved in the ideas of Lutheran unity. Already in the 1910s, talks of Lutheran union began. By the 1930s, the American Lutheran Church and the LCMS were discussing the possibility of fellowship. The LCMS at first kept a level head on its shoulders, wanting there to be fellowship only when true unity was discovered. However, the LCMS began to march farther and farther into these dialogues. When this occurred it moved farther away from the WELS. It was to the point that in 1938, Wisconsin’s *Quartalschrift* became the first publication in either synod to criticize the other one in 70 years. The issue at hand was that the LCMS and ALC seemed to be drifting closer to fellowship while not being in full agreement on doctrine. By the late 1940s, Missouri and Wisconsin were in open combat with each other in their official magazines.

In 1955, the ELS, a longtime member of the Synodical Conference, voted to suspend fellowship with the LCMS over the increased hostility between the LCMS and other Synodical Conference bodies. This was a real tragedy, as the two synods had been in fellowship since 1857. The Wisconsin Synod also held a convention in 1955. During that convention, WELS President Oscar Naumann stated that WELS leadership had concluded that the Missouri Synod was guilty of causing division and that the WELS now had to follow the command to “avoid them.” With that in mind, the convention’s Standing Committee on Church Union recommended “with deep sorrow” that the Wisconsin Synod must terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod. A resolution was drafted but a substitute resolution was also drafted to delay the termination of fellowship until the 1956. The reso-

lution to delay the termination of fellowship passed. The writing was on the wall for the termination of fellowship. Yet, at the 1957 WELS Convention, the action of breaking fellowship was further delayed when the resolution to terminate fellowship narrowly failed, though the WELS did maintain a position of “vigorous protesting fellowship with Missouri.” As a result of the further delay of termination of fellowship, many protests were lodged against the WELS by some of her pastors, professors and even two sitting district presidents. The dissenting members of the WELS formed the Church of the Lutheran Confessions in 1960.

The 1961 WELS convention was the climax of Wisconsin and Missouri’s relationship. It would be improper to say that the events of the 1961 convention were surprising by any stretch of the imagination. It has already been demonstrated that the severing of fellowship was on the radar since 1955 if not earlier. Yet, the cessation of fellowship was still a heart-breaking tragedy that many in both synods felt. To set the scene, the story of the Franzmann family needs to be told. First there was Martin Franzmann. Martin began his teaching career at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI, the pastor’s training college for the WELS. In 1946, Martin received a call to teach at the Missouri Synod’s Concordia Seminary St. Louis. He served as the Missouri’s representative at the 1961 WELS convention. Then there was Werner Franzmann. Werner served as the chairman of Floor Committee #2, which was tasked with handling the matter of fellowship with the LCMS. Finally, there was Gerhard Franzmann, who served on the faculty of Northwestern College who was present at the convention and who spoke openly from the floor in opposition to the resolution. Though there were other players at the convention, it was defined by the Franzmann brothers.

On Tuesday, August 15, 1961, Committee #2, headed by Werner Franzmann, presented a resolution to the WELS Convention to suspend fellowship with the LCMS. Debate ran through the afternoon and into the evening. Debate continued at the Wednesday morning session. There both Martin Franzmann and the representative of the Slovak Synod were questioned extensively on the doctrine of fellowship. On Thursday afternoon, the debate started again, it would be the last day of debate on the matter. The Milwaukee Journal reported that when the vote was finally taken it was eight hours after the expected adjournment of the Convention. When the vote was finally tallied, 72 percent of the delegates had voted to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

At this point, perhaps the most memorable scene at the convention took place. Martin Franzmann, a man raised and trained in the Wisconsin Synod, now serving as the Missouri Synod’s delegate, spoke. In his speech he begged the delegates to be more patient with the Missouri Synod be-

fore giving a “lengthy and impassioned” goodbye speech to them. Werner Franzmann stood at the other microphone and responded “We have gone the long mile of Christian love with the Missouri Synod with the course and kind of admonition we have given until now. . . today a sterner kind of admonition and love is required.” Gerhard Franzmann called the scene a “very wrenching experience.” From there the LCMS and WELS went their separate ways.

## THE LCMS AND WELS TODAY

The relationship between the LCMS and WELS was pretty much destroyed by the split between the two synods. The two synods became very suspicious of each other. An example of this can be seen in my own life. Growing up in what I assume was a typical LCMS family, all I really knew about the Wisconsin Synod was that if I were to ever run across a WELS member, he would not pray with me. I did not know that the LCMS and WELS were ever in fellowship until I was in college. The distrust apparently ran both ways. In 1992, an ELS pastor and an ELS laywoman wrote a book, published by Wisconsin’s Northwestern Publishing House detailing what was going on in the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In that book, written less than 20 years after *Seminex*, the authors gave a vague hope that the LCMS would hold on to its confessional identity, but the line was often repeated “the battle does not appear to be over.”

Yet, in recent years there has been a warming in the relationship between the two synods. In 2012, the WELS and ELS approached the LCMS with the intention of beginning informal dialogue. At the 2013 WELS Convention, a resolution “to continue discussions with the LCMS to strive for true unity based on full agreement in doctrine and practice,” was passed unanimously by voice vote. In 2015, both synods along with the ELS issued a joint report on the dialogue noting that many pleasant surprises, including being able to recognize “that doctrinal agreement exists in many areas.” In 2021, President Matthew Harrison attended and addressed the WELS Convention, becoming the first LCMS president to address a WELS convention since fellowship was suspended. In his address to the convention, President Harrison acknowledged that the ELS and WELS broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod to avoid the *Seminex* Controversy. The two synods still meet annually along with the ELS.

There are two main reasons that are often listed for why these talks are happening. The first goes all the way back to the 1955 ELS convention, when the writers of the resolution to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod chose the word “suspend” instead of “terminate.” The WELS followed suit in choosing the word suspend in their 1961 resolution. Werner Franzmann made it clear that the choice of wording was intentional. He

a viable option for the Old Lutherans. Joint services of the Sacrament were held between the two groups, and some Lutheran and Reformed congregations were forcibly merged. The distribution was changed from “The body of Christ . . .” to “Jesus says ‘This is my body . . .’” Those who opposed this were suppressed and were often replaced by clergy who would conform to the state’s wishes. All the while petitions to allow dissenting churches to form independent “free churches” were not granted until 1841.

Martin Stephan, a pastor in Dresden organized an emigration from Saxony to Perry County, Missouri in the hope of founding a confessional Lutheran body in America. In 1838, Stephan, along with five other pastors, 10 candidates for the ministry and about 600 other souls set out for their new Zion. Along the way, however, things took a dark turn with Stephan’s leadership. Carl Mundinger reports that already on the ships Stephan “began to conduct himself like an Oriental despot.” From that point on Stephan had the final say in the new Lutheran colony in all secular and doctrinal matters. Finally, on May 30, 1839, less than six months after the immigrants arrived in America, Stephan was excommunicated and exiled from the colony; the charge was adultery.

In the chaos that followed, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther became the leader of the *woebegone* immigrants. Born in 1811, Walther continued the family tradition of going into the office of the ministry. In 1837, he received his first call to Braeunsdorf in Saxony. During his short year in the congregation, Walther experienced the pain of trying to remain faithful to the Lutheran Confessions while dealing with a purely rationalistic hymnal, liturgy, and catechism. Therefore, he joined the emigration. In the wake of Stephan’s ousting, Walther faced a new problem. The argument was now being made that the emigrants were not a legitimate church because the pastors in their ranks had left their rightly ordered calls to join the emigration. Therefore, Walther set up a debate with Adolph Marbach in April of 1841. Walther’s arguments that won the day went, in short, as follows: the church is inherently an invisible communion of all believers, the true church exists where there is true faith regardless of the continuity of human organizations. Therefore, the emigrants must be regarded as part of the true church with the full right to call pastors. From there, the Saxon immigrants became firmly established and in 1847, the Missouri Synod was formed.

While there was less tumult in the founding of the Wisconsin Synod, it was not without its problems. Wisconsin was founded by Johannes Muehlhauser, who in 1837 was sent by United Rhine Mission Society’s school at Bremen to serve as a pastor in Rochester, NY. Nine years later, Bremen sent Johannes Wisemann and William Wrede to work with Muehlhauser. By 1849, all three men were serving in the Milwaukee area of Wis-

consin. In December of that year, the three men met in the parish hall of Grace Church in Milwaukee to form the Wisconsin Synod and Muehlhauser was chosen as the president. The next April the three men met again and were joined by Kasper Pluess of Slinger, WI to constitute the new synod. However, unlike the Missouri emigrants Muehlhauser and his companions held a “relaxed brand of confessionalism.” For Muehlhauser, the Lutheran Confessions were “paper fences” meant to keep Christians from expressing true unity in the gospel. To that end, though the initial constitution of the new synod required subscription to the Lutheran Confessions for new pastors, the words were quickly crossed out and replaced with the phrases “pure Bible Christianity” and “pure Bible Word.” This was without a doubt Muehlhauser’s doing.

### EARLY CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

The relaxed confessionalism of Wisconsin and the staunch confessionalism of the Old Lutherans in Missouri gave rise to near immediate hostility toward one another. In Wisconsin, the Missouri Synod, along with the Buffalo and Iowa Synods, was labeled as a “Romanizing sect” by Muehlhauser. The love for Wisconsin was not lost in Missouri. In 1861, a Missouri Synod pastor in Michigan accused the Wisconsin Synod of being a deceptive and lying church that was “thoroughly unionistic.” Another Missouri Synod pastor in 1861 accused Wisconsin Synod pastors of living comfortable lives so that they could “missionize where the gospel is already being preached.” In 1862, the Wisconsin Synod established a congregation in Watertown, WI, where the Missouri Synod had already set up shop. One Wisconsin official said that it was “high time our synod came to Watertown,” because, before this the choice was between “Methodistic enthusiasm” and the “rigoristic exclusivism of the Old [Missouri] Lutherans.” The Missouri Synod’s official publication responded by saying that the new Wisconsin Synod congregation would serve as a place where those who were indifferent on doctrine or hated church discipline could “find a refuge for their sensitive skin,” all the while they could still pretend to be Lutheran. This marked the first phase of the relationship between the two synods, utter conflict.

Yet even as these fights of the 1850s and early 1860s grew fierce, there was a subtle shift towards confessionalism in the Wisconsin Synod. By the mid-1850s, Weismann and Wrede began to insist on stricter adherence to the Lutheran Confessions and clearer definition of confessional subscription in the synod. As time went on, they were able to overrule Muehlhauser and get subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession into their constitution. Another major development was the arrival of Johannes Bading in 1853 from a mission school at Hermannsburg where he was trained in the Lutheran Confessions under Ludwig Harms. Two years later, Bading

said that the word suspend was used “because we wanted to use a less harsh term hoping that the Missouri Synod will return.” In recent years, this fact has been a key talking point for the Wisconsin Synod leaders when giving explanations to their members on what is going on between the two synods. Second, the WELS and ELS recognize that the LCMS has changed since fellowship was suspended. Thomas Nass, a retired professor at the Wisconsin Synod’s Martin Luther College writes, “The LCMS has solidly reestablished its commitment to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions and has ended all official discussions with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Perhaps now is the time for former partners from the Synodical Conference to become reacquainted.” This sentiment seems to be shared by the members of both synods.

Even as the two synods are getting reacquainted both are careful to remind members that fellowship is not on the radar yet. In the 2015 report issued by the LCMS, ELS, and WELS, the three synods noted that despite the agreement in most doctrinal areas “a number of significant differences (real or perceived) remain that need to be thoroughly addressed. It should be stated clearly that we do not expect to reestablish church fellowship in the near future. All of us are convinced that church fellowship requires complete agreement in doctrine.” Though the two synods have warmed up to each other, fellowship is still a long way down the road.

### THE FUTURE OF THE LCMS AND WELS

It is too early to tell if fellowship between the LCMS and WELS is possible. As mentioned earlier, both synods agree that complete agreement in doctrine is required for fellowship, and both agree that they do not have full agreement at this time. Fellowship between the two synods may not happen on this side of Christ’s return. If there is any hope of fellowship between the two synods taking place before Christ’s return, there are three doctrinal areas that need to be clarified.

First, both synods seem quite defined in their doctrine of fellowship. The very issue that tore the two synods apart more than 60 years ago is still at the very heart of what separates them. While there is agreement on the matter of closed communion and on “general principles” of church fellowship, there is still heavy disagreement. The LCMS is firm in its belief that joint prayer may be conducted between LCMS Lutherans and Christians who are not in fellowship with the LCMS. The WELS on the other hand, is defined by its stance of not praying with Christians who are not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the WELS. Something would have to give on either side for fellowship to happen. It does not seem possible for that to happen at this time.

Second, the synods disagree on the office of the ministry. The WELS says that the office of the ministry is given to the congregation and the congregation may call a layman to step into the role of the public ministry on occasion. However, a layman may only do this when called upon by his congregation and must relinquish the role when that (for a lack of a better term) “temporary call” ends. For example, an elder at a WELS congregation may take unconsecrated elements to a shut-in and conduct a Communion service if his congregation asks him to do so. He may not, however, baptize his own children (except in an emergency) or do a Communion service in his own home. In addition to this, the WELS does not believe that the office of the ministry is synonymous with the pastoral office. Instead, Wisconsin teaches that “the church has the freedom to establish different ‘forms’ or offices of the public ministry.” The Wisconsin Synod has three of these “forms”, the pastoral office, teachers (both male and female), and “staff ministers” (the role of DCE would fall into this category).

The LCMS teaches that the office of the ministry is the pastoral office and that the primary function of the ministry is the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This office is given by God through the congregation to be exercised by the pastor on behalf of the congregation. All other “ministries” of the church are auxiliary offices meant to support the one office of the ministry. For example, a congregation may have a Sunday School to supplement what the children are learning in the Divine Service. Even though these seem cut and dry, there at times seems to be ambiguity in both synods on the matter. Nass, who is a long-time attendee of LCMS and WELS dialogues, claims that the difference is really over the language that the two synods use. Yet, the two synods at times talk and practice like the other synod. Therefore, some clarity on the matter from the two synods would be in order.

The final area of disagreement is the area of the role of women in the church. While both synods agree on the matter of the order of creation and both synods reject women’s ordination, there is disagreement on whether women voting in the church constitutes women having authority over men. The LCMS generally believes that it does not constitute authority and therefore most LCMS congregations allow women to vote and women delegates are allowed to vote at district and synodical conventions. Meanwhile, in the WELS, women are not allowed to vote in congregational, district, or synodical meetings. It would be difficult to change the doctrinal position of either of the two synods at this time. Therefore, further conversations need to continue in this area of doctrine.

While fellowship between the LCMS and WELS is still highly unlikely at this point it is still worth pursuing. Schisms are after all, an affront

to our Lord. Therefore, we should take steps to improve our relationship with the WELS. It would now be helpful to look at what individual pastors and laypeople in the LCMS can do to make the relationship better. First, all Missouri Synod Lutherans can pray for their brothers and sisters in the Wisconsin Synod. Pray that the Holy Spirit guides them in the truth of the Word of God. Pray that he guides the conversations at the dialogues between the two synods. Even though it seems so far away, pray that God leads our two synods back into fellowship with a true agreement on doctrine. Second, pastors and laity in the LCMS can read WELS materials with proper judgement. The Wisconsin Synod has a rich history of theologians that many in the LCMS have never heard of. These theologians provide excellent insights into doctrine and are worth our time. A good example of this would be the writing of Adolf Hoenecke whose Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics rival Pieper's Dogmatics in their brilliance. It is also helpful to read WELS theologians in the areas where we disagree, a good place to start would be Mark Braun's *A Tale of Two Synods*. This will give us a better understanding of what they teach as we are not relying on what other people say about them, but what they say about themselves. This is why the majority of my sources for this article are from a WELS point of view. Finally, LCMS pastors can get to know the WELS pastors in their area. Even though they will not pray with us, it is still good to get to know them. Go out to lunch with them, invite them and their families over for dinner, maybe even invite them to Greek study. All the while we wait with the rest of creation in eager expectation for the day when Christ will restore all things, including the fractured relationship between the LCMS and the WELS. May God grant that the relationship is restored on this side of Christ's return.

Endnotes

- 1        *The former organization will be referred to as the LCMS, the Missouri Synod, or Missouri. Likewise, the latter will be referred to as the WELS, the Wisconsin Synod, or Wisconsin*
- 2        *Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-141, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 15.*
- 3        *August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, "The Promised Land," in The Lutherans in North America, ed. E. Clifford Nelson, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 154.*
- 4        *Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 16.*
- 5        *Abdel Ross Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 116. Suelflow and Nelson dispute this number and claim that there were closer to 700 immigrants that made it to New Orleans and up the river to Missouri. Suelflow and Nelson, "The Promised Land," 157.*
- 6        *Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947),*
- 7        *Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod, 89.*
- 8        *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 117.*
- 9        *Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 523.*
- 10       *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 118. For the full text of all eight of Walther's theses at the debate Cf. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, 523-525.*
- 11       *John A. Braun, Together in Christ: A History of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 3.*
- 12       *John Braun, Together in Christ, 4.*
- 13       *Mark E. Braun, A Tale of Two Synods: Events that Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 20.*
- 14       *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 20.*
- 15       *John Braun, Together in Christ, 4-5.*
- 16       *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 20.*
- 17       *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 27.*

- 18      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 28.*
- 19      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 28.*
- 20      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 29.*
- 21      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 29.*
- 22      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 30.*
- 23      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 31.*
- 24      *John Braun, Together in Christ, 12.*
- 25      *John Braun, Together in Christ, 12.*
- 26      *Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 181.*
- 27      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 33.*
- 28      *Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, 180.*
- 29      *This body will be referred to as the Synodical Conference for the rest of this article.*
- 30      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 34.*
- 31      *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213.*
- 32      *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213. The precise accusation was that Walther*
- 33      *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 213-214.*
- 34      *Johannes Bading and R. Adelberg, "The Wisconsin Synod Supports Missouri," trans. Carl Grossman, in Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod, ed. Carl S. Meyer. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273-274.*
- 35      *Wenz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, 297. This, and its successor body shall be referred to as the ALC.*
- 36      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 55.*
- 37      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 50.*
- 38      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 89.*
- 39      *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 93-95. It should be noted that neither syn-*

od sent chaplains

when the United State entered World War I in 1917. Cf. Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 76. It should also be noted that the Wisconsin Synod was not the only church body that questioned the idea of submitting their ministers to the government for the War. The most notable example of this was the Presbyterian Church USA which urged its members to try to avoid becoming part of the military establishment. Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 86.

40 There was an issue of the doctrine of the Office of the Ministry in the early 1900s that still persists to this day, but at the time the lines on the ministry were not clearly based on synodical lines. The adage was used “Missouri practiced what Wisconsin preached, and Wisconsin practiced what Missouri preached.” Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 73.

41 Hans K. Moussa, “The Craze for Organizations,” *The Northwest Lutheran* 1, no. 1 (1914): 5-6.

42 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 103.

43 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 106.

44 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 108.

45 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 109-110. The “little” Norwegian Synod would later be renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). That synod’s history with the LCMS is also an interesting case study but that is another story for another time.

46 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 147-149. It should be noted that both synods did criticize things about each other in those 70 years but generally differences between the two synods seemed to be differences of personality more than anything else.

47 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 214.

48 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 230.

49 Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill: A History oof the Evangelical Lutheran (Norwegian) Synod, 1918-1968*, (Mankato, MN: Board of Publications, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 194.

50 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 231.

51 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 233.

52 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 239.

53 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 240-241.

- 54 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 247.
- 55 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 248.
- 56 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 265.
- 57 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 266.
- 58 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 269.
- 59 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 265-266. *The Slovak Synod was the Missouri Synod's sole ally through this ordeal. At some point the Slovak Synod was re-named the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, SELC. In the 1970s the SELC was absorbed by the LCMS and became one of the non-geographic districts of the LCMS.*
- 60 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 266.
- 61 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 2.
- 62 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 268.
- 63 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 268-269.
- 64 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 2.
- 65 Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 269.
- 66 Patsy A. Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith, *What's Going on Among the Lutherans?: A Comparison of Beliefs*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 328. *Interestingly enough, the back of the book contains two endorsements from LCMS pastors, one of which was the Fort Wayne professor, Kurt Marquart.*
- 67 Thomas Nass, "Continued Conversations," *Forward in Christ*, last modified: July 31, 2025. <https://forwardinchrist.net/continued-conversations/>.
- 68 Paula Schluenster Ross, "WELS Resolves to Continue Discussions with LCMS," *Reporter*, last modified: August 12, 2013. <https://reporter.lcms.org/2013/wels-resolves-to-continue-discussions/>.
- 69 John A. Moldstad et. al., "A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders, 2012-2015," n.p. 1.
- 70 Robert Pasbrig, "Minutes of the 66th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod," *Presented at the 66th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Watertown, WI, July 27, 2021. Proceedings 2021*, 72.
- 71 Matthew Block, "LCMS President Greets WELS and ELS Lutherans," *International Lutheran Council*, last modified: August 12, 2021. <https://ilcouncil.org/2021/08/12/lcms-president-greets-wels-and-els-lutherans/>.

- 72 *Aaberg, A City Set on a Hill, 194. The full text of the resolution to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod can be found on pp. 283-287 of that book.*
- 73 *Mark Braun, A Tale of Two Synods, 266.*
- 74 *Nass, "Continued Conversations." Cf. Mark Shroeder, "Purposeful Discussions," Forward in Christ, last modified: November 29, 2021. <https://forwardinchrist.net/purposeful-discussions/>. The second article is by the President of the WELS and was written three months after President Harrison addressed the WELS convention.*
- 75 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*
- 76 *Moldstad et al., "A Report on the Meetings," 3.*
- 77 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*
- 78 *Thomas P. Nass, "The Revised This We Believe of the WELS on the Ministry," Logia 10, no. 3, (2001), 33.*
- 79 *Nass, "The Revised This We Believe," 34.*
- 80 *Nass, "The Revised This We Believe," 34.*
- 81 *C. F. W. Walther, The Church and the Office of the Ministry: The Voice of Our Church on the Question of the Church and Office. Study Edition. Trans. J. T. Mueller; rev. and ed. Matthew C. Harrison, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 262.*
- 82 *Walther, The Church and the Office of the Ministry, 284.*
- 83 *Nass, "Continued Conversations."*