

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-6-2024

The Congregation in All Her Glory: How the History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) Can Be Used to Teach Free and Living Church Polity

Stephen Mark Mundfrom
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, rphadad@hotmail.com

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



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mundfrom, Stephen Mark, "The Congregation in All Her Glory: How the History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) Can Be Used to Teach Free and Living Church Polity" (2024). *Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project*. 234.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/dmin/234>

This Major Applied Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

THE CONGREGATION IN ALL HER GLORY:
HOW THE HISTORY OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF FREE LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS (AFLC)
CAN BE USED TO TEACH
FREE AND LIVING CHURCH POLITY

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
Rev. Stephen Mundfrom
May 6, 2024

Approved by:

Dr. Joel Biermann

MAP Advisor

Dr. Timothy Dost

Reader

Dr. Mart Thompson

Reader

To Joanne, my wife, helper and best friend for 38 years. Thank you for the courage and faith you have shown and shared wherever the call of God has taken us.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABBREVIATIONS	vii
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION.....	1
RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	1
RESEARCH QUESTION.....	4
RESEARCH PURPOSE	5
CHAPTER TWO	6
THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH.....	6
ORIGINALITY	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
The History of the LFC/AFLC.	9
The Story of “Church.”	13
Jeffery Kloha’s “The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament”..	14
Barry A. Ensign-George, Between Church and Congregation.....	18
Martin Horn, “The Congregation as the Bride of Christ”	25
Samuel Wells: Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics	34
CHAPTER THREE	44
THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	44
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION.....	44
Whatever Happened to History?.....	44

Why History?.....	47
The Narrative Identity of the AFLC	67
Summary.....	84
CHAPTER FOUR.....	86
THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	86
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	86
Implementation Timeline.....	92
Methodological Approach	94
Research Methodology	95
Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher.....	96
CHAPTER FIVE	97
PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA	97
DATA ANALYSES	97
Improved Understanding	105
Retrograde Responses.....	109
EXPECTED FINDINGS	114
CHAPTER SIX.....	117
SUMMARY.....	117
PERSONAL.....	117
CORPORATE.....	121
APPENDIX ONE.....	125
THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES.....	125
APPENDIX TWO.....	127

SALVATION THEOLOGY (TH 2302) LECTURE NOTES	127
APPENDIX THREE.....	149
ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS	149
APPENDIX FOUR.....	151
ASSESSMENT SURVEY RAW DATA	151
APPENDIX FIVE.....	155
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 3 SYLLABUS.....	155
APPENDIX SIX	166
LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH FROM THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER OF THE FREE LUTHERAN BIBLE COLLEGE.....	166
APPENDIX SEVEN.....	167
STUDENT PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM (BLANK).....	167
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	171

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The last words are also the first words. *Soli Deo Gloria*. Thank you to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only true God, constantly present in His congregations, for so wonderful a salvation and the promise that I will some day see my Savior just as He is.

In the eight years that I have worked at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary I have enjoyed constant and meaningful Christian fellowship, support and collegiality from administration, colleagues and staff. I am grateful for all the encouragement that has been given as well as much needed support for this endeavor. Well before that, AFLBS and AFLTS provided me in God's perfect plan and timing the necessary foundation for life and vocation which the Lord knew I needed. It is an honor to be back here on the teaching side of the enterprise.

Has there ever been a teacher who didn't say, It's all about the students? I say it here, but not just because it is a thing to say. Nothing is of greater interest or joy than to discover the uniqueness and depth of another human being. Every year, a new class of amazing students arrives on campus just waiting for us to find out who they are, what makes them tick, and becoming friends. Thanks to all the students!

Congregations are so special. The field where God does His greatest work. I am thankful for the congregations I have been blessed to serve: Bethany, Calvary, Zion, and Grace.

Scripture teaches us to love our heritage (Psalm 16:9). I got my inheritance many years before my parents, Gerald and Margaret, went on to glory. That's the great thing about learning to trust Jesus in a Christian home. You don't have to wait until mom and dad die to enjoy the inheritance they give you. By God's incredible grace we have passed on that heritage to our son and daughters—Rebecca, Philip, Heidi and Alison. I am so thankful for each of you.

I also say a special thank you to my oldest daughter Rebecca for her help in proof-reading and preparing the final draft. I hate doing footnotes!

ABBREVIATIONS

AFLBS	Association Free Lutheran Bible School
AFLC	Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
AFLTS	Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary
ALC	American Lutheran Church
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FLBC	Free Lutheran Bible College
FLS	Free Lutheran Seminary
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LFC	Lutheran Free Church
MAP	Major Applied Project

ABSTRACT

Mundfrom, Stephen M. “The Congregation In All Her Glory: How the History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) Can Be Used to Teach Free and Living Church Polity.” Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary. 2024. 175 pp.

Among Lutheran denominations in America, the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations privileges the free activity of the congregation with a unique church polity. Because of its rarity, the AFLC is especially concerned that a correct understanding of its polity be taught at its schools and passed on effectively to future generations. One way to ensure that this occurs successfully is through a combination of theological and historical instruction. Historical education has been in decline for several hundred years due to developments in Western thought. Nevertheless, significant arguments can be made for the necessity of an historical and narrative understanding of Christian faith and life. This research project set forth a narrative account of the AFLC’s polity and attempted to measure the impact on Bible college students of a combination of theological and historical instruction using that narrative account. A Likert-scale survey was given to participants after theological instruction of church polity but before historical instruction. Another survey was given after the historical instruction. Results suggest that the historical instruction improved the students understanding of the AFLC’s practice of congregational church polity.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

As an instructor of Systematic Theology at the Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC) it is part of my responsibility to teach the distinctive AFLC congregational polity to the students. This has been accomplished in part through the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) course. Part of this course has included the polity of the AFLC. The student body of FLBC is of a mixed denominational nature. A majority of the students come from the congregations of the AFLC, however, many come from other backgrounds, often non-Lutheran protestant churches. By-and-large I find that many students are uninformed and/or ambivalent about the question of church polity. Or, at least, they are ill-equipped to discuss or defend a biblical viewpoint.

In contrast, the founders of the AFLC in continuity with their ecclesiastical forefathers who established the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) believed that at least one particular issue of polity was vitally important to the life of the church and was worth fighting for: the freedom of the local congregation. It is feared that unless the new generation of AFLC young people are taught the meaning and value of “Free and Living Congregations,” they will not be prepared to stand up for or make good use of that freedom in the future when they are members and leaders of AFLC congregations. Rather they may without even knowing it squander their heritage in favor of a synodically or clerically dominated church life. Perhaps the commonsense way of organizational structure (from the top down) as often seen, for example, in business and government has been accepted uncritically rather than the free and living congregational paradigm that is evident in Scripture.

As a young Christian I had assumed that my experiences as a congregational member

growing up in the AFLC were more or less similar to those of other Christians or Lutherans. Our churches had an active laity which took considerable interest in the condition and guidance of both the national church body and the local congregation, on a theological as well as a practical level. The members of these congregations did not regard the decisions or actions of the national church body to be a given for the congregation that you simply had to live with. Rather, the condition of the congregation and church body was something for which they were responsible.

Since my father was a Lutheran pastor, I likely had more opportunities to gain intimate knowledge of the workings of my childhood and young adult congregations than others. Still, a major step forward in my own realization of the value of congregational freedom came through an understanding of the LFC's past and of Norwegian Church life which many of the immigrants experienced prior to coming to America. One of the most significant moments occurred for me when I read the first chapter of *The Years of Our Church* by Clarence J. Carlsen. This chapter, entitled "Background and Beginning," details the two different strands of church experience in Norway and their corresponding representatives in America. Carlsen writes,

During the first three decades of immigrant history in this country, 1840–1870, the Norwegian-Americans were divided, broadly speaking, into the same two groups that had existed in Norway: those who favored the State Church pattern for the emerging church in their new homeland and those who favored a church which would perpetuate the ideals and methods of the revival movement. The former organized themselves in 1853 into a church body known popularly as the Norwegian Synod. The latter were gathered in 1847 into what came to be commonly known as the Eielsen Synod.

The leaders of the Norwegian Synod were pastors who had been trained at the University in Norway. Their aim was the establishment of a church in this country which would follow as closely as possible the lines of the State Church of Norway, with its emphasis upon organization, ritual, and pastoral authority.

The leader of the Eielsen Synod was the famed Elling Eielsen ... He and his followers endeavored principally to transplant the revival movement known as Haugeanism to American soil. They paid little attention to congregational or synodical organization, matters with which they had had nothing to do in Norway and

with which they were not willing to concern themselves any more than absolutely necessary in this country.

Thus the Norwegian Synod represented one extreme and the Eielsen Synod the other.

Many immigrants did not feel at home in either of these two organizations. Accordingly, in 1870, a third church body appeared among the Norwegian Lutherans in this country. In fact, a fourth one appeared almost simultaneously. The third was the Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Conference and the fourth the Norwegian Lutheran Augustana Synod. Both of these groups took a mediating position between the extremes of the first two groups.¹

The AFLC in sympathy with its ancestor church bodies which Carlsen has just mentioned has sought partly by means of church polity to realize the best of both historical lines (Carlsen calls them “extremes”). It desires to have a true Lutheran church body gathered around the means of grace with a shared identity and consistent organization served by well-trained and examined pastors. While at the same time promoting and caring for the spiritual life and freedom of the individual Christian through an emphasis on genuine Christian experience. A prominent mechanism to maintain this balance has been a church polity which protects the freedom of the congregation. It has been maintained that a self-governing congregation² (sometimes called independent or autonomous) provides opportunity and places demands upon the laity which encourage them to be active in guiding and supporting the congregation while at the same time bridling the clergy’s political influence in favor of its prophetic work. The early leaders of the

¹ Clarence J. Carlsen, *The Years of Our Church* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Free Church, 1942), 17–19.

² Throughout this paper I have chosen to avoid the terms autonomous and independent, although they are often used in the AFLC’s own conversation. Both terms carry connotations that I prefer to avoid. “Autonomous” seems to suggest that the congregation is radically sovereign, existing only for its own sake. Clearly, this is false. The congregation exists by an act of divine grace and exists solely for God’s pleasure to live by His revealed will. The free congregations of the AFLC expect that this existence by and for God will be realized through their own experiences of the Spirit’s work through the means of grace. “Independent” seems to suggest a congregation that is sufficient in itself and needs no help, fellowship or co-operation with other congregations; all things which “self-governing” does not imply nearly as strongly. While a free congregation governs its own affairs according to the Word and Spirit, it needs the fellowship, resources and mutual accountability that involvement in a larger body necessitates. As Sverdrup expressed it in the Fundamental Principles: “A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God” (#7). So, the preferred terms in this paper will be “free” and “self-governing.”

LFC were well aware of the fact that congregational freedom can be compromised both from without (by a hierarchical synodical structure akin to the European State Churches) and from within (by an authoritarian or over-protective clergy). While the question of church polity has usually been treated with freedom by Lutherans, the AFLC rather emphatically holds that it should not be, for that reason, a matter of little importance.

Over time the passing generations seem less likely to understand and care about the past events and movements that have been influential in their own background. The mantra of the 1960s that “history is bunk” coupled with the rise of post-modern skepticism regarding the possibility of any historical knowledge has not failed to alienate many Christians from the stories of their origins as denominations and the unique identity those stories provide. Yet it is simply a fact that an institution or living community such as a church body cannot fully be understood apart from its past.³

Research Question

It is my concern as a researcher and a teacher in the church to find an effective strategy for teaching the AFLC’s polity of congregational freedom to the students at FLBC. That strategy will inevitably involve multiple prongs; biblical, systematic, practical and historical elements will have to be included. I am concerned here especially with the historical prong.

Specifically, I want to explore whether the students’ grasp of, and possibly their

³ Throughout this paper, I will endeavor to maintain a clear distinction between history and the past. The past is what has actually happened in the course of human events. It is fixed and unchanging. History is the after-the-fact record of the past which, except for Holy Scripture, is an exclusively human work. Like all human endeavors, history is sometimes done well but often done poorly. All history is in some way colored by the opinions, biases and suppositions of the contributors, both conscious and subconscious, both accidental and intentional. Only by a careful, studious, broad-minded and self-critical effort involving many contributors can we begin to bring our history close to the actual past. While many historians embrace the idea of multiple, competing histories, I personally believe that, as difficult as it might be, it is worthwhile to aim for a history that as nearly as possible corresponds with the actual past.

commitment to, the AFLC's congregational identity can be enhanced by devoting special attention to its past as it relates to this specific issue. I am aware that this research could be conducted along several different axes. For example, instead of testing for cognitive understanding of theological truths, the research could examine the students' sympathy towards or affection for congregationally oriented church life. In such a study the valuable work of James K. A. Smith on Christian formation would be carefully examined and applied. As it is, this study will consider what effect there is on student understanding from telling a moving historical narrative of the past in which Christians took their stand for important, biblically informed principles, and as a result saw those principles lived out and codified in the church-body's polity.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this project will be to identify key elements of the church body's past as it relates to congregational freedom; to prepare an historical narrative of that past which will augment the systematic theology lectures; and to endeavor to determine the impact of that historical narrative on the understanding and attitude of the students. It is hoped that this research can provide guidance for the development of the Ecclesiology curriculum at FLBC.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

Originality

Several recent MAPs have addressed the nature of the church, but have not approached it from a narrative perspective. These MAPs have a story of the church, the church's narrative identity, that is working in the background which will be discussed briefly. Besides addressing many other issues, each MAP is concerned with the question of which story of the church/synod relationship will be predominant in the LCMS.

Michael Bingenheimer has explored the story of the church in a MAP from 2011, "Autonomy or Multi-Site? A Policy Capturing Study of Two Models of Church Planting for the Guidance of Future Site Plantings at Ascension Lutheran Church, Wichita, Kansas," which seeks to determine if his multi-site congregation(s) in Wichita, KS is/are one congregation or two. He explores at length the lexical material, particularly related to *Acts*, and concludes that his two-site congregation is one church. While they operate at separate locations, they continue to share a pastor and a common legal structure and experience substantial interactions between the two campuses. Bingenheimer's attention appears to be somewhat directed towards political/legal matters, concerned with the way the Synod views his congregation. He mentions pressure from the circuit counselor to divide the campuses so as to achieve greater representation in synodical government.

Bingenheimer observes that there is some free play in the usage of *ekklesia* in Acts. Most of the time Luke refers to the believers gathered in a locality, but there are some exceptions, most notably 9:31 and the three uses in chapter 19. He also explores, quite helpfully, the question of whether etymology or usage should govern our understanding of the term. From its etymology

we would be led to a story of the “calling out” aspect of church life and explore questions of the church’s relationship with the world out of which it is called. While these are real issues, they do not appear to be the main concern with the use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament account. On the other hand, the usage of *ekklesia* in the Roman world to designate a local, political meeting does seem to be the prominent one.¹ While Bingenheimer’s MAP addresses the significance of the New Testament usage of *ekklesia*, he does not explore in any depth the way congregations are related to larger church organizations. Throughout the MAP, the notion of a governing model for the congregation’s aspirations is frequently mentioned. Perhaps this could be framed as a narrative of the church’s life which would provide a more dynamic way of thinking. Models are often static, while a narrative is dynamic. One of the issues that the churches struggled with was the way change affects the model.

Another MAP which explores the significance of the congregation is from 2012: “Engaging Ecclesia: A Model for Training and Leading Circuits to Engage in Mission as Ecclesia” by Jeffrey Shearier. Shearier is much more concerned with the theological legitimacy of church structures above the congregation. Also concerned with church planting, “Engaging Ecclesia” seeks to motivate the people of the Rocky Mountain District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to engage more seriously in the mission of planting new congregations. Shearier hopes that this can be accomplished by demonstrating that the missional work that occurs at the district level is just as much a work of the *ekklesia* as that which occurs in the local congregations.

Shearier takes the same starting point as did Bingenheimer: the Biblical usage of *ekklesia*.

¹ Michael Bingenheimer, “Autonomy or Multi-Site? A Policy Capturing Study of Two Models of Church Planting for the Guidance of Future Site Planting at Ascension Lutheran Church, Wichita, Kansas” (DMin MAP, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2011), 34–35. <https://scholar.csl.edu/dmin/137>.

His study acknowledges the frequent local idea in the use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament narrative, but also at times a more “transcendent” meaning.² Shearier relies heavily on the conclusions of Jeffery Kloha, which will be discussed later in the Literature Review. In his Historical and Systematic treatment of *ekklesia*, Shearier rather casually dismisses the Free Church viewpoint for its frequent connection with the heterodoxy of the Radical Reformation.³ In dealing with the Lutheran Confessions, he asserts a trans-congregation element, but never seems to identify it, speaking mostly about the fellowship of believers around Word and sacrament (which occurs in Scripture at the congregational level). Shearier also tells the story of the changing theological understanding in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since its inception and narrates the struggle for dominance between them, where the more congregational, incipient views of Theodore Graebner were set aside for the founding views of C. F. W. Walther.⁴

Shearier gives attention to several strong voices in favor of a broad understanding of *ekklesia* that includes structures larger than or above the congregation. The question that he does not address, which was very important for some theologians like Georg Sverdrup, a champion of Lutheran congregationalism in pioneer America, was the status of the congregation when its life or confession come into conflict with the agenda of the synod. This scenario has often been played out in American Lutheranism. In a perfect world, the congregation and the synod will always agree and strive together for common goals based on their common confession. Nor would the elevation of the synod to the status of *ekklesia* ever harm or undermine the life and

² Jeffrey Shearier, “Engaging Ecclesia: A Model for Training and Leading Circuits to Engage in Mission as Ecclesia” (DMin MAP, Concordia Seminary, St Louis, 2012), 34. <https://scholar.csl.edu/dmin/140>.

³ Shearier, “Engaging Ecclesia,” 42–43.

⁴ Shearier, “Engaging Ecclesia,” 51–53.

freedom of the congregation when it is standing solidly on Biblical grounds. However, we know that we do not live in a perfect world and that congregation and synod do sometimes disagree and compete. While Shearier's goals of a more robust participation in the mission of church planting is commendable, the question of what this might cost in terms of congregation life and vitality is also an important part of the story.

My research will approach the doctrine of the church from an historical and narrative angle. Scripture says certain things about the church which are true and normative. How do we tell the story of our own church existence that is faithful to those truths, and is that story effective in forming the way others think about the church? Both of these earlier researchers were interested in helping people think about the church in a way that was different than what they had encountered—a way they believed was biblical. Both also took a rather direct theological approach to ecclesiological instruction, as far as is discernable in their MAPs.

Literature Review

The literature for this project falls into three categories: the history of the LFC and AFLC, the way the church is identified in a denomination, and finally the usefulness of history in teaching theology.

The History of the LFC/AFLC.

The stories of the LFC and of the AFLC do not typically receive even a mention in the historical surveys of American church history. For example, Sydney Ahlstrom (*A Religious History of the American People*, 1972) acknowledges that there were dissenters during the merger efforts of the Norwegian Lutheran churches in America in the late 1800s, but doesn't

mention any by name.⁵ In Mark Noll's 1992 *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* the 1960 merger that formed the American Lutheran Church (ALC) is mentioned in one sentence, but no dissenters in that merger are recognized.⁶

As would be expected, the Free Lutherans fare better in the histories devoted specifically to Lutheranism in America. E. Clifford Nelson's *The Lutherans in North America* (1980) gives a two-page summary of the Lutheran Free Church that is quite helpful, providing not just an overview of events but also a few paragraphs explaining its Fundamental Principles.⁷ The formation of the AFLC in 1962 is only mentioned in passing.⁸ More recently Mark Granquist has written *A New History of Lutherans in America* (2015). Georg Sverdrup has one listing in the index, and the coverage of the fight to save Augsburg College in the early 1890s is mostly attributed to a penchant for conflict among the Norwegians with a passing mention of disagreement on humanist vs. pietist viewpoints. Nothing is said about concerns for church polity and the freedom of the congregation.⁹ The AFLC gets only two references in the text mentioning its initial formation and its reception of a number of dissenting congregations at the time of the 1988 mergers which formed the ELCA.

In 1969 Eugene L. Fevold wrote *The Lutheran Free Church; A Fellowship of American Lutheran Congregations, 1897-1963*. This remains the definitive work of the history of the

⁵ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 760–2.

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 484.

⁷ E. Clifford Nelson, and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 2:341–43. There is quite a bit about the Lutheran Free Church in Nelson's (and Fevold) older, two-volume work *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans* (1960). My impression of that book has always left me feeling that Nelson disdains most opposition to the movements for unity.

⁸ Nelson and Fevold, *Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans*, 505–6.

⁹ Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 229–30.

Lutheran Free Church. Fevold introduces the two men who championed the freedom of the congregation in the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Conference, Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal, as coming to “Augsburg imbued with the progressive spirit of the Church Reform Movement and with the democratic ideals represented in Norway by the political party known as the Left (Venstre).” He says further, “The two professors brought with them from Norway a deep commitment to the ideal of a free church—a spiritually-alive church in which all gifts of grace are utilized and given expression in the congregation, and a self-governing democratically-led church which is free from clerical domination.”¹⁰ His treatment of congregational autonomy under the heading of the “Old School and New School Parties” seems tepid to me, diffused by the inclusion of “doctrinal differences and...personality clashes,” and the suggestion that Sverdrup and Oftedal were not faithful to the original intent of the Conference’s founding.¹¹ Although certainly an accomplished historian and scholar, Fevold was not a graduate of Augsburg College nor a member of the Lutheran Free Church.¹² I think this distance shows in his failure to appreciate the centrality of congregational autonomy throughout the LFC’s past. Writing in 1969, seven years after the LFC had rejected its congregational polity to merge with the ALC, perhaps he considers free-church ideas *passe* and best forgotten.

A more enthusiastic work on the Lutheran Free Church from one of its own sons is *The Years of Our Church* by Clarence J. Carlsen (1942). This is the book cited in the introduction that gave me my first real sense that I understood what the existence of the Free Lutheran movement was all about. It is an introduction to the Lutheran Free Church that covers both the

¹⁰ Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Free Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 32.

¹¹ Fevold, *Lutheran Free Church*, 45–47.

¹² *Biographical Directory of Pastors of the American Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), 181. (compiled by John M. Jensen, Carl E Linder, Gerald Giving).

history (extending back into Norway) and its current activities and prospects. He writes about the LFC's college:

Augsburg became a center of controversy because of the ideals of personal Christian life as well as of congregational life which the leaders at the school advocated with such great vigor. These ideals were distinctly opposed to the religious formalism and the aristocratic and authoritarian tendencies which prevailed in many parts of the Lutheran Church in this country. Sverdrup and Oftedal, the young professors from Norway, were contending for personal Christianity, spiritual awakening, witnessing by the laity, evangelism, a democratic ministry, and a church life which followed as closely as possible the pattern set forth in the New Testament.

The men of Augsburg were strongly opposed by other immigrant church leaders, who were in favor of transplanting the ecclesiasticism of Norway to American soil.¹³

Carlsen's book is a good example of history being used to persuade readers of the author's point-of-view. Since it was published by the LFC a fairly persuasive tone runs through the book.

Two other authors have made significant contributions to our access to and understanding of the work of Georg Sverdrup within the LFC. Andreas Helland wrote a biography of Sverdrup in 1947 "Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message." This is a sympathetic and clear "biographical sketch" in English of his life and a primer on his significant contributions, including a chapter covering his literary activity. Earlier Helland, a close associate of Sverdrup at Augsburg, had collected some of his writings and from 1909–1912 issued *Professor Georg Sverdrups Samlede Skrifter i Udvalg*. This six-volume collection, published in Norwegian, is in the process of being translated into English in *The Sverdrup Journal*, edited by Larry Walker since 2004. The Journal also includes a variety of articles related to Sverdrup and Lutheran congregationalism. Helland also wrote *Augsburg Seminar, Gjennem Femti Aar* in 1920 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Augsburg Seminary, which remains untranslated. James S. Hamre is the other historian who has made valuable contributions to our knowledge of Georg

¹³ Carlsen, *Years of Our Church*, 120.

Sverdrup. His 1967 dissertation from the University of Iowa addressed “Georg Sverdrup’s Concept of the Role and Calling of the Norwegian-American Lutherans: An Annotated Translation of Selected Writings.” And in 1986 he wrote his own biography of Georg Sverdrup, *Georg Sverdrup; Educator, Theologian, Churchman*, which adds considerably to our understanding.

It is saddening to admit that no AFLC history has yet been published as she passes her sixtieth anniversary. Several yearbook style volumes have been made, one in 1982 and one in 1992. These volumes contain many pictures and brief explanations, but leave a large gap in our knowledge. Robert L. Lee, long-time history professor at the AFLC schools is currently writing the AFLC’s history, *From Freedom to Life*, but it has not yet been published. Pastor Lee’s manuscript has been consulted on some points of history for this study.

It has been shown that, while not extensive, there is enough historical material available to gain an understanding of the circumstances and concerns of those who began the Free Church movement among Norwegian-Americans in America. These are the works that formed the researcher’s understanding and from which the historical narratives for the field research were drawn. These various historical accounts along with the theological stance of the AFLC give us a good start toward understanding the narrative identity that exists in the AFLC.

The Story of “Church.”

In the field research for this MAP, I will present an account of the nature of the church as congregation that exists within the AFLC’s self-identity. This identity is a mixture of biblical theology and historical perspective. It has been the concern of AFLC teachers and leaders to present the self-identity of the AFLC in continuity with the story of the church which begins in Scripture. Several approaches to this story will be examined here, mostly from non-AFLC

writers.

Four works have principally captured my attention in this study of how the nature and story of the church are told: Jeffery Kloha's "The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament."¹⁴ Barry A. Ensign-George's *Between Congregation and Church; Denomination and Christian Life Together*.¹⁵ Martin L. Horn's "George Sverdrup's Concept of the Free Congregation: The Congregation as the Bride of Christ."¹⁶ And Samuel Wells' *Improvisation, the Drama of Christian Ethics*.¹⁷ While not usually framed in terms of a story, each of these works tells the story of the church in its own particular way. These "stories" will now be presented along with some analysis.

Jeffery Kloha's "The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament"

Jeffery Kloha's "The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament" appeared in a special edition of *Concordia Journal* dedicated to ecclesiology. Several times Kloha seems to challenge the prevailing narrative that has stood for quite some time in his own Lutheran denomination, that only the congregation is the church in the biblical sense. It seems like he prefers a narrative about the church that is less focused on an exclusive claim for the local congregation to be seen as the church. Based on the attention that this work has received and the number of references by academics and scholars, I gather that it is an important contribution to current LCMS thinking about how the story of the congregation and church are told. Kloha

¹⁴ Jeffrey Kloha, "The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament," *Concordia Journal* 34, no. 3 (July 2008): 172–90.

¹⁵ Barry A. Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church: Denomination and Christian Life Together* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

¹⁶ Martin Lein Horn, "Georg Sverdrup's Conception of the Free Congregation: The Congregation as the Bride of Christ," (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021).

¹⁷ Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

marshals an impressive array of exegetical material to support his view of a trans-congregational narrative on the New Testament church and follows these up with many helpful implications. He says that “In drawing out these implications, based on the previous discussion, this essay does not intend to be exhaustive or directive, only suggestive. Pastors, congregations, and church leaders are encouraged to reflect on the New Testament depictions of church and consider how they ought to live as part of the church.”¹⁸

Kloha proposes a narrative of the church based a three-tiered usage of the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament: the local gatherings and the universal church, and in addition something in between, for which he uses the label “trans-congregational.” His arguments are based on exegetical work in Acts and the Epistles of Paul, from which most scholars would also draw their conclusions. In a number of instances he offers a compelling narrative in which the congregations encountered in the New Testament are not isolated or disconnected, but share actively in a common faith and practice that suggests a broad-based or inclusive structure for nascent Christianity. Kloha supplies a brief systematization to his story by outlining several activities which characterize the trans-congregational church: shared communication, shared practice, and shared mission and practice.¹⁹

Kloha seems to have a foil that he rightly sets out to delegitimize: the isolated, self-absorbed, uncooperative and atomized local congregation (and its defenders) who refuse to see, care about, or hold loyalty to any Christian reality beyond itself. From the fact that he is concerned about it, one might guess that some instances of this exist in his experience. Of particular interest for this project are the sections in which Kloha narrates the story of an

¹⁸ Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 184.

¹⁹ Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 180–83.

authority over the local congregations in the New Testament. In regard to Acts 11:23, he writes, “As the persecuted Christians scattered to Antioch and preached the Gospel there, more people ‘turned to the Lord.’ (11:21). Upon hearing of this, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas, who seems to exercise some kind of oversight in Antioch when he ‘encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.’”²⁰ Kloha includes in his account the suggestion of an authority over congregations as found in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. In chapter 11 the local community is “rebuked for their celebration of the Lord’s Supper.”²¹ And in chapter 12 the Corinthian congregation is required to order their life according to Paul’s well-known image of a body and its members. At this point Kloha states, “Once again Paul calls the Corinthians to specific action that correspond to those of the larger (trans-congregational) church. Just as God has arranged things according to his will in the church, so it should go also in Corinth.”²² Again in defending the narrative of “shared practices” in the New Testament church, Kloha asserts regarding the Corinthian congregation, “In three passages in 1 Corinthians he appeals to the practice of the “church of God” when dealing with issues surrounding marriage and divorce (7:17), head coverings (11:17), and worship practice (14:33): “If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.”²³ Kloha freely acknowledges that in this narrative no specific kind of church organization is commanded by Scripture and that this trans-congregational church is not presented in any fully worked-out form which can be replicated today.

Kloha vigorously defends the narrative of the “church” in a larger sense than the local

²⁰ Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 175.

²¹ Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 178.

²² Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 179.

²³ Kloha, “Trans-Congregational Church,” 181–82.

congregation in the New Testament. It is not clear that Lutheran advocates of a Free Church narrative deny that the New Testament congregations held fellowship, worked together cooperatively or identified regionally. Another question that may be posed is whether the shared activities which Kloha stresses in his account were achieved through a top-down, authoritarian structure, or more spontaneously through the preaching of the Word as led by the Spirit.

In light of the primary research question of this project—FLBC students’ understanding of church polity and how that can be formed to correspond to the historic AFLC doctrine—the views of Kloha fit with an organizational model or paradigm. (In all fairness to Kloha, his work is really too short to constitute a paradigm nor does it intend to do so. It is perhaps only an example that would fit within a paradigm.) I find this organizational model to be a common view of church polity and a common-sense one. Polity is largely about organization and how that works and looks practically. I am not saying that practical matters are Kloha’s only concern, just that they are prominent in this piece. This common and common-sense way of thinking about polity is likely to be at least somewhat in the minds of FLBC students. The class lectures for this project should attempt to clarify this for the students.

Additionally, my own presentation of a doctrine or story of the church can draw on Kloha’s concern that the individual, local congregations not become entities unto themselves with little or no sense of their larger Christian and Lutheran brethren. In the post-Enlightenment milieu of our day, individualism runs amok and Christians often feel justified in viewing their lives as isolated expressions of Christian faith and life. Local congregations may also be more interested in finding their unique niche than in carrying forward an historical expression of Christian faith. In the field research, the participants can be queried about their views of freedom, whether it is an absolute sovereignty involving no obligations, or whether it is a freedom that finds its fulfillment

in conformity to Christ and love for neighbor. (See Survey Item #2, page 148.)

Another aspect of our understanding of the church that arises from Kloha's work is the recognition of some gaps in the biblical record. What we find in Scripture does not appear to tell the whole story of the early church's development. We are left with the chore of filling in those gaps. One gap that I see has already been mentioned, "Did the shared activities of the early Christians arise from a top-down, authoritative structure or more spontaneously through the preaching of the Word as led by the Spirit?" (See Appendix Three, page 148.) Several options exist as an answer to this question. These various answers apply to my research because we all approach the doctrine or story of the church with our own assumptions that, among other things, cover the gaps in the biblical account. Those assumptions should be examined so that we know as far as we can what is really biblical and what we may have found elsewhere. The field research can give students the opportunity to examine their own assumptions about how the church works as I present the theological portion of the lectures.

Barry A. Ensign-George, *Between Church and Congregation*

While Kloha only dipped a toe into the vast ocean of church narratives, Barry Ensign-George offers a full-blown narrative of denomination. He finds that denomination has been a neglected subject in telling the story of the church, even regarded as illegitimate by many. His goal is to give the existence and work of denominations a firm theological footing within the larger story. Rather than the path chosen by Kloha which bases the narrative on the exegesis of the New Testament use of *ekklesia*, he tells the story of denominations (also using the term trans-congregational on occasion) using the command to Christian love and our creatureliness as the starting points for his argument. Christian love compels believers towards one another and this compulsion cannot be satisfied in a unit as small as the congregation. We always seek a more

comprehensive space in which to interact as God’s people. This expansive expression of love is balanced by our creatureliness. Only God can love—or be in meaningful relationship with—everyone or all Christians. Inasmuch as we are finite creatures, our love that is too much for the limits of the congregation but too finite to embrace the *una sancta*, finds its outlet in denomination.²⁴ Unlike Kloha’s merely suggestive narrative, Ensign-George wants to tell a definitive story. He writes, “The understanding of denomination proposed in this book is not simply descriptive. It is prescriptive, and as such is an attempt to counter false understandings of denomination.”²⁵ It is my view that Ensign-George raises some significant issues about how the narrative of Christian ecclesiology is told. The work is extensive and only several sections will be reviewed here.

Ensign-George provides an historical element to his work by examining several American figures and their views on the church, and especially denomination, after which he moves on to a churchly narrative of denominations proper. He suggests five terms which describe denominations: intermediary, contingent, partial, interdependent and permeable.²⁶ Of particular interest to me was the section in which he deals most directly with an account of the Christian congregation. His narrative of the congregation is rather weak, based mostly on the needs of individuals rather than an outright endorsement in Scripture. He says, “The impelling force pulling Christians toward one another finds its immediate expression in the local congregation. The Christian faith cannot be lived out by individuals on their own. [...] Congregations are the first places in which this membership with one another can be embodied.”²⁷ While this is

²⁴ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 158.

²⁵ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 7.

²⁶ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 178.

²⁷ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 158.

certainly true, it leaves one wondering if that is all there is to a Biblical account of the congregation. Given this starting point, perhaps any Christian (or even broadly spiritual) organization that gives an outlet for love should be included in the story of the Church? Furthermore, it is unclear to me what he means by using the word “first” to describe the congregation’s position. Does he mean first in a way that makes the congregation itself an institution authorized in the Biblical narrative, or does he mean first only in a logical progression or in his own ordering of the story? From the context I am inclined to suspect that he means the latter. He says further on,

Congregations are the immediate context in which our membership in Jesus Christ and in one another is embodied. Congregation is a setting in which relationships with sisters and brothers in the faith can have a high level of particularity and depth. It is in such relationships, with their full particularity, that the ways of Christian love can be learned and lived.²⁸

I come away from Ensign-George’s work thinking that he primarily regards the congregation in his narrative for its experiential value to the believer. It is the way he experiences Christian relationship in the congregation that matters. This seems to allow that if a believer finds thick relationships in other contexts, then the congregation is at least at that point unnecessary. Because congregations do not fully meet the compelling demands of Christian relationship, denominations are necessary.

Prominently within his narrative of denomination Ensign-George calls denominations an “ecclesial form.”²⁹ By this terminology, it seems to me that he does not want to say that denominations are church—in the true sense. In fact, at several points he denounces efforts to classify denomination as church.³⁰ Unfortunately his narrative denies that denomination is the

²⁸ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 159.

²⁹ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 170.

³⁰ For example, on page 172, “It is only in virtue of this participation in ecclesiastical tasks and actions, a

church only because of how it infringes upon the pre-eminence of the universal church, leaving the story of the Christian congregation (which is definitely called church in the New Testament narrative) without such standing. While Ensign-George attempts to tell a story of denominations that can serve the whole church, he defines denomination in terms closest to a Presbyterian form of church government, he affirms,

What distinguishes denomination is that denominations are structured to enable congregations to carry out tasks that are specifically ecclesial. The decisive distinguishing mark of denomination is authorizing corporate worship and leadership for such worship—on its own authority. [...] Denomination, in its role of mediating the church universal to the congregation, participates in the ordering of ministry as part of enabling the congregation to live into the fullness of the church one holy catholic and apostolic.³¹

In Ensign-George’s way of telling the story the congregation cannot call a pastor and authorize its own worship—which he does explain in sacramental terms. His account requires the congregation to belong to a denomination that “on its own authority” gives the congregation permission to engage in churchly functions and provides it a leader. While Kloha vigorously argues for a trans-congregational church beyond the local congregation, that entity does not give legitimacy to the congregation. A more satisfactory and genuinely biblical narrative of the congregation traces its legitimacy back to the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and the proper

participation rooted in the intermediary character of denomination, that it is legitimate to call denominations church. One of the great difficulties of our present moment is the inveterate unwillingness of denominations to acknowledge fully, with blunt directness, that they are denominations. Denomination has become a forbidden term, regarded as demeaning, and so denominations refuse to allow themselves to be named as what they are. Once denomination has been removed from the table of licit names, denominations no longer have a vocabulary with which to discuss their own reality. In place of denomination what is used most frequently is church. The problem here is the constant temptation on the part of denominations to regard themselves (and to demand that others regard them) as something more than denominations—to regard themselves as church *tout court*. This feeds confusion about the difference between the church universal and a denomination. This confusion feeds the constant temptation denominations face to arrogate to themselves characteristics that properly and fully belong only to the church universal. Therefore, while there is a sense in which it is legitimate for denominations to be called church, the refusal of denominations to acknowledge that they are denominations, substituting church where denomination is to the point, continually malforms them.”

³¹ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 171.

administration of the sacraments, as Lutheran theology has consistently taught.³² In the theological portion of the lectures this element of ecclesiology will need to be emphasized.

According to the Free Church polity which will be presented in the field research, it is not the denomination that gives legitimacy to the congregation, but the congregation that legitimates the denomination. In simple terms, congregations need other congregations, usually in the form of a denomination. That is, they need them in the sense made clear by AFLC Fundamental Principle #7: “A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.”³³ God has commanded that His church do things that ordinarily require the mutual cooperation of congregations to achieve. Hence denominations are justified.

In a juxtaposition of denomination and congregation, his narrative states that the congregation lacks the full nature of the true church:

Denomination also looks to the comprehensiveness of the universal church. It does so by bringing the presence of other congregations to bear on the life of the local congregation. Denominational ties affirm that a congregation is not the fullness of the church. The congregation is a necessary, but not sufficient, embodiment of the church. By their commitment to a denomination’s structure and way of life, local congregations find themselves tied to a particular set of other congregations. A local congregation is identified as one among them; it agrees to limit its freedom of action by adhering to certain denominational standards and decisions, and its outlook on the

³² Ensign-George’s account seems to be the exact arrangement that Martin Luther condemned in a letter to the Leisnig congregation from 1523. Not the denomination according to Luther’s account but the operation of the Word alone is what makes the congregation into the true expression of the church. Luther says, “All of St. Paul’s warnings, [...] do nothing but take the right and power to judge all doctrine away from the teachers and with a stern decree impose it on the listeners instead, on pain of losing their soul. Accordingly, they not only have the power and the right to judge everything that is preached, they also have the duty to judge, on pain of [incurring] the disfavor of Divine Majesty.” Martin Luther, “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture,” in *Church and Ministry I*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, vol. 39, *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 308.

³³ Appendix One. See also Marian Quanbeck Christopherson, Loiell O. Dyrud, and Martin L. Horn, eds., *Free and Living Congregations: The Dream that Would Not Die*. (Minneapolis: Ambassador, 2002), 257–58.

world beyond itself is in part tied to consideration of the other congregations in its denomination.³⁴

For his narrative a robust congregational self-government does not fit into his thinking about denominations. In fact, the congregation's freedom must be sacrificed for the sake of its participation in the denomination.

In summary, Ensign-George deals with several important aspects of the story of the church which can help the church tell its story more effectively, mostly by asserting the legitimate place of denomination in the narratives of church structure. His honest appraisal of the individual's relationship to the universal church is helpful:

Being such creatures, we require structures that are less than universal in which to live. No serious ecclesiology disputes the legitimacy of congregations, in which we gather in separate groups for living out the Christian faith in worship and in manifold other ways (catechesis/Christian education, mission, service in the world, and interaction with the broader church). Our shared recognition of the necessity of local gatherings for worship and for communal life is a recognition of the nature of finite, creaturely existence (that is to say, it is at least an implicit recognition).³⁵

He calls the existence of denomination “the scandal that should not be a scandal.”³⁶ Just as God has made creatures that are both small enough to be seen only by a microscope and large enough to dwarf our whole galaxy, so we see in His creation of the church forms both small and large. The richness of God's creative acts on our behalf begins a story of the church as His body which lives a creaturely existence.

Once the story is begun in which our need for creaturely forms in and for the church is asserted based on the insufficiency of an exclusive focus on the purely spiritual universal church, we can now give a better account of denominations. If our narrative stresses the more abstract

³⁴ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 149–50.

³⁵ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 220.

³⁶ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 223.

universal body of believers as the center of the church's story, then the existence of denominations has to be considered an expression of dis-unity, the *una sancta* is not one whole unit. But if, on the other hand, the story stresses the concrete, creaturely local congregation as the center of the church's story, then denominations are an expression of unity—the many are coming together. It mostly depends on where one's thinking begins, with the concrete or with the abstract.

Overall, Ensign-George's thorough and thought-provoking work is commendable in its effort to give denominations a solid place in the narrative of the church. Nevertheless, I find the effort substantially insufficient because of its failure to recognize the centrality of the Christian congregation in the Biblical narrative.

Again, how should Ensign-George's work be connected to the research goals of this project? While Koha's position seemed to fit somewhat into an organizational view of church polity, Ensign-George highlights several other views that may be held by students in the research group. Like Ensign-George there may be students who hold a very spiritual view of the church in the sense that the universal, spiritual body (without organization or form) is the only real, true church. He says repeatedly that denomination mediates the universal church to the congregation.³⁷ With this explanation of denomination, the congregation pays a huge price for its legitimacy. Furthermore, I found his treatment of the congregation to be disjointed and confusing, suggesting an underlying uncertainty of its true worth and standing. Such confusion is likely to be found in a cross section of Bible college students. Several research questions could help reveal where the understanding of the students lies.

Over against Ensign-George's complex description of denominations, I would prefer a

³⁷ Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 170-72.

much simpler approach in the theological section of the field research. I would propose that denominations are legitimate because they help congregations accomplish the tasks that God has given to the church. Tasks which belong preeminently to the congregation. (See Fundamental Principle #7, Appendix One, page 124.)

Martin Horn, “The Congregation as the Bride of Christ”

Longtime AFLC pastor and keen student of its history, Martin L. Horn’s 2021 PhD dissertation from Midwestern Baptist Seminary addresses Georg Sverdrup’s account of the congregation and makes several valuable contributions to the way we tell the narrative of the church attending to the way Scripture also tells the story of the congregation. The major portions of Horn’s thesis are: a brief story of Georg Sverdrup’s life and theological views of the church, an introduction to the Biblical metaphor of divine marriage and finally an explanation of Sverdrup’s claim that the local congregation, not just the universal church, can be called the bride of Christ in line with Scripture’s own account. His most intriguing suggestion is that the local congregation is free and self-governing, not simply because of the way Scripture uses the word, *ekklesia*, in its narrative, or because of the Biblical story of human creatureliness, but because she is the Bride of Christ and cannot be wedded to any earthly overlord.

Horn’s summary of the theological outlook of Georg Sverdrup is helpful. He asserts that Sverdrup was both orthodox (adhering to the Nicene Creed’s definition of the church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic)³⁸ and confessionally Lutheran (recognizing the marks of the true church as the proper proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments).³⁹

³⁸ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 188.

³⁹ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 92–93. Several paragraphs of Sverdrup’s “The Lutheran Position on the Congregation” deserve to be cited here: “When Luther and his followers were under the ban of the Pope and under sentence of death by the Emperor, the question of the church or congregation began to be very serious for them. The Catholics declared them to be ‘no church’ because they were excommunicated from the Church and so had no hope

Throughout Sverdrup's extensive writings on the church and the congregation, he returns time after time to these two indispensable marks of the church—Word and Sacrament. Further evidence of Sverdrup's essentially Lutheran theological position is seen in his application of the Law/Gospel tension to life in the congregation. Horn writes,

When Sverdrup argued that the congregation is formed through the ministry of the Gospel, he did not deny the necessity of the preaching of the law. The law is necessary to bring conviction of sin; however, only the Gospel can build the congregation:

The Spirit does not follow after the commandments and rules of the Law. Therefore, if a preacher of the Word explains, however forcefully, how a Christian ought to live and what a Christian congregation ought to be, nevertheless no life or freedom will come of it if the gospel and Jesus and His relationship to the congregation be omitted.

Law and Gospel are both necessary, but for the sake of the congregation, the Gospel must be primary in Christian preaching.⁴⁰

Another aspect of Sverdrup's account of the congregation concerns the identification of the church; it is the assembly of believers, as stated in the Augsburg Confession. Again, Horn writes,

Note that Sverdrup's definition of the congregation follows article seven of the Augsburg Confession where it says that the Church "is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." Therefore, according to Sverdrup's

of salvation, for "outside the Church, there is no salvation."

"The Lutherans found it necessary to prove that they were not outside the Christian Church even though they were outside of the Pope's church. And the principle evidence of the Lutherans in this matter was this—that the Church consisted of the truly believing, whether they were in the Catholic organization or out of it, because the congregation is the work of the Holy Spirit where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments rightly administered...

"As a result, the Lutheran Confessions established the church as the gathering of the faithful where the Gospel is rightly preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And in great clarity and penetrating brilliance, Melancthon defended this Confession. He didn't deny that hypocrites and evil persons are 'insinuated into the church' in this life, but he says that since the church is Christ's body, 'those in whom Christ is not active are, therefore, not members of Christ's body.' 'In addition, the church is Christ's kingdom in opposition to the devil's kingdom. If then, the church, which is Christ's kingdom, is separated from the kingdom of the devil, then it necessarily follows that the ungodly, who are the devil's kingdom, are not the church.'

"No one could say it better or think more clearly about the church, properly understood. It consists of the believers, who through the Holy Spirit are connected to Christ the Head, and of no others. The external organization can neither take in nor shut out anyone from Christ's true body. Where then is the believing congregation to be found? It is wherever the Gospel is rightly proclaimed and the Sacraments rightly administered." Raynard O. J. Huglen, trans. "The Lutheran Position on the Congregation," *The Sverdrup Journal* 13 (2016): 57–58.

⁴⁰ Horn, "Sverdrup's Concept," 112.

understanding, article seven of the Augsburg Confession is ultimately congregational.⁴¹

As Horn notes, Sverdrup's narrative of the congregation recognized it as the creation of God and not as an organization that comes into being by human decision or work. The congregation or church is more than simply the way God wants things done, it is actually the way God does things through His own powerful Word:

Not only did Sverdrup teach that the congregation is divinely instituted and is part of the divine order for the kingdom of God, but he also taught that individual congregations are divinely created and sustained. Sverdrup wrote of the divine creation of the congregation in three ways: the congregation is the creation of the Holy Spirit, the congregation is formed by the Gospel, and the congregation is formed through the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.⁴²

We are already getting hints from Sverdrup he did not think it necessary to draw any theological distinction between the universal church and the local body of believers. One might say that for Sverdrup the story of the universal church is the same story which the congregation lives out. Here a longer citation from Horn is helpful because this idea influenced Sverdrup's teaching about the congregation so thoroughly:

Although Sverdrup recognized that ἐκκλησία is used in both a universal and local sense in the New Testament, he argued this does not mean the existence of two different churches. Only one Church exists, and this Church reveals itself in the form of the local congregation. Sverdrup wrote in the "Free Church Fellowship":

The Holy Scripture speaks about the congregation in two ways. It speaks of one church and of many churches. ...Is this two different things, two kinds of churches? Far from it; they could not then be called by the same name. It is the one and same body of Christ manifesting itself in different places.

For Sverdrup, the congregation is the Church. "For there is no church apart from the local congregations...the local congregations have exactly the same rights and the same dearly bought freedom as the whole Church." Through an appeal to the apostle Paul, Sverdrup defends his conviction that the congregation is the church: "When, for example, Paul without further ado calls the individual congregation 'God's

⁴¹ Horn, "Sverdrup's Concept," 102.

⁴² Horn, "Sverdrup's Concept," 111.

congregation’ or ‘God’s house,’ it is sufficiently clear that the gathering of believers in every single place is just as much a church with all its rights and duties as all the believers in the world together.”

Sverdrup’s understanding that the local congregation is the Church led him to the conviction that no substantive theological distinction exists between the universal Church and the local congregation. In other words, Sverdrup believed everything ascribed by the Scripture to the Church is ascribed also to the local congregation.⁴³

Horn’s last sentence needs a little explanation. He stated that for Sverdrup there was no theological difference between the universal church and the local congregation. One significant difference that might easily be claimed is the way unbelievers figure so often in the story of the congregation—while the universal church is holy and pure, the local congregational organization often (maybe always) includes some who are without faith. Here it is necessary to read Sverdrup closely. Horn discusses this issue pointing out that in the Fundamental Principles (See Appendix One), which distill much of Sverdrup’s theology of the church into brief statements of practice, he makes a distinction between the congregation (which is the believers) and the organization, which he says, the congregation *has*.⁴⁴ Carefully stated, the congregation *is* the believers, the congregation *has* an organization. Unbelievers may be in the “external” organization, but are never in the congregation proper. This distinction also corresponds to the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.⁴⁵ So, Georg Sverdrup held an orthodox and Lutheran account of the church based on both the Nicene Creed and the Augsburg Confession (see footnote #39). This is a distinction that Christians in general need to make and which the theological lectures can aim to help the students make as well.

A further component of Sverdrup’s congregational narrative is the description of the local

⁴³ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 100–101.

⁴⁴ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 103–4.

⁴⁵ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 169.

congregation as “free and living.” Horn says,

Sverdrup believed that freedom and life are two of the primary attributes of the New Testament congregation, and thus the phrase “free and living” was an appropriate description of the ideal biblical congregation. In the article “The Revival of the Congregation,” Sverdrup wrote of the significance of the “living congregation”:

We do not deny that we find the expression “living congregations” well suited to express the goal of our labors. We sincerely consider it a more apt description of the nature and essence of the visible congregation than other terms that have been in use in the church. We also consider it a proper description of the purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and sacraments; it is His work that gives life. We believe also that life is the chief and defining characteristic of the body of Jesus Christ.

Christian Freedom was also central to Sverdrup’s understanding of the congregation. In the article “The Principles of Augsburg,” Sverdrup wrote that Christianity “by its very nature is a power for freedom, not for bondage.” Therefore, it was only natural for Sverdrup to conclude that the Christian congregation is also free.⁴⁶

Sverdrup laid much emphasis on the need for life in the congregation. No doubt the history of pietism, in which in the Scandinavian churches appear so prominently, influences Sverdrup here, as do the stories of spiritual revivals in his homeland—both the Haugean and the Johnsonian awakenings. Horn explains the narrative way in which Sverdrup understood the living

⁴⁶ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 115. In this citation from “The Revival of the Congregation” Sverdrup refers to the *visible* congregation. We might be tempted to equate this with the external organization which includes unbelievers. Sverdrup does not do that. As Horn notes, the visible congregation is the fellowship of believers around the Word and Sacrament. Horn cites Sverdrup, “The Church is thus both invisible and visible, just as God Himself is invisible and visible... God has revealed Himself in His son, who Himself is God’s Word; the church has revealed itself in believing people who live, by Word and Sacrament, a spiritual life, rich in the fruits of mercy And as God’s revelation in the Son is in humility, in low position, in poverty, in the limits of time and space, so also the revelation of the church is in weakness, in low estate, in contempt, and bound to definite times and places. But we must hold fast to this, that just as it is the same one true God who is invisible and revealed, so it is also the one and the same Church of God which is invisible and visible, as the Word of God says: ‘You are the Light of the world, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.’” (Horn 98–99). In another work which Horn does not cite, Sverdrup made this observation about the use of the visible/invisible distinction: “So what does the Lutheran church mean when it says the church is visible? It means by this that the work of the Holy Spirit may be known and is revealed through the testimony which believers make. Where the children of God gather for prayer and thanksgiving, for the preaching and hearing of the Word, for the use of the sacraments, where they are active in the Christian home, in Christian education, and religious instruction of the young, where they labor for missions and works of charity, where they speak a word of encouragement to a fellow pilgrim, where they stretch out a helping hand in Jesus’ name and for Jesus’ sake, there the Church is visible – that is to say, there its inner nature is made visible so that it may be recognized that here the mind of Christ and the Spirit are present.” (Larry J. Walker, trans., “Can We Know Who the Believers Are?” *Sverdrup Journal* 9 (2012): 64–65).

congregation:

Sverdrup outlined what he considered the work for a living congregation. This work, he wrote, begins in infant baptism, where the Spirit of God creates life and faith in the heart of the child. The work for a living congregation continues as the new life planted in the child through baptism is nourished and strengthened through the teaching of the Word in both the home and the congregation.⁴⁷

The work for a living congregation is further carried out through “living preaching” done by “living pastors” who have personally experienced the work of the Holy Spirit through Law and Gospel.⁴⁸ It should be noted here that the life of the congregation is not found in anything other than the spiritual lives of the individual members that are created by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament. Sverdrup does not envision some abstract, impersonal “life” that hovers within the congregation like a cloud and is disconnected from the actual lives of the members.

Now as to the story of the freedom of the local congregation, Sverdrup found this taught in the New Testament in many ways,⁴⁹ including the imagery of the body of Christ, and especially the bride of Christ. Here we come to the chief point of Horn’s thesis, and it is strongly narrative. Horn states, “One of the foundational elements of Sverdrup’s theology of the congregation is his

⁴⁷ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 121.

⁴⁸ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 122. Also, Larry J. Walker, trans., “Living Pastors” in “Can We Know Who the Believers Are?” *Sverdrup Journal* IX, (2012): 64–65.

⁴⁹ Sverdrup also used a very direct argument for the freedom of the congregation: the New Testament congregations were free and self-governing. As he states:

“It was for this form of the kingdom of God, the congregation, that all the apostles and first Christians worked. They did so because the Spirit impelled them to it. Nothing is said within the revelation of the New Testament about any other form for the kingdom of God.

“We mean that in the New Testament nothing is said about an episcopate over or in more than one congregation; nothing is said about a papacy, church department, consistory, council, or synod. In every place where there are Christians there is a congregation. This congregation has its elders or bishops, but there is no ‘consistory’ of any kind.

“There are indications of decline and decay when not long after the time of the apostles there began to be ‘consistories’ of one sort or another over greater or lesser portions of the church, thinking thereby to get a better form of the kingdom of God. In reality there has never been a common church government over the whole Christian church. There is not such in our day either.” James Stanley Hamre, “Georg Sverdrup’s Concept of the Role and Calling of the Norwegian-American Lutherans: An Annotated Translation of Selected Writings” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1967), 208.

conviction that the New Testament metaphor of the ‘bride of Christ’ applies as much to the local congregation as it does to the universal Church.”⁵⁰ Metaphor is of course a literary device that figures prominently in story-telling of all kinds. In the final main section of the dissertation (chapter 6) Horn reviews a number of New Testament pericopes, tracing the presence of bridal/marriage language and discussing their application to the congregation.⁵¹ In his summary he divides the question into two parts. Does the bridal imagery include freedom? And does Scripture apply this image or metaphor to the local congregation? To the first question, Horn says,

The Pauline texts under review in this chapter demonstrate that the bride is, by nature, free. According to Romans 7:1–6, the bride has been released from the law so that she can be joined to Christ. In Galatians 4:21–5:1, Paul uses a complex analogy to demonstrate that the Church is like Sarah the free-woman and “Jerusalem above,” who is free. The Church, Paul writes, has been freed from slavery to the law, and is now free in Christ. Significantly, as she is the bride of Christ, the Church is called to guard her freedom and never be subject again to the “yoke of slavery.”⁵²

As to the second question (Does Scripture apply the bridal image or metaphor to the local congregation?), Horn also answers in the affirmative, saying,

Paul also presented the local congregation as the bride in 2 Corinthians 11:1–6, and possibly in Romans 7:1–6. Further, although the bride represents the universal Church in Ephesians 5:21–33, it may be argued that the Ephesus church would have read the text as applying also to their congregation.

[...] John also applied the image of the bride directly to the local congregation. In 2 John 1:1, the congregation is a mother, and the members of the congregation are her children. This verse implies that the congregation is also the bride. John applied the metaphor of the bride to the congregation in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. The dominant theme of the letters is faithfulness to Christ, and this

⁵⁰ Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 123.

⁵¹ Rom. 7:1–6, 9:25–29, 1 Cor. 6:12–20, 2 Cor. 11:1–6, Gal. 4:21–5:1, and Eph. 5:21–33 in the Pauline epistles, as well as 2 John 1:1 and Rev. 2–3 in the Johannine literature.

⁵² Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 221. Elsewhere in the thesis, Horn speaks of “three facets of Sverdrup’s understanding of the free congregation: first, the free congregation is a congregation that is set free from spiritual bondage, second, the free congregation is a bond-servant of Christ, and third, the free congregation governs itself.” (p.126) Significantly, Sverdrup does not see the political freedom as primary. For him, a congregation ruled by sin or unbelief is not indeed free, even if it may be without political masters. Horn, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 127–28.

theme seems to be expressed through allusions and echoes of the metaphors of the faithful bride and the unfaithful harlot from the Old Testament.

Possible allusions to the faithful bride include the seeming paradox of the impoverished, yet rich congregation in Smyrna (2:9), the promise of the crown of life, which is possibly the bridal crown (2:10; 3:11), and the identity as Christ's beloved (3:9). On the other hand, possible allusions to the theme of the unfaithful harlot include the charge that the Ephesus congregation "left their first love" (2:4), the figures of Balaam (2:14) and Jezebel (2:20), who both led Israel into prostituting themselves after a foreign God, the soiled garments which may indicate spiritual adultery (3:4), and the paradox of the wealthy, yet destitute Laodicean congregation (3:17).⁵³

In summary, Horn provides a number of opportunities through the teaching of Georg Sverdrup to understand the church as a story about congregations, chiefly the use of bridal imagery in the New Testament which supports the account of the Christian congregation as free from man-made systems of institutional oversight following her Divine Groom in faith and obedience.

It is primarily the Sverdrup-Horn account of the church and congregation that will be presented in the theological lectures of the field research. Horn's systemization of Sverdrup's diverse writings provides invaluable guidance for the preparation of a congregational theology of the church for the classroom lectures. Previously, I characterized Kloha's views on the congregation-synod relationship as organizational and Ensign-George's views as leaning strongly spiritual (despite his attention to our creatureliness). The Sverdrup-Horn view in comparison looks much more theological. Because of that biblical-theological description of the congregation a polity of free, self-governing congregations seems to be in order. Since Scripture has not differentiated in any significant way between the local congregation and the universal church (which cannot be said of either synod or denomination in an unqualified way), its subservience to higher earthly authorities is inappropriate and unnecessary. Given its full access

⁵³ Horn, "Sverdrup's Concept," 222.

to the Spirit through the Word and the Spirit's faithfulness in Word and sacraments, the congregation can negotiate its life and ministry in the world for God's glory. Such negotiation will normally and "gladly" involve cooperation with other congregations which share its faith and confession.⁵⁴ The benefits of its spiritual connection to both the universal and historical church can also be experienced through this voluntary interaction with that larger church without the magisterial mediation of a synod, denomination or episcopacy.

It was also noted earlier, in relation to Kloha's piece, that certain views of freedom need to be excluded from view in the theological lectures. The Sverdrup-Horn account also helps to clarify this for FLBC students. Horn proposes three facets of Sverdrup's understanding of the free congregation: "... first, the free congregation is a congregation that is set free from spiritual bondage, second, the free congregation is a bond-servant of Christ, and third, the free congregation governs itself."⁵⁵ Nothing in this multifaceted understanding of freedom, corresponds with the Enlightenment view of radical autonomy (which will be explored more fully in the next chapter). The true freedom envisioned by Sverdrup recognizes human depravity and the idolatry of the self while asserting the absolute Lordship of Christ. The third facet of freedom is self-government, which the congregation is obligated to practice in submission to the Word and Spirit of God (See Fundamental Principle #1, page 124). These important distinctions underlie the understanding of church structure that the AFLC holds, and there may be students who do not grasp them clearly. The primary research question of this study regarding the student's clear understanding of the AFLC narrative of the congregation cannot finally be separated from or understood apart from a biblical view of freedom. This central concern of

⁵⁴ Fundamental Principle #7 says, "A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God."

⁵⁵ Horn, "Sverdrup's Concept," 126.

Sverdrup must also concern me as a teacher at FLBC.

Another fruitful line of thought in relation to the primary research question of this project is the role of history in Sverdrup's own development of a doctrine of the church. If history is an effective tool for teaching doctrine (as is being argued), then Sverdrup's prominent connections from the early church to the church of his day matter. Furthermore, Horn's whole dissertation applies history to a theological question. Horn does not ask whether this will make his conclusions more persuasive in disseminating the AFLC narrative of the church. It is the goal of this project to pursue that question.

Samuel Wells: *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*

The last work considered here is *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* by Samuel Wells. Unlike the three previous works, this book is directly concerned with narrative in theology and seeks to apply characteristics of story, specifically drama, to our thinking about the church. Wells seems to qualify as a narrative theologian along the lines which I will explore in the next chapter and has collaborated with Stanley Hauerwas, whose work also comes up in the next chapter. I will give special attention here to the early parts of Wells' book which demonstrate the narrative character of our thinking about the church, while also providing a useful contrast to the views I have already discussed.

Wells' views of the church are encompassed in his larger teaching about ethics, i. e. the way Christians live. His viewpoint is more practical than theological, as his Methodist background might lead one to expect. Wells sets forth his ethics against the backdrop of the church's story running from the influence of pre-Christian thought up to the present. In his very brief survey, he offers a narrative which combines the church's desire to live corporately after the idea of the *polis* in Aristotle's philosophy with a temporal way of being as found in the

Gospels (journey).⁵⁶ On its pilgrim journey, the church seeks appropriate virtues (as in Aristotle) but not violent ones (contra Aristotle). The rise of Constantinianism caused the church to become established in the ways of the dominant culture, including the acceptance of violent attitudes. For Wells, this violent attitude was expressed in the effort to impose Christian morality on the whole culture rather than view Christian morality as the special way of being that the church pursues for itself.⁵⁷ During the Medieval period, Christian ethics moved into the monastery with an odd mixture of the authoritarianism of the Roman age and concern to preserve Christianity and civilization within the defensive enclave. With the Enlightenment, ethics became individualized. He writes,

The drama of the universe ceased to be God's unfathomable forces of life, death, and judgment, and the church's negotiation of them through the preaching of the biblical narrative and the ministration of the sacraments. Now the center of attention was the human individual, the new self, and the drama was humanity's struggle to know and command its environment.⁵⁸

With the rise of the individual, the focus moved to a spiritualized, abstract Christianity and away from an embodied church or congregation of believers living Christ-like lives before the watching world as guided by its theological commitments. Wells strongly advocates for a corporate ethics that defines the way the church lives:

Ethics is about forming lives of commitment, rather than informing lives without commitment. In common with the early church this approach seeks also to understand the common life of the church, its internal "politics," and its relationships with all who are not its members as the heart of God's concern. [...] By attention to the regular details of life, it emphasizes that the approach to apparent crises of decision lies in attending to the regular habits and practices already embodied by the community. Dependence on God's providence is a demonstration of faith that, in

⁵⁶ Wells, *Improvisation*, 2–3.

⁵⁷ Wells, *Improvisation*, 5.

⁵⁸ Wells, *Improvisation*, 6.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Father has already given the church all it needs to cope with any crisis that might come along.⁵⁹

This book captured my attention because of the way Wells describes the church. The church is distinct from the culture and seeks rather to be a witness to truth rather than an arbiter of truth for all, accepting the fact of its fundamental differences with the world. Although Wells does not (so far as I have found) deal directly with the church as congregation, the kind of witness that the church offers seems to me to work very well for congregations. He is especially concerned about the church's exercise of power. For him, ecclesiological power is oppressive towards the marginalized communities—a very contemporary notion. Viewed from the Free Church narrative, which is similarly suspicious of centralized power, a desire for the church to exercise a lot of power shifts the focus away from the congregation to the larger structures of church life (which usually exercise more power) and fosters the idea that we need to get everyone on the same page to maximize our influence.⁶⁰ The beautiful variety and unique culture of the individual, self-governing congregations can be lost under such influences. It will be noted that Wells' account of the church focuses mostly on the early church and its unique dynamics, which is also a major component of the Free Church's narrative identity, as will be shown shortly.

Wells second chapter is entitled “Theology as Narrative” and anticipates much of what is addressed in the theological portion of this MAP. First Wells presents three ways that ethics have historically been understood, the universal, the subversive and the ecclesial, and offers a narrative which might be used to support each one. In the universal view there is always some overarching reality by which ethics is applied to everybody. It may be historic events, or the texts

⁵⁹ Wells, *Improvisation*, 10.

⁶⁰ An example of the way this argument was used in the merger discussions within American Lutheranism is explained on pages 79–80.

that tell about them, or the God or philosophy behind the text, or the experience that these things (events, texts, God Himself) produce. In his critique of the universal, Wells downplays these events, texts and theology in a way that I am afraid would undermine an orthodox view of Christianity and which does not correspond well with a Lutheran appreciation for established and authoritative doctrine (*regula fide*). The subversive view holds sympathy for those who feel left out of the universal scope of the first view. As an example he explains, “The winners have written not just the history, but the theology too. So, to take the most common example, men have constructed a theology of a male God; this has underwritten a patriarchal social structure and inhibited women’s freedom, experience, voices, ministries, lives.”⁶¹ So the stories of women, gender minorities and the developing world figure prominently in this view. It downplays an overarching story while seeking to value everyone’s story equally. This subversive view of ethics, which he calls ethics-for-anyone, may even further erode the universal validity of the Gospel and Christian doctrine. Wells does not favor either the universal or subversive, although he finds something valuable in each. His preferred view of ethics is the ecclesial. For him, the center of ethics is neither a single, universal story nor the multiple, irreconcilable stories of each individual, but the story of the church as it is formed by God. He says,

Ecclesial ethics has its own definition of theology. It sees the key location of theology as being in the practices of the church. This is only secondarily about a sacred text, sequence of events, or set of doctrines; it is primarily about the formation, development, and renewal of a sacred *people*. It is this people, the sacred community, that is the center of ethical reflection. This is what God wants as witness in the world and as companion in the kingdom. This is what Jesus came into the world to embody and gave his life to make possible. This is what the Bible was written to encourage and guide, and this is what theologians are called to resource and challenge. The sacred community is the touchstone of virtue. That which builds it up and enables it to be faithful is good and right and true; that which attempts to bypass it or contrives

⁶¹ Wells, *Improvisation*, 16.

to render it invisible or undermines it from within is dubious, misguided, or dangerous.⁶²

It is his view concerning the great value of a congregation or community to be God's witness in the world that is useful for this project. The Christian community that so powerfully influences the world and sets before the world God's gracious plan for salvation, besides appearing so prominently in the Biblical narrative, is a community that knows its story and tells its story. It does not try to co-opt the story of others because it knows both the uniqueness and preciousness of its own story. This is where the objective of this MAP is headed. It is essential for students to know certain theological truths about the congregation. But it is also necessary for students to know the story of the congregation. It is these stories or history which put the theology into a human context and allow students to integrate the story of the congregation with their own stories. That much being said, the previous quotation from Wells also betrays the weakness of his narrative approach. He says that the practices of the church are primary while the sacred text and doctrines are only secondary. While he is speaking especially about ethics and not doctrine *per se*, his argument places too much distance between theology and ethics and strikes me as an exact inversion of the historical, orthodox view of Christianity and risks the actual loss of Christ's redemptive work. It is one thing to criticize past generations for doctrinaire absolutism, it is quite another to exalt practice above doctrine. One can see this basic error in his explanation of the sacraments. He describes them as "developments" of the early church and part of their ethics,⁶³ while Scripture presents them as direct institutions from Christ Himself for our salvation. In Wells' version, these practices developed as the crucial way that identity was expressed with virtue, while in Scripture, the Sacraments express the Gospel as it proceeds from

⁶² Wells, *Improvisation*, 17.

⁶³ Wells, *Improvisation*, 4-7.

the prior doctrines of Christ and salvation.

In chapter three, *Narrative as Drama*, Wells points out his criticism of narrative in favor of a dramatic view of Christianity. He bases his schema largely on the work of Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, with whom he largely credits the development of the dramatic view in his work, *Theo-Drama*. Wells' principal criticism of narrative is that it lacks a vehicle to involve Christians in the story. He describes how drama picks up where narrative leaves off:

That something else [beyond structured doctrine] is the embodiment of the text, the events it describes, its interpretation and systematic construal in the practices and performance of the community. This is a dynamic, spiraling process of constant repetition, reinterpretation, transfer, and restoration of meaning, of things never being the same again and other things being rediscovered, ever new. It is what happens when words leave the page, when thoughts leave the mind, when actions ripple through other lives and cause further actions and further thoughts. It is what happens when narrative becomes drama.⁶⁴

Wells is concerned that both theology and the church's narrative history can become just a thing which exists (and may be forcibly foisted upon people) and not the lived experience embodied in the church of today. His concerns are not new to him or unique in history. How do we relate the history found in Scripture to the present moment and the people who are living it? Wells, borrowing from N. T. Wright, suggests a Five-Act drama from creation to consummation: creation, Israel, Christ, church and eschaton. Throughout, he strives to balance the objective aspect in which God is the author and hero of the drama with the subjective aspect in which humanity participates creatively in the outworking of the final act. He offers both support for this schema and a host of cautions. I find a lot to commend in the drama as a summary account of "salvation history." As with any attempt to formulate the Biblical content into a coherent story or

⁶⁴ Wells, *Improvisation*, 26. The narrative vs. drama issue will be addressed again in Chapter Three.

system, the theologian somewhat chooses what stands out most prominently and what “character” ends up with only a few lines, or none at all. The key point that Wells wishes to make is that we are currently living in and participating in the final act of the drama.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the criticisms I have just made, I do appreciate the way Wells uses the narrative/drama idea. Christianity is a story as much as it is a fixed set of propositions. While propositions are entirely useful and necessary in Christian theology (as Scripture itself demonstrates), it would be wrong to reduce the Christian Faith to those propositions alone. Stories resonate with people; and, as we shall soon see, we are narrative creatures. Still, several additional concerns arise from Wells’ work. First, he places undo stress on the openness of the story. The final outcome is fixed, but the details that we are currently living become our responsibility to improvise.⁶⁶ The guiding, providential hand of God seems to rest rather loosely on the whole story of the church. Inasmuch as Wells comes from the opposite side of Protestant spectrum as the “sovereignty of God” position (i. e., historic Calvinism), this view of openness is not surprising but would need to be dealt with carefully. Another area of concern for me would be the emphasis on transformation. In Wells’ explanation, the present moment and the way we live it (our improvisation) is extremely important. While within his dramatic view, Act Three (Christ) is the most important one and baptism is presented as one’s entrance into the story of

⁶⁵ Wells, *Improvisation*, 33–35.

⁶⁶ Wells’ explanation here reminded me of what C. S. Lewis said in the chapter “Work and Prayer” from his book, *God in the Dock*: “We know that we can act and that our actions produce results. Everyone who believes in God must therefore admit (quite apart from the question of prayer) that God has not chosen to write the whole of history with His own hand. Most of the events that go on in the universe are indeed out of our control, but not all. It is like a play in which the scene and the general outline of the story is fixed by the author, but certain minor details are left for the actors to improvise. It may be a mystery why He should have allowed us to cause real events at all; but it is no odder that He should allow us to cause them by praying than by any other method.” I doubt that Wells would ever call our participation “certain minor details.” [C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 105–6.] For Lewis most of the events in history are out of our control. My reading of Wells is that in his account most of the events in history are in our control.

Christianity, it still seems that the Christian's daily activity might all too easily overshadow his confidence and rest in the finished work of Christ (in theological terms, regeneration might overshadow justification). Again, the historic trajectories of the various branches of Protestantism seem to be at play. The remainder of Wells' book provides details about how the function of drama can help bring coherence to the Christian message.

While I earlier characterized Kloha's view of the church as organizational, Ensign-George's view as spiritual, and Horn's view as theological, I would say that Wells' view is political. Much of his argumentation surrounds the political impact of the organized church on the world around it, which he especially sees in the history. His goal seems to be a church that has significant political/cultural influence but does not actually participate in politics directly.

Wells' book was useful for my thinking about how historical narrative gives shape to our theological commitments. The primary research question of this project is whether the inclusion of an historical narrative with a theological presentation in the classroom will result in greater understanding on the part of students. This was clearly the case for me with Wells' book. I do not believe that I would have grasped his main concerns as clearly as I did without his use of story or narrative. By telling a story of the church in a particular way, his theological commitments become very clear and concrete. His arguments are not abstract or general, but specific and tangible. Notice here that I am talking about his method more than his actual conclusions. Wells has taken the value of narrative very seriously and his work is quite persuasive for that reason. The primary research question of this project is supported, I believe, by these observations.

I will hasten to add that I am not completely comfortable with the historical narrative that Wells gives in support of his views. He seems to have highlighted many of the worst blunders of the Christian church through the ages at the expense of its equal or greater faithfulness. Without

ignoring the blunders and taking the biblical view of the Spirit's work through the Word in the church, history should rather be read as primarily a story of God's victory and the church's striving for faithfulness through Him. Likely the faithful church will always be a remnant, but this remnant is the true church and should be recognized as such. Oftentimes the worst blunders are made by those on the periphery of the church. This prompts me to think about the way I will present the story of the LFC/AFLC in the historical narrative. The story of the church can be told in either predominantly negative or predominantly positive ways. Neither the good nor the bad should be completely ignored. I know that I do not want to be as critical of the church as Wells seems to be. In telling the history of the church, an over-emphasis on its blunders and failures might discourage students and make them uninterested in church participation or in the study of its theological foundation. Some issues related to the subjective element in doing history will be addressed at the beginning of the next chapter.

In the four books that have been reviewed in this chapter, we have seen how the story of the church, both the local congregation and larger "ecclesial" structures, have been told. There are significant differences in the telling of this story and each of these writers tell the story with their own preferred emphasis. I have characterized them in terms of an organizational paradigm (Kloha), a spiritual paradigm (Ensign-George), a theological paradigm (Horn) and a political paradigm (Wells). My goal in making these characterizations is not to pigeon-hole the writers into a narrow field of vision, rather it is to suggest that their views are more complementary than contradictory. Each one wishes to bring their particular concerns to bear on ecclesial theology in a responsible manner. Certainly some differences are irreconcilable. But some difference also stem from a different goal for their work or from an attempt to answer different questions about the church and its congregations. Some restrict their source to Scripture alone; others wish to

draw also from common-sense, creation-informed general revelation. All pay some attention to history while looking at different episodes. Some are very reactionary with regard to Enlightenment modernism; others likely find *something* in the modernist viewpoint that can be salvaged. These distinctions will be further explored in the theological section of the MAP.

It is not within the scope of this MAP to attempt any resolution of the aforementioned disparities in these writers in either exegetical or theological terms. It is sufficient to acknowledge that the AFLC has told the story of the church in strongly congregation-centered ways, as will be explained more fully in Chapter Three. We have also seen that such history and narrative are an important component in Christian teaching, an idea that we turn to now with greater focus.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Biblical and Theological Foundation

This chapter will address several theological issues that relate to the primary research question of this study, the importance of historical knowledge in a student's real understanding of theology. The goal of this study is to see whether classroom instruction emphasizing a narrative-based presentation of the historical background of the AFLC's past will aid students in understanding the theological foundation of its congregational structure. The first part of this chapter will consider the importance of history and narrative in Christian theology. Secondly, I will attempt to trace a narrative identity for the AFLC which reaches backwards to several key historical times and which currently animates its theology and polity. It will not be the purpose of this section to present and explore either the historical or doctrinal accuracy of these narrative elements, but simply to observe their existence and influence.

Whatever Happened to History?

One of the challenges that arises in promoting a greater awareness of our church's history, let alone regarding such awareness as having necessary value, is the attitude of the current *zeitgeist*. While the Lutheran Reformers were deeply committed to preserving the church's historical continuity, subsequent movements have not been so similarly inclined. The Enlightenment which will be considered more fully below, contributed considerably to a marginalization of historical perspective in favor of an individualized perception of reality unencumbered by past realities. Such a view may lead to an abstract theological study without proper historical context or grounding—the exact opposite of this project's goals.

More recently, post-modernism has gone well beyond marginalization to outright rejection

of any true, that is, factual historical knowledge. William J. Abraham gives a helpful analysis:

[T]he rejection of metanarrative means the rejection of any effort to place historical events in any kind of wider cosmic, theological, or, say, national narrative. Equally it can mean the rejection of the claim that we can provide objective criteria of assessment for historical claims. Whatever we make of historical investigation, it does not provide us with any kind of neutral, objective description or explanation of the past. The most radical version of this thesis is that there is no essential difference between history and fiction, between history and literature, between history and aesthetics, and between history and poetics. Historical facts are constructed all the way to the bottom; there is no significant distinction between fact and interpretation. More modestly we get the claim that all historical writing is biased, prejudiced, and ineradicably subjective. It is decidedly not scientific but relative to the presuppositions of its practitioners. Hence there can be no final, authoritative account of the past; there are only histories written from the perspectives of historians.⁷⁰

The foregoing description of the post-modern viewpoints shows some of the challenges that are faced by any attempt to introduce an historical perspective into the study of theology.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this anti-historical moment, a revival of interest in the narrative quality of Scripture has occurred. Narrative theology (aka post-liberalism) came into its own with the theology of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck in the 1970s and 80s. It claimed that Christianity had its own communal way of speaking that served to give Christian theology its meaning. Narrative theology is “A theological perspective espoused by George Lindbeck (b. 1923), who claims that religious doctrines function as ‘rules’ for appropriate communal ways of speaking. The Bible’s language and narratives should define the world so Christians can make sense of life in biblical terms.”⁷¹ The argument of this project is not the same as that of narrative theology proper. For the purpose of this project, it is enough to observe that Christian theology has a narrative element inherent in it along with the usually more prominent propositional form.

⁷⁰ Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, eds., *The Voice of God in the Text of Scripture: Explorations in Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 148–49. I have already admitted that I have a particular prejudice in the history that will be told. I see the congregation as the precious bride of Christ that is often assailed by both internal and external forces that interfere with its simple desire to serve Christ faithfully.

⁷¹ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 242.

No mutual exclusivity is proposed between the narrative and the propositional expressions of theology, rather they are viewed as primarily complementary.⁷² At the very least, the narrative element, seen even in the narrative form of Scripture itself, adds richness and potency to Christianity enabling better human understanding. Furthermore, it may be the case that some particular Christian doctrines are exposed to easier criticism and popular misunderstanding when viewed outside the whole Biblical narrative.⁷³

This study will take the position that Christian truth is both propositional and narrative. It gives us true and factual statements that can be taught, learned and understood. However, these propositions, in themselves, are easily misused and misapplied if they are not accompanied by a narrative that ties them together and gives them concrete being. Understanding occurs most readily in connection with the narrative that is inherent in Christianity itself. It should be clear from this how the content of this chapter aims to support and inform the research question for this study. In the classroom during the field research, it will be important to bring the doctrine and the history together. This will be achieved by following up a doctrinal presentation of the church with an historical account of this doctrine in practice. C. S. Lewis addressed this relationship in his 1944 essay “Myth Became Fact:”

The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It *happens*—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) *under Pontius Pilate*. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is

⁷² Some theologians do believe in a mutual exclusivity between propositional and narrative theology, as James Beilby states, “Some narrative theologians hold only that theological beliefs are best presented in narrative form. Others go farther, holding that theological statements must be given in narrative and this is because propositional theological statements fail to live up to their promise of representing religious reality to the mind.” James Beilby, “Contemporary Religious Epistemology: Some Key Aspects,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, D. A. Carson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 799.

⁷³ George R. Sumner Jr., “Postliberal Theology,” *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster, 2000), 431.

the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other.⁷⁴

In Lewis' terms, the myth (a larger-than-life narrative) is essential. It takes an abstract notion that we struggle to personalize and makes it concrete. The abstract facts are useful for talking about Christian truth, but participation in the reality of Christ occurs through the myth. It is clear that the historical narrative of Christianity is not simply a way of dressing up the facts to make them more interesting or relatable. The narrative is necessary for a full account of Christianity. The following section will support this claim.

Why History?

In the following section I will make a rather lengthy case for the narrative character of Christian theology beginning with God Himself and moving through creation and towards theological anthropology, wherein we find humanity as a narrative creature. For the most part, I will reserve comments of the relationship of this narrative theology to the research of this paper until the end.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Two important observations can be made from this opening line of Scripture. First, the Bible begins like a story. Many fairy tales start with the line “Once upon a time.” Scripture is surely no fairy tale (in the sense of make-believe), but most certainly does begin as a story. In fact it begins as THE story which will go all the way back to the very beginning and tell the complete story of the world, its people and its God. It does not tell a complete story in the sense that every event is retold with excruciating detail. But it does tell the complete story in the sense

⁷⁴ Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 66–7. Emphasis original.

that all of the important events for a true understanding of the world are in the story and are explained within Scripture.

Second, God is set forth in relation to the world's past. It is something of a truism that God exists outside of the realm or reality of time. It might be akin to the way that the author of a book exists outside of the plot-line of the book itself. Every part of the plot is present to the author continuously. This idea is part of what is meant by the theological statement that God is eternal.⁷⁵

Pieper says,

In its strict and absolute sense the word *eternity* denotes infinite, unlimited duration without beginning, without end, without succession. In this sense, eternity can be predicated only of God. [...] God is the Creator of time without becoming temporal. He accompanies time without becoming subject to time or its laws. God's relation to time is the same as His relation to space. For though God created space and place and is present everywhere, He does not become local, but remains exalted above space and place.⁷⁶

What does Pieper mean by saying that God is “without succession...without becoming temporal?” Should we understand this eternal nature of God to mean that He cannot meaningfully relate to this world of time and history? Perhaps there is a temptation to view God in His eternal nature as radically transcendent, static and unmoved, entirely passive and inactive, and far too remote from the world to be relevant to its past or present realities. Jack Kilcrease gives a fuller account of God's eternal, before-time, being:

The Godhead speaks from all eternity. Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God (John 1). [...] The Word of God is not something created but rather is eternal. In that God is eternal and unchanging (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8), in all eternity He is never a speechless or inactive God (*Deus mutus, Deus otiosus*). From all eternity the Father speaks forth a linguistic image of Himself in the person of His Son (Jn. 1:1–3; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15). Though the Father is the source of divinity (*fons totius divinitas*), He

⁷⁵ Gen. 21:33; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:17.

⁷⁶ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:446.

nevertheless knows and addresses Himself from all eternity in the person of His Son (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).⁷⁷

Although the Triune God is eternal, He is not ahistorical. He is active in speech from eternity. We have no record of God's eternal speech-action, and it may well be ineffable, impossible to repeat meaningfully in human language. But it still seems proper to recognize for Him an eternal history. Furthermore, the eternal speech of God signifies the eternal relations of the Godhead. Again, Kilcrease writes, "As a speaking God, God is by nature a relational God. God is not relational in an amorphous or abstract sense, but concretely so through His Word."⁷⁸ God's eternal history takes in the eternal relation of mutual love between Father, Son and Spirit. This eternal *agape* is expressed in Scripture propositionally as "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Without impinging on the reality or importance of that propositional truth of God's loving essence, we can say that the history *precedes* the doctrine, the actual life of God came before the abstract theology about it.⁷⁹ This observation turns on its head the way we usually think of theology—that "the truth" is really contained in our theological statements and that stories and narratives merely illustrate the deeper truth. The eternal, loving interactions of the divine Godhead must not be reduced to an illustration of love, rather these acts of love should be recognized as God's own history which He extends into the history of the world. Therefore, the proposition which we find in Scripture—God is love—is not an invitation for us to speculate on the nature of pure existence, but rather to know God and His story.

We have seen that God has His own story. He is more than merely a God who "just is." He is the Living God. The story of God is certainly deserving of further exploration. Kevin

⁷⁷ Jack D. Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture* (Ft. Wayne: Luther Academy, 2020), 2.

⁷⁸ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 2.

⁷⁹ Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 64.

Vanhoozer casts the story of God as a drama rather than a narrative. Certainly, the importance of history is not lost in this move.⁸⁰ He also connects God's history with the eternal (including before creation) works of God *ad intra*:

God's identity is a function of his characteristic actions and relations in history and within his own triune life. For example, within the so-called immanent Trinity, the specific activity of the Father is "eternally begetting the Son." The Son is the "one who is eternally begotten." The Spirit is the love that proceeds from Father to Son and back again. God's triune being is thus a being in communion. In similar fashion, each of the three persons is involved in God's work *ad extra*: the Father initiates, the Son executes, and the Spirit perfects. The gospel thus concerns the triune God's self-communication for the purpose of enlarging the circle of communion. The gospel proclaims a new possibility, namely, that of becoming a "communicant" in the life of God.⁸¹

Vanhoozer introduces but does not expand upon the "enlarging" life of God. As Scripture testifies, God is life (John 3:10; John 5:26; John 11:25; 1 Tim. 3:15). Again, following our modernist way of thinking, we tend to view God's life in static terms, the quality of existence or being alive as opposed to dead. But life, even God's life, has an historical quality to it, what we might call a *lifetime*, albeit for God an eternal one. To participate in God's life is more than just to be alive spiritually through His grace; it is also to become part of His lifetime, part of His story, the narrative or drama of His existence. History matters because God is an historical being

⁸⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 48–49. Vanhoozer explains his preference for drama over narrative: 'The recovery of narrative by theologians in the 1980s rightly redirected attention to the way in which Scripture depicts the identity of God (in contrast to philosophical speculation about the nature of perfect being) and shapes Christian identity (in contrast to seeing Scripture as an expression of religious experience). While it is true that much of the Bible is written in the form of a story, narrative and dramas represent stories differently. Narratives require narrators and recount their tales in the first or third person. Dramas, by contrast, show rather than tell. Moreover, in drama, the words are part of the action. Drama, more so than narrative, provides a salient reminder that we should not draw too fine a distinction between "word" and "act." The theater is, after all, the "language of action," and the dramatist's task that of "teaching through action." [Karl Elam, "Much Ado about Doing Things with Words (and Other Means): Some Problems in the Pragmatics of Theater and Drama" in Michael Isaacaroff and Robin F. Jones, eds., *Performing Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 41.] Not only do dramatic acts often have symbolic force, but the dialogue is "spoken action." Finally, unlike narrative, the biblical text, along with its present-day reader, gets caught up in the action too.'

⁸¹ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 43.

with His own history and life into which He draws humanity. He creates and interacts with humanity in the course of history, and in the incarnation He actually enters into human history being at once both Author and character.

This section started with the observation that Scripture begins like a story—In the beginning. The narrative character of Scripture, however, extends well beyond the beginning. Much of Scripture takes the exact form of historical narrative that tells the reader what happened at particular times and places. Other literary forms exist in Scripture—poetry, prophecy, epistle, apocalyptic. Each one though must be recognized for its connection to an historical reality or situation. It is, in fact, the main point of all Scripture to relate the great event of God’s incarnation in human life and history. No other historical event equals the incarnation in its inner majesty and its historical prominence. Within the larger event of the incarnation lie Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, which constitute the action of God to grant forgiveness and redemption to sinful humanity. Scripture exists primarily and comprehensively to tell *this* story.

The specific saving actions of God in the past which Scripture relates and which we call the Gospel may sometimes be called the economy of salvation or even salvation history. Vanhoozer explains, “Theology done in accord with the *euangelion* highlights two divine initiatives that together make up God’s good news about God: God acting (there is only news if something has been done) and God speaking (there is only news if someone reports what has been done).”⁸² It might further be asserted that these two parts of the Gospel are really one and the same—when God speaks, He acts, and when God acts, He speaks. It amounts to a distinction without a difference. So then, the whole purpose of Scripture is historical. It is given to tell us what God

⁸² Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 39.

has done, does, and will do for our salvation and to extend that saving history into our lives and into *all* lives, by which we become part of the world's salvation story. No expression of Christian truth can fail to account for the narrative essence of Christianity.

Jack Kilcrease has given an excellent overview of the speech/story/narrative foundation of Christian truth as it relates to all of human existence. His account of God's eternal story of relational love has already been mentioned. Explaining the creation of the world as expressed in Genesis 1, he presents the narrative essence of creation:

As creator, God narrates creation into existence through His Word (*creatio per verbum*). As the Father speaks forth the Son in eternity as His uncreated Word, similarly in time He speaks forth the temporal order as His created speech. God reveals His will and grace in time not only through audible words given to the prophets and apostles but also through the natural order which He has established by His speech.⁸³

Notice what Kilcrease asserts—that the temporal world exists as God's speech. Certainly God's act of speaking brought the world into existence. But Kilcrease goes further seeing the world itself as a form of God's speech. As he expands his idea, the creation of the world is then correlated to the Gospel in that it is a creation *ex nihilo* by the unilateral working of God.⁸⁴ This is evident in Scripture where salvation is described with creation language.⁸⁵ Kilcrease sees the way God created by His speech in the form of a narrative as determinative for the kind of creation that God made. He says, "According to the Bible the essence of creatures (that is, what they are most fundamentally) is not determined by a Platonic or Aristotelian form. Rather, it is determined by God's address within the dynamic narrative of Genesis 1."⁸⁶ Not only did God

⁸³ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 4.

⁸⁴ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 4.

⁸⁵ For example, 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10.

⁸⁶ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 5. He further says, "As we have already seen, human beings are storied creatures. God created the whole universe through speaking forth a single grand narrative over the protological week (Genesis 1). Humans find their identity and life in a story narrated by God. For this reason humans understand and

create man by means of a narrative, God also created a narrative being, a creature who would himself live a narrative existence and find his meaning in the story God would tell. Kilcrease makes a point of the fact that the creation was not completed in a single moment but came to be progressively in the six days on which God spoke. He says, “Had God created the world in a single instant, creation would lack a story and therefore an essence which is dependent on God’s original address.”⁸⁷ The image of God is also related to the narrative character of creation. Man has the ability like God to speak. His speaking far exceeds the abilities of the lower creatures and sets him apart as a rational creature. Kilcrease very insightfully says,

[...] as a creature of God even reason itself is dependent on the Word for its existence. Contrary to what Enlightenment thinkers believed, reason lacks any autonomous existence over against God and His Word, but rather is radically dependent on them. After all, for reason even to exist as a faculty of humanity it must be narrated into existence through God’s Word. Even on an intercreaturely basis, our ability to think and use rational categories is dependent on language. Such language is not something created by our inner autonomous and disembodied faculty of reason; it is received from outside ourselves from the surrounding culture. In this, the inner reality of reason is dependent on our prior address through the external Word.⁸⁸

Several ideas are brought together here by Kilcrease. Our communicative speech proceeds from our rationality and is dependent on it. Our language is the medium of our rationality which has developed within our culture. That is to say, we cannot think without thinking in a language, usually the language of our historic community. Thus it necessarily follows that reason can never be truly autonomous. Humans do not just talk like their parents and ancestors; they think and hence live like their ancestors too. Despite the tireless effort that contemporary young adults

process reality as narrative. This truth is reflected in the fact that all cultures generate myths and literature. They do this not simply because telling stories or performing plays is enjoyable and entertaining, but as a means of self-understanding. Characters in myth, literature, and drama are abstractions of human nature as it exists in the real world. By abstracting themselves from their daily lives and placing the self in a narrative, humans can analyze their existence and come to some form of self-understanding.” 85–86.

⁸⁷ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 5.

⁸⁸ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 8.

make *not* to be like their parents, they always end up being much more like them than they are different. It truly shows that we are narrative beings and that the generations-long stories of our lives are always there, both in the language itself and in our thinking and reasoning that depend on that shared language. Through our linguistic being, our history is indelibly fixed upon us and is inescapable; we cannot even rationalize it away.

We are well aware of the fact that this world does not still reflect the perfect order and shape of God's creative narrative. Another speaker influenced the world with his lies, a false narrative, another story. The Fall, as expressed in Genesis three, continues to unfold along the lines of storytelling—the serpent tells the story differently (falsely) and alienates Adam and Eve from God. Kilcrease explains,

Since belief is a passive receptivity to God's Word, it represents a self-consciousness of the human being's status as a creature that possesses its existence as a result of the divine address (Gen. 1). Conversely, unbelief is then also a refusal to accept one's status as a creature and a receiver of the good from an external divine source."⁸⁹

Fallen man is shown in Scripture to be in hopeless revolt against God and the plan, the story, He has graciously spoken for the world. As sinners, we are always trying to “write our own story” rather than live the story of God. At first glance it appears that a narrative approach to Christian thinking and theology might all too easily open the door for man's sinful imagination to invent his own story, assert the primacy of that story and write God out of human history altogether. What we find, however, is that sinful man has already done just that, and our attention to narrative enables us to see what might otherwise have remained unnoticed. God's authentic story includes God's gracious saving actions in the Word made flesh. Here I quote Kilcrease at length:

In speaking His redemptive word God establishes a counternarrative to the mangled and tragic narrative of the original creation. In order for creation to be redeemed, its story once tragically mangled by sin must be spoken forth again in order to establish

⁸⁹ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 40.

a new narrative of creation. As was observed in the previous chapter, creation receives its essence from its narrative.

Like the old narrative, this new narrative is formed by the pattern of God's effective address of Law and Gospel. Whereas the old narrative succumbed to the tragic power of sin and the condemnation of the Law, the new narrative will be the story of the eternal triumph of divine grace. To achieve this triumph the eternal Word of God became flesh in order to enter into the curse of the Law as a new Adam. Fulfilling and destroying that curse by His divine power, He may speak forth a new creation in the power of His resurrection. It is fitting that the eternal Word undertook this role, in that it was He who spoke forth the first creation (Heb 2:10). In the incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ creates the world again by the divine power and glory communicated to His flesh (Col. 1:19).⁹⁰

Salvation, understood as God's new narrative for the world whose story has been rendered confused and disorienting, appeals to a world that loves to hear and tell stories.

We have already seen that both Samuel Wells and Kevin Vanhoozer have pursued an approach to Christian ethics and Christian theology, respectively, using drama as the basic lens for understanding and applying the truth. Kilcrease also draws on drama to make an important point in his explanation of the story of redemption:

It would be more appropriate to state that God's actions in redemption stand in a "dramatic" coherence with His earlier deeds and words. By dramatic we mean that it is dialectically continuous with God's previous acts. When the plot of any good drama is contemplated from the perspective of its end, the course of the actions and the decisions of the characters can be seen to be a logical and coherent whole. This is true even though the character did not behave mechanically so as to make the end of the story absolutely inevitable. Each person's decisions make sense in the light of his character, even if those decisions were not the only ones available. Indeed, there even may be elements of surprise and even occasional disruption in movement in the plot.⁹¹

Indeed! The story of redemption that we have reviewed is full of surprises. God is found to be more holy and more gracious than the early parts of the story might indicate. The Triune God does not develop like characters in a story, but His true nature is more and more fully revealed

⁹⁰ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 52–53.

⁹¹ Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 52.

even up to the very end. Moreover, some theological truths—universal human depravity, atonement through violence, the reality of eternal damnation—that many people nowadays find problematic or even repulsive, may gain new traction within a larger, more coherent narrative. We have only briefly reviewed the narrative structure of Christian theology as told by Kilcrease. It should be evident that the full scope of Christian teaching can be developed and understood in light of the story of God.

The narrative reality of God and of Christian doctrine that Scripture presents and that Kilcrease has explained has not consistently been the dominant view in theology for most of church history, and falling far out of favor in the last several hundred years. Influenced strongly by developments in philosophy, God has been studied as another idea or object of human inquiry abstracted from the Biblical narrative. This development corresponds with the dawning of the modern age in the Enlightenment and the key figure of Rene Descartes. His philosophical outlook, discussed briefly here, helps one see the strong disjunction between the modern worldview and the narrative concern in theology which we have reviewed. Descartes was a mathematician as well as a philosopher and was deeply impressed by the neatness and certainty of mathematical facts.⁹² A key aspect of his philosophical outlook was the radical distinction of mind and body. This dualism rested on his claim that there are only two essential attributes of substances: thought and extension.⁹³ He found the certainty of his own existence in his rational thinking and sought to found all knowledge on self-perception.⁹⁴ Descartes's rationalistic approach provided a method of inquiry for several other Enlightenment thinkers.⁹⁵ Historical

⁹² Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 2:348.

⁹³ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 348.

⁹⁴ Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 348–9.

⁹⁵ Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett, eds., *Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume VII: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 252.

theologian Gerald R. Cragg in his work, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648–1789*, helpfully characterizes Descartes’s thinking about God:

The criterion of truth is the clearness and distinctness of the idea. We deduce this from the character of our fundamental conviction. No idea is so clear as the idea of God. Since it is not derived from sense experience, and is not fashioned by our own act, it must be an innate idea, implanted in us by God himself. To think of God is to imply his existence; that which is perfect would be less than perfect if it did not exist. Perfection includes veracity; on this depends the reliability of our perceptions of the world around us, and so we can be sure of the existence of other beings and of other things.⁹⁶

Notice the sharp contrast with the narrative view. Here God, though existing transcendentally, is known as an idea in the mind which is held clearly; and one’s rational faculties enable knowledge of other realities as well. For Descartes, because this thought exists so clearly and inescapably in his mind, it must be true. Such knowing starts with the human knower exploring his own ideas and comparing them to the reality around him. Naturally, in an epistemology which privileges mathematical and empirical data, past events and our knowledge about them are marginalized. Further, in his system the individual observer and his own ideas matter far more than any shared narrative, culture or wisdom of a community or society. It is from this philosophical position that the idea of the modern, autonomous individual has arisen.⁹⁷

A number of points can be drawn out of the foregoing consideration of narrative theology and related to the research of this project. First, God has a history, both within His own eternal being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in His Triune acts in history. Second, the life which

⁹⁶ Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church in the Age of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 38.

⁹⁷ Another critic of the modern, psychological self is Carl R. Trueman who offers helpful analysis in his book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self; Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020). He writes, “The psychologized, expressive individual that is the social norm today is unique, unprecedented, and singularly significant. The emergence of such selves is a matter of central importance in the history of the West as it is both a symptom and a cause of the many social, ethical, and political questions we now face. To use another of the concepts outlined above, this new view of the self also reflects and facilitates a distinct move away from a mimetic view of the world as possessing intrinsic meaning to a poietic one, where the onus for meaning lies with the human self as constructive agent.” (70–71).

God gives us is not just a state of being but actual participation in His on-going being. We were created by a loving God to be a character actively participating in that story. Third, and this is the key point for the immediate purpose, we were created by the narrative action of God and are ourselves narrative beings. Life makes sense and we make sense of life by the larger narrative of which we are part. Meaning comes to us through the narratives of God's life, of our own life and of the world's continuing story. By meaning here I intend not so much "explanation" as "significance," but it is a significance that we can understand. And fourth, the narrative meaning God spoke into the world was corrupted in the Fall but is being restored in Christ. So we live in a reality about which exist both true and false narratives. As this project brings real historical narratives to bear on our thinking about the church, students become more aware of their own history and its impact on their current lives.

So what's the point of this lengthy exploration of narrative in Christian theology? In large part, the initial purpose has been to clarify in my own mind the relationship of history and doctrine. My own doctrinal training (and innate outlook) has been almost exclusively propositional in nature. I have approached Christian doctrine as the distillation of both general and specific truths from the Word of God organized in rational and pastoral systems. I cannot say that I have ever found this way of doing doctrine to be personally unsatisfying although it can be hard to interest church members with it. Certainly the opinion prevails that doctrine is heady and abstract, sterile and dull. In either the classroom or the pulpit, it can be dressed up with personal anecdotes and digital graphics. A skillful teacher can incorporate provocative discussion. Besides these more cosmetic affects, Christian doctrine must certainly be dynamically related to personal faith and congregational ministry, which cannot help but bring it more to life. At any point along the way, movements and events from the past can serve as clarifying illustrations or tragic

warnings.

But I don't think any of these ruminations/meanderings get to the heart of the issue.

Another thing C. S. Lewis said in his essay, *Fact and Myth*, makes the most sense to me:

When we translate we get abstraction—or rather, dozens of abstractions. What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley...⁹⁸

Truth is not the same as reality, although we do sometimes use the words interchangeably.

“[T]ruth is always about something, reality is that about which truth is.” Our doctrinal truths are about the reality which is Christianity itself, especially the saving acts of God in history. It takes a narrative to communicate those acts, the truth of theology is only about that narrative. Now the history which I will present in class is not the same as the Christian narrative, but it can be received by the students (or anyone) in much the same way because it is concrete rather than abstract and it is presented in a narrative form. So, for the primary research question of this project, I had to find out for myself how to defend the notion that teaching history matters and it helps. I believe that I have done that.

The historical narrative in the field research will present several episodes in the LFC/AFLC's past in which local congregations found themselves at odds with their Lutheran denomination on matters which they believed concerned their faithfulness to God. What is the significance of these stories and the actions they relate for believers today and for FLBC students? Were those congregations mistaken in their conviction that God was actively present in those events to guide them and use them, was their history in His hands? Were they wrong to act from principle based on Scripture rather than go along with what many viewed as the inevitable

⁹⁸ Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 66.

progress of history? Did they surrender to the modern view of freedom and individual autonomy in which people simply pursue their own preferred outcomes regardless of the needs and decisions of others, or of God Himself? Did they already have a theologically informed history that might shed light on the more recent struggles? Could they safely act in continuity with their past? The use of historical narrative helps students consider these questions and should prompt them to consider appropriate, biblical answers.

An influential critic of the notion of the modern self as proposed by Descartes is Alasdair MacIntyre who also argues for a narrative view of persons within a philosophical rather than a theological framework. MacIntyre has argued that “the Enlightenment project” (as he terms it) was certain to fail because it continued to speak of human moral action in terms that had lost their currency. Specifically, moral action was still held to answer to a universal standard when terms like “right” and “good” were believed to express only personal preferences and individual feelings.⁹⁹ MacIntyre contrasts this modern, dysfunctional, moral reasoning with the long-held view found in Aristotle in which a culture judges a man good because his life and actions are moving towards a *telos* that expresses man as-he-ought-to-be.¹⁰⁰ He further argues that modern man, the autonomous self, was invented by the Enlightenment, as we have briefly seen in Descartes, and that invention forced society down a pathway that has made coherent moral judgments impossible.¹⁰¹

According to MacIntyre, the way back from this moral impasse is to reclaim a view of man as a narrative being who moves towards a *telos* that defines the good and has a long established history within the culture. He says,

⁹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 60.

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.

¹⁰¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 61.

In all those cultures, Greek, medieval or Renaissance, where moral thinking and action is structured according to some version of the scheme that I have called classical, the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories. [...] What matters for my own argument is a relatively indisputable historical fact, namely that such narratives did provide the historical memory, adequate or inadequate, of the societies in which they were finally written down. More than that they provided a moral background to contemporary debate in classical societies, an account of a now transcended or partly-transcended moral order whose beliefs and concepts were still partially influential, but which also provided an illuminating contrast to the present.¹⁰²

A culture's or society's moral imagination is formed by its classic stories which provided a linguistic medium in which moral debate and the consequent judgments have meaning. It is through these stories that virtues are addressed and expounded.¹⁰³ A people without such stories can only engage in fruitless squabbling rather than real moral reasoning. Beyond their benefit to society, which MacIntyre calls a "relatively indisputable historical fact," narratives also function as key players in a person's self-identity. Building on the notion of a character in a story, MacIntyre writes,

But what is crucial to human beings as characters in enacted narratives is that, possessing only the resources of psychological continuity, we have to be able to respond to the imputation of strict identity. I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others—and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it—no matter how changed I may be now. There is no way of *founding* my identity—or lack of it—on the psychological continuity or discontinuity of the self. The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character.¹⁰⁴

Modern views of the self focus on psychological states and events which MacIntyre believes are inadequate to form an identity. Too much is left out of the factors that determine who we are as persons. The modern views of personal identity "have failed to see that a background has been omitted, the lack of which makes the problems insoluble. That background is provided by the

¹⁰² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 121.

¹⁰³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126–27

¹⁰⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217

concept of a story and of that kind of unity of character which a story requires.”¹⁰⁵ The modern self has become disconnected from its past. Its inner wholeness has disintegrated and it has become unable to achieve the self-identity that is required for personal well-being and coherent moral action. MacIntyre summarizes his view of narrative selfhood:

What the narrative concept of selfhood requires is thus twofold. On the one hand, I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death; I am the *subject* of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar meaning. [...] The other aspect of narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives.¹⁰⁶

The value of MacIntyre's view of the narrative self is evident here as it gives intelligibility or meaning to individual lives through those lives' histories and it connects individuals together in the way that no one's story can ever be told or understood without recognizing its interplay with the stories of others.

Finally, how does the narrative self help with the question of moral action? MacIntyre offers this explanation:

In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask 'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask 'What is the good for man?' is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. But now it is important to emphasize that it is the systematic asking of these two questions and the attempt to answer them in deed as well as in word which provide the moral life with its unity. The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest. Quests sometimes fail, are frustrated, abandoned or dissipated into distractions; and human lives may in all these ways also fail. But the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.

¹⁰⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217–8.

¹⁰⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218–19.

The modern view of the self with its subjective outlook that finds truth in its own perceptions and is convinced that its own reasoning powers could yield all truth, inevitably slid into an existentialism that cut off the self from its past and was able to find meaning only in the present moment of decisive action. Both Kilcrease's theological reflections and MacIntyre's philosophical arguments have exposed the lie in the modern viewpoint. MacIntyre's idea of a quest brings us very close to the eschatological character of Christian theology. A Christian's past is full of sin, but his future holds the promise of perfection. Scripture repeatedly urges Christians to live eschatologically, in view of the way God will bring all things to their graciously willed outcome.

A number of points from the previous presentation underscore the need for an historically informed teaching practice, which is the goal of this project. This suggests that those goals are significant and useful. The connections to history which will be taught can give students a new or renewed awareness of their own past enabling them to make better judgments about their theological commitments and Christian lives. The research will focus on a single topic, church polity, but the implications of these theological/philosophical findings are very broad.

Stanley Hauerwas has put narrative selfhood into a more explicitly Christian and theological setting. He too has been very critical of the way modern thinking, has neglected the narrative character of the Gospel, and his criticisms extend even to the way that Christians think about the Christian faith. He writes,

Too often we assume the narrative character of Christian convictions is incidental to those convictions. Both believer and unbeliever are under the impression that narrative is a relatively unimportant moral category. Specifically, we tend to think of "stories" as illustrations of some deeper truth that we can and should learn to articulate in a non-narrative mode. [...] I think this is a dire misreading of the narrative character of Christian convictions. My contention is that the narrative mode is neither incidental nor accidental to Christian belief. There is no more fundamental way to talk of God than in a story. The fact that we come to know God through the

recounting of the story of Israel and the life of Jesus is decisive for our truthful understanding of the kind of God we worship as well as the world in which we exist. Put directly, the narrative character of our knowledge of God, the self, and the world is a reality-making claim that the world and our existence in it are God's creations; our lives, and indeed, the existence of the universe are but contingent realities.¹⁰⁸

Many echoes of Kilcrease's theological account of narrative are present in Hauerwas's critique (or is Hauerwas echoing in Kilcrease?). Hauerwas takes the daring view that in some important ways narrative is more fundamental to Christian thinking than a more propositional, analytical view. Clearly this runs counter to the way most theology has been developed and written for many centuries as well as my own experience and personal proclivities (as I have admitted previously). It may be the case that we live in a period of human history when a narrative form for theology will prove much more congenial to the thought forms of the day than propositional theology, so long as it remains entirely faithful to Scripture. As a Christian theologian I should not run away from this fact or ignore its significance. The complimentary relationship of propositional and narratives forms of theology are clearly evident here. Theology or basic Christian communication of its truth can be evaluated either by how well it articulates the message of Scripture in its own right (faithfulness to Scripture) and by how effectively the meaning of that message is received and understood by an audience (resonance with the hearers). It is certainly true that the second standard of evaluation only comes into play after the first standard is met. But that is not Hauerwas' concern at this point. He claims that by its own inner character, Christian theology should be primarily narrative. As we have seen from Kilcrease, narrative is at the center of what God has said and done in the world. This story corresponds to the *quest* that MacIntyre placed at the heart of human identity and corporate life. Hauerwas says,

¹⁰⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 25.

Not only is knowledge of self tied to knowledge of God, but we know ourselves truthfully only when we know ourselves in relation to God. We know who we are only when we can place our selves—locate our stories—within God’s story.

This is the basis for the extraordinary Christian claim that we participate morally in God’s life. For our God is a God who wills to include us within his life.¹⁰⁹

For Hauerwas, we do not understand ourselves “truthfully” unless we do so within the story that God tells in Scripture. He calls this an “extraordinary claim.” One wonders how well the average Christian makes the connection from God’s epic narrative in Scripture to his own often disjointed and confused life-story. Probably not often enough. On its face, the Bible story appears to be a very different story than the one that we live out from day to day. It may be for this reason that some Christians find little meaning in their Christian lives despite having a significant awareness of many Christian doctrines, such as creation, the Trinity and redemption. Hauerwas explains how it is especially the story of Christ that is the focus of this narrative emphasis:

To know our creator, therefore, we are required to learn through God’s particular dealings with Israel and Jesus, and through God’s continuing faithfulness to the Jews and the ingathering of a people to the church. Such knowledge requires constant appropriation, constant willingness to accept the gift of God’s good creation. As Christians we maintain that such appropriation is accomplished in and through our faithfulness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that by learning to be his disciples we will learn to find our life—our story—in God’s story. In the process we find our life in relation to other lives...¹¹⁰

We find Hauerwas also saying much the same things as MacIntyre did about self and community, but within a clearly Christian viewpoint. The implications of these findings are very helpful for the pursuit of this project’s primary research goal.

Each of the writers we have been looking at give a clear statement about how natural it is

¹⁰⁹ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 28.

for people to identify themselves in terms of a story or narrative. Hauerwas says, “Narrative plays a larger part in our lives than we often imagine. For example, we frequently introduce ourselves through narrative.”¹¹¹ Kilcrease makes much the same point, adding a comment about our own attitudes towards our storied self:

If someone is asked the question “Who are you?” he likely would tell his life story. Going beyond his individual life story, other constitutive elements of his identity are self-evidently narrative in his character. For example, if he were a German his identity would be determined in part by World War II. This would be the case whether he liked it or not. The historical narrative of World War II would project a kind of determination onto his existence. In his limited human freedom he could of course place himself in a position standing for or against the reality of his nation’s identity as determined by its history. Nevertheless, one cannot escape that history: it shapes the individual irrespective of whether his individual response is positive or negative.¹¹²

Certainly many people have misgivings about the story of their individual lives as well as the larger story of human existence, and many fail to grasp the causes of this angst. We can embrace it or reject it, but we cannot change it—a terrible shock for some modern minds to suffer! Our past will always remain a part of who we are. Finally, MacIntyre put it this way, “What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.”¹¹³ I find myself part of a history. Both individuals and communities (congregations) have real histories which, at least to some degree, form the character of their current being. That history is meaningful and worthy of embrace.

Many pedagogical devices are available to teachers nowadays beside the more traditional

¹¹¹ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 26.

¹¹² Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture*, 5.

¹¹³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221.

techniques of lecture and class discussion. Some of those may be helpful for improving the effectiveness of the instruction of doctrine at FLBC. Teaching history along with theology, however, is more than a pedagogical device. History is part of who our students are, part of their identity. Teaching the history of the AFLC will give the students more than an effective classroom experience. It will allow them to know themselves better and embrace their identity within the body of Christ.

The Narrative Identity of the AFLC

If narrative is an important means of self-identification, and if, as was claimed at the beginning of this paper, an ecclesiastical body like the AFLC cannot truly be understood apart from its history, a point thoroughly presented and defended in the foregoing section, then it is proper to explore the narrative identity of the AFLC as I understand it, a life-long hearer of that story. It is this narrative that the next section of the MAP seeks to identify, and parts of which will be communicated to the students at FLBC during the field research. This narrative identity and its apparent sources will be discussed here and presented merely as the story of the AFLC without any intent to judge its historical accuracy or biblical warrant. Especially useful in this examination will be the views of Professor Georg Sverdrup, whom we have already been introduced to through Dr. Horn's dissertation (Chapter Two).

Like all church bodies, the AFLC certainly has its stories to tell. Of course, the story of the AFLC is not an entirely separate story from that of other churches. All histories are intertwined as part of the history of Christianity and of God's whole creation. Nevertheless, there are parts of this unique story which are not shared widely with other American Lutheran denominations. So, how does the AFLC tell its history, and how does that story serve its theology?

A good starting point to answer this question is the Gospel itself, "If the Son therefore shall

make you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). Beginning here, the AFLC has regarded the Christian’s freedom in Christ from the condemnation of sin and the consequent freedom to serve his neighbor in love as the most proper way to think about being free in Christ. Put another way, if freedom of polity, i. e. self-governing congregations, were to cause error in faith or life, then such freedom has failed in its purpose. In this viewpoint, the AFLC follows the lead of LFC founder Prof. Georg Sverdrup, whose first concern for the congregation was always its spiritual condition:

What then do we understand by a free congregation?

First, and foremost, the freedom of the congregation is that it is bought with a price for God so that the god of this world no longer rules over it. This is the firm foundation on which the congregation is built. Christ is the foundation which is laid and no one can lay another. His death and resurrection are the victory by which freedom is won.

Thus, to speak about a free congregation except upon this foundation of liberation would be like speaking of a free Israel without an exit from Egypt and without a crossing of the Red Sea. The congregation stands on this firm rock and there can be no talk of congregational freedom so long as men are either impelled by the whip of covetousness or coerced with the hard yoke of the law. The bondage of vice and the compulsion of the law are both irreconcilable with the free congregation.¹¹⁴

Questions of polity and organization are not the main thing in the AFLC’s narrative identity or its theology. The main thing is consistently the work of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to set people free from the burden of their sins and to live free of sin’s bondage in a regenerate life of love toward others. In recognizing that the Gospel proclaims freedom from condemnation and freedom to love others, the AFLC is quite intentional in telling its story to be careful not to express a view of freedom that approaches spiritual, moral or ecclesiastical anarchy, a do-whatever-you-want mentality. Additionally, the importance of such freedom given in the Gospel of forgiveness is often expressed in the AFLC by the attitude that this Gospel-given freedom fits

¹¹⁴ Hamre, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 91.

very well within a structure in which the congregation (led the Word and Spirit of God) chooses its own confession as well as other matters of organization and leadership, and bears responsibility for those choices. That is, it is consistent with this spiritual freedom found in the Gospel for the congregation to govern and to be governed through willing cooperation rather than by hierarchical compulsion—the goal always remaining to live faithfully as God’s people. The larger Christian story has freedom as a chief element in that each person who becomes a Christian always experiences freedom from condemnation by his conversion to Christ.

The AFLC also sees itself in historical continuity with the apostolic church as described in the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, and the historical accounts found there have significant impact on the AFLC’s self-identity and theology. Again, AFLC forefather Georg Sverdrup, took Acts as highly paradigmatic for his understanding of the congregation. Sverdrup often called Pentecost the birthday of the Christian congregation. He believed that the local gathering of Christians in their congregation constituted the true picture of the church in the New Testament quite clearly and this became a major facet of his theological understanding of church polity. His account continues to be told frequently as part of the AFLC story. In one of his most often quoted explanations of the New Testament, he says:

Nothing is said within the revelation of the New Testament about any other form for the Kingdom of God.

We mean that in the New Testament nothing is said about an episcopate over, or in, more than one congregation. Nothing is said about a papacy, church department, consistory, council, or synod. In every place where there are Christians there is a congregation. This congregation has its elders or bishops, but there is no “consistory” of any kind.

There are indications of decline and decay when not long after the time of the apostles there began to be “consistories” of one sort or another over greater or lesser portions of the church, thinking thereby to get a better form of the Kingdom of God. [...]

According to the New Testament, it is necessary for the Kingdom of God to have a congregation, but we cannot see that some other outer organization over the congregation is a necessary part of Christianity.

It is, therefore, a principle in the Free Church, which submits only to God's Word and nothing else, that the congregation is an adequate form for the Kingdom of God, and that no other form is required from the time of the outpouring of the Spirit until Christ's return. But according to God's will, as revealed in His Word, the congregation, on the other hand, is absolutely necessary wherever it is possible. When an individual Christian lives alone, such as in prison or other restriction, the lack of a congregation will not cause him to perish. But where Christians can be a congregation and will not, there is certainly a great danger for their souls.¹¹⁵

The apparent absence of any certain New Testament reference to a larger church structure has always been a major clue for the AFLC in thinking about itself and structuring its polity. Other New Testament elements have also been important.

The prominence of the Apostolic Office is one such additional consideration. Several characteristics of the Apostolic office understood from Scripture inform this aspect of the AFLC's narrative.¹¹⁶ Inasmuch as the canon of Scripture was not yet closed in the book of Acts and the Apostles, personally appointed by Christ to lead the foundling church, were still alive and working, it appears in Scripture that their instructions (even second-hand) carried special weight in all the congregations. Sverdrup writes,

¹¹⁵ James S. Hamre, trans., "Concerning the Fundamental Principles of the Lutheran Free Church," *Sverdrup Journal* III, (2006): 53.

¹¹⁶ Acts 1:21–22 "of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." Acts 1:25 calls this united witness an "apostleship." The Apostolic office included only those who were personal witnesses of Christ's resurrection. As such it would end when that first generation of Christians died, to be continued by the witness of the written Scriptures, see 1 Cor. 15:3–4. The author of Hebrews acknowledges an especially authoritative office for the church in the first generation of hearers, saying, "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (2:3–4). The writer of Hebrews adds that the performance of supernatural signs and wonders was a mark of the Apostolic office. Paul identifies himself in that office several times along with these requisite signs (1 Cor. 15:8–9; Gal. 1:11–12; 2 Cor. 12:12). The presence of apostolic signs and wonders seems to be significant in Acts 15:12 when Paul relates them to the Jerusalem gathering possibly indicating that they were all aware of the Apostolic office at work among them.

As witnesses and companions of Jesus the apostles were the bearers of the gospel in the church; the church looked to them as bearers of the message of peace, the faithful witnesses from whose mouths sounded the blessed word upon which their whole faith and life was built. They were the pillars in the building, the foundation for God's house. Their word had for the congregations the same significance as the New Testament has for us and thus they had an authority which among us is given the New Testament. But the apostles did not misunderstand this position and imagine that they had been called to be lords and judges in God's church. Nor is it proper for us to misunderstand them. We have also the authority and power of the New Testament over us.¹¹⁷

The specific events recorded in Acts 15 are understood in the AFLC in this light. The decisions of the council are weighty and are communicated to the congregations with the expectation that they will be received and followed (Acts 16:4). The AFLC has understood this to be a function of the Apostolic Office rather than the beginnings of a hierarchical governing structure.

Free Lutherans, in fact, see free congregations operating throughout the New Testament. They consider the frequency of congregational activity in the New Testament. Jesus used *ekklesia* in Matthew 18 in the context of local church discipline, and His teaching is put into practice in 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul urges the congregation in Corinth to take action against their sinful member. He seems to envision a solemn meeting of the whole body in which Jesus Himself is powerfully present for the resolution of this tragic affair (5:4). As the AFLC sees it, the Corinthian congregation is not a cog in the machine; it is the machine itself. The AFLC sees a similar situation in chapter six of the same letter. There Paul chides the Corinthians for bringing lawsuits against each other in the secular courts. Apparently his preferred solution is for the congregation to provide such judgments, believing that there must be at least "one wise man" among them.

For the AFLC's self-identity, one of the most moving accounts of free congregational

¹¹⁷ Hamre, "Sverdrup's Concept," 51.

activity in the New Testament is recorded in Acts 13. In what looks like an ordinary Sunday in the ordinary course of congregational ministry by the regular pastors in Antioch, God the Holy Spirit directs the believers to send out Paul and Barnabas as their missionaries. Especially meaningful to the AFLC is the observation that without seeking approval or support “from headquarters” what may be the greatest missionary enterprise in the history of the church is launched. Over the course of many years and several different journeys and after his work has won the attention of a much larger constituency, it appears that Paul consistently returns to Antioch to report to that congregation about his ministry. Much later in his travels Paul receives support from other congregations and encourages individual congregations to support the beleaguered saints in Jerusalem.¹¹⁸ These many discrete events are seen within the AFLC’s identifying narrative to be examples of free inter-congregational cooperation which Paul and others administered without hierarchical structure.

Additionally, the New Testament narrative of free congregational activity is understood to be present in the Apostle Paul’s letters to various congregations. In these letters Paul gives frequent instructions—both theological and practical—on the apparent assumption that these congregations, like present-day AFLC congregations, have problems and opportunities that will have to be addressed in the course of their own internal decision-making. The insight of the apostle and the example of other congregations is often given in these letters, but the ultimate decision seems to lie consistently with the congregations themselves—who are after all the addressees of the letters.¹¹⁹

A major element of the AFLC narrative identity concerns the notion of the servant-pastor

¹¹⁸ Phil. 4:13–14; 2 Cor. 8–9.

¹¹⁹ The way the congregations are addressed in Rev. 3–4 is believed to further reinforce this perspective.

who does not seek to rule over the congregation, but to be its servant. It is based on 1 Pet. 5:3 where the apostle gives direction to the elders (pastors) of many congregations reminding them not to act as lords over the congregation but to lead by example.¹²⁰ In its understanding of the pastoral office, the AFLC has taken special care to make these Biblical statements part of its identifying story and often claims to train and employ servant pastors in its congregations and ministries. In fact, very few concepts provoke as much feeling in the AFLC as the idea of the servant-pastor.¹²¹

The way that the AFLC sees its history and identity in continuity with the apparent congregational emphasis of the New Testament church is one of the most prominent and significant elements of its whole identity.

The AFLC also sees itself in historical continuity with the Lutheran Reformation. Several aspects of this self-identity are relevant here. Certainly the central focus on the Gospel which has been previously noted was reemphasized by the Reformation. Justification by grace through faith is the principal doctrine and central message of the AFLC as it was for Luther and is for all Lutherans. The AFLC demonstrates this by its adherence to the Lutheran Confessions. Furthermore the AFLC sees its own history in terms of God's work in its midst through the Word and the Sacraments and so identifies itself with the true marks of the church.

In what is perhaps different from some other Lutheran church bodies, the AFLC connects its strong emphasis on freedom to its Reformation heritage. The theme of freedom is evident at a number of points in the theology of Luther and the Reformation: Luther's understanding of

¹²⁰ That spirit of being an example to the flock is also seen as pervasive in Paul's three pastoral letters which, in the AFLC narrative, focus mostly on what Timothy and Titus should be doing as pastors rather than on what they could be telling their congregations to do, saying "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1 Tim. 4:16).

¹²¹ The significance of this idea is demonstrated by the title of the seminary's primary news and information publication, *The Servant-Pastor*.

justification meant that the individual was free from the demands of the law in his relationship with God and his hope of eternal life. Also, the *sola Scriptura* principle meant that Christians were free from the doctrinal hegemony of the Roman papacy, from the ecstasies of the Schwärmer, and from unhelpful pre-Christian influences on theology (Aristotle). And again, Luther's view of Christian life and vocation freed the church from the burdens which monastic vows imposed for sanctification. All of these aspects of Christian freedom find expression in the AFLC's understanding of how the Reformation teaching of freedom is lived out among them.

Some interpretations of the Reformation trace the development of democracy back to Luther's bold stand against the autocratic figures of Emperor and Pope.¹²² Accordingly, Luther is seen as a hero in the struggle for freedom of conscience for the individual Christian against the wicked tyranny that prevents believers from simply following Jesus and His Word. As was stated at the beginning of this section, it is not my present purpose to evaluate these historical accounts for accuracy, but merely to recognize their existence and the power that they carry in forming the denomination's self-identity.

The Lutheran Confessions also work to form the self-identity of the AFLC. Of particular note here is the influence of the Catechism. Sverdrup writes,

We are, of course, Lutherans, brethren, and that means first and foremost that we stand steadfastly on the basis of Scripture. Thus it is completely correct and truly Lutheran to seek the right enlightenment about the congregation in the Holy Scripture itself. And surely Luther himself has shown us the way in this matter also. No one has been more successful at gathering his thoughts in a concise summary than Luther. His *Small Catechism* is in this respect the greatest masterpiece that exists within the Christian church. The statement in the Catechism that it is "the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" is like a ray of sunshine.¹²³

¹²² As an example of this historical perspective, one might examine Joseph A. Seiss' *Luther and the Reformation: The Life-Springs of Our Liberties* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication, 1883).

¹²³ James S. Hamre, trans., "The Prerequisites for Forming a Congregation," *Sverdrup Journal* 1 (2004): 46.

Many additional citations could be mentioned in which Sverdrup extols the singular wonder of the Catechism. There is an important line of thought in the AFLC that recognizes the value of the Catechism in presenting and preserving our Free Lutheran heritage. Such a valuable outlook would not be possible in a church without our confessional story to tell.

Another important chapter in the AFLC's narrative identity is the story of the Norwegian immigrants to America. In 1874 when Georg Sverdrup came to Augsburg Seminary in Marshall, Wisconsin it was still frontier country, sharing much of the spirit and attitudes of the colonial period. In this atmosphere of political freedom that was very different from their experiences in Norway, Sverdrup would serve the Norwegian settlers and teach in their college. As a theologian of the church, Sverdrup was strongly influenced by several factors which also contribute to the AFLC story. The Haugean and Johnsonian revivals in Norway had given him a deep appreciation for personally experienced salvation. Despite what revivalism might mean when part of other narratives, Sverdrup never held the Word and sacraments in any disregard, frequently asserting that all life and power in the church comes only from the means of grace.¹²⁴ For him, revival was not an exception to God's ordinary work through Word and Sacrament, it was instead the proof and demonstration of that ordinary work. Sverdrup fully expected that the means of grace would yield their fruit in the lives of believers—that they would have an *experience* of salvation. The consciousness of these revival roots that have repeated themselves at times in the Lutheran church in America, remains an important part of the AFLC's narrative of identity.

Another significant factor in Sverdrup's theological outlook was the church reform movement in Norway and its connection to political liberalism. The centralized power of the

¹²⁴ See *Sverdrup Journal* 8 (2011): 57; 1 (2004): 42, 47; 2 (2005): 40–41; 3 (2006): 58.

monarchy was weakening, and Norway was moving towards democratic government. The 1814 Eidsvold Constitutional Convention which gave Norway its republican government was chaired by Georg's namesake and great-uncle Georg Sverdrup (1770–1850). Other Sverdrup statesmen included Georg's uncle Johan Sverdrup who served as prime minister and his father Harold Ulrik Sverdrup who served for a time in parliament.¹²⁵ All of these forebears worked for democratic reforms in both the nation and in the national church. Georg Sverdrup shared these views and quite naturally found a congenial home in the United States.¹²⁶

While Sverdrup was careful to find his theological footings in Scripture, the realities of life in the New World had their impact on him as well. As he reviewed the panorama of church history he saw the Christian congregation dominated by the papacy from the early church right up to the Reformation.¹²⁷ Then the upheavals of the Reformation came which, he thought, should have set the congregation free for self-government but was overshadowed by the state which, he believed, kept the congregation from realizing the freedom it was meant to have under Christ its Lord. This way of telling the story of the Free Lutheran movement was especially important to Sverdrup.¹²⁸ For him, it wasn't until the advent of church-state separation in the United States that the full freedom of the congregation became a real possibility. He believed that the church

¹²⁵ Andreas Helland, *Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message*. (Minneapolis: Messenger, 1947), 13–15. See also James S. Hamre, *Georg Sverdrup: Educator, Theologian, Churchman* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian American Historical Association, 1986), 19–22.

¹²⁶ Sverdrup wrote, "Popular government awakens feelings of independence in every man, sharpens the feeling of responsibility, and calls forth independent thought and determination. And these are beneficial rather than detrimental for Christianity, whose first demand is that men awaken from sleep, cast off all dullness and see their own position in the light of the truth. It is unfortunately true that when the royal calling and responsibility pass over to the people, a part of the royal vanity and foolishness also are brought along. But on the basis of our experience, we are inclined to believe that this blemish in the life of the people of a republic is more than outweighed by the many dark features in the character of the people of monarchical lands." Hamre, "Sverdrup's Concept," 34–35.

¹²⁷ Sverdrup wrote a substantial analysis of the history of the Western church which was published in the first volume of his *Samlede Skrifter*.

¹²⁸ Hamre, "Sverdrup's Concept," 64.

could learn some lessons from the way freedom worked in American civic life and government.

“We acknowledge with thanks to God that he has placed the civic freedom around the free congregation in order that it might draw instruction in many external things from those who have learned the practice of freedom through a good deal of painful experience.”¹²⁹ In another place, he writes,

The free congregation, which through the discharge of its pastoral office edifies itself by means of the word and sacraments, which grows and expands by the drawing power of love, and sends missionaries to the pagans and Jews—is not that the beginning of a true free-churchly work? Or is anyone able to find either in God’s word or in church history any sound or serious objection to beginning with the free congregation?

¹²⁹ Hamre, “Sverdrup’s Concept,” 262. Note the larger context as well:

“We praise the Lord who made our country a place of refuge.

“And not only that. Those who had suffered persecution at home were not ready immediately to practice freedom over here. It took time before the principle of religious liberty was understood and acknowledged. Not until the great battle for liberty with England had ended and the newly-formed states were bound together by the bond of union was it recognized by everyone that if freedom was to be preserved without tearing the Union asunder it must be established immovably and unchangeably that church and state were to be completely separated so that no political coercion threatened and no political advantage tempted the confessor of one or the other religion. Jews and Christians, Catholics and Protestants had equal rights in the state, and no obstacle from the side of the state was placed in the way of the most free exercise of religion.

“This arrangement created the conditions for the life and work of the congregation as never before. Never before and nowhere else has the congregation had such good external conditions. It is completely free from the state’s enmity and friendship, power and weakness, and so may arrange its affairs as it wishes and is able, as it best understands and is capable.

“If we but consider what a great advantage this is we should truly join in singing praise to our God who in such a remarkable manner and through mighty world conflicts has guided thither so that we have received a fully-accomplished freedom of religion as an unmerited gift, enabling the vitality and working-power of God’s congregation to manifest itself unhindered by extraneous interference.

“Let us thank the Lord who has accomplished this task in a glorious manner and permitted a beautiful and delightful lot to be ours.

“The third boon which we may mention in this connection is the very model that is given us of a free constitution in the civic freedom and popular self-government. It is said that the children of the world are wiser than the children of light in their own generation. And that is of significance in this connection. Little by little our free people have developed the forms for the exercise and practice of freedom, and in many respects these are also useful for the self-government of the congregation. Our congregational work and government have profited a great deal from the civic forms of freedom among us. The example of freedom works in a powerful way, so we see that even the Catholic church with its fixed and deep-rooted tradition is by no means the same in the United States as it is in the old countries. So perceptible is the difference that at the present moment the pope has found it necessary to rebuke in a powerful way the leading men in the American Catholic church because they are too liberal-minded and Americanized.

“We acknowledge with thanks to God that he has placed the civic freedom around the free congregation in order that it might draw instruction in many external things from those who have learned the practice of freedom through a good deal of painful experience.” 260–62.

We consider it to be settled, then, that it will be admitted that this is the place to begin. Our calling, pointed out for us by the word of the Lord, church history, and the exalted freedom of our country, is clear as the noon-day. No Christian ought to make a mistake at that point.¹³⁰

It should not be concluded that no other influences were at work in the development of Sverdrup's congregational, Lutheran church polity than Scripture alone. As a keen student of history, Sverdrup knew where the historical development of church polity began and what advances had been made, especially in the Reformation. While appreciating the great strides made during the Reformation period away from authoritarian church rule, he believed that a new step forward was both historically possible and biblically proper. He boldly urged the Norwegian Lutheran church in America to take that step.

One might commend Sverdrup at this point for recognizing that his views on church polity were not constructed entirely from Scripture but were also drawn from the example of American democracy. He understood the question of polity within a narrative that drew both from Scripture and everyday life (i. e., special revelation and general revelation). It cannot be denied that he seems to speak at times as if Scripture alone provided the foundation for his congregational polity.¹³¹ It is not clear what he thought of this apparent inconsistency since I am unaware of any time he addressed it or attempted to reconcile his own differing claims.¹³² As was suggested earlier by MacIntyre, our past always forms us whether we realize it or not. As an American denomination the AFLC shares this democratic past and the temptation to spiritualize it because

¹³⁰ Hamre, "Sverdrup's Concept," 65.

¹³¹ For example, "According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the kingdom of God on earth." Fundamental Principle #1. Throughout the Fundamental Principles congregational self-government is defended on the basis of Scripture alone with no reference to other possible sources. (See Appendix One).

¹³² In light of the confessional lacuna regarding church polity, it is neither illegitimate nor un-Lutheran to draw on secular notions of organization in seeking an effective church polity. Inasmuch as Sverdrup believed that history would vindicate democratic republicanism as the best form of political structure in a fallen world and the ultimate realization God's temporal will for humanity on this side of the eschaton, it is not illogical for him to find the seeds of that viewpoint already in Scripture.

that historical narrative is very potent.¹³³

Another part of the AFLC's narrative identity which figures strongly in its overall character is the AFLC's own struggle to preserve its freedom when opposed by unsympathetic synodical leaders. At the time of the AFLC's establishment in 1962, a document was prepared entitled "The Statement on the Historical Situation." Several aspects of denominational innovation are addressed in five points of criticism.¹³⁴ This David-and-Goliath story remains very potent in which the largely unsophisticated but Bible-centered local congregation wants to carry on faithful Word and Sacrament ministry while facing opposition from their synodical leaders that threaten their continued existence. As the narrative goes, the local congregations saw and resisted the pattern of consolidation and decline that was playing out in many such church mergers. Resistance to this top-down movement towards organizational union was regarded as essential to the congregations' continued faithfulness.

Addressing the merger talks among Midwestern Lutheran church groups of the early 1960s, Robert L. Lee writes in his forthcoming book on the history of the AFLC, *From Freedom to Life*:

¹³³ Mark A. Noll has demonstrated in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* that two parties that are equally committed to orthodox faith and Scriptural authority can read the Bible in diametrically different ways. These divergent readings are often strongly influenced by cultural outlook and historical circumstances that are unique to each position. It is possible that Sverdrup, shortly after coming to America, began to read Scripture in a distinctly American way, reflecting values and expectations that were at odds with more traditional European ways of approaching the Bible. Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 121–23. As was evident earlier in this paragraph, Sverdrup freely acknowledged that the church in the New World "learned the practice of freedom" from its American civic situation. See footnote 129.

As an example of Sverdrup reading Scripture in a distinctly American way, one might study "Is It Possible for Norwegian Lutherans To Build A Christian Free Church In America?" (Hamre, "Sverdrup's Concept," 27–57.).

¹³⁴ This is my summary of that Statement, preserving much of the original wording: The objections which we have raised against the American Lutheran Church: 1. Her membership in the World Council of Churches. 2. Theology [Changing attitudes towards the Word of God and towards Roman Catholicism.] 3. Church Polity [Smaller, less representative General Convention with a delegate system. More powerful district presidents.] 4. The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, all represent the Lutheran Church as being high-churchly. 5. And the American Lutheran Church does not represent the pietism we believe is needed and right for our day. The complete statement is in Christopherson, *Free and Living*, 268–80.

In the same issue [of *The Lutheran Messenger*] a letter from a reader noted that articles favoring the merger were written by church “dignitaries,” and suggesting that it is their privilege to go where they may enjoy what is lacking in their association with the Lutheran Free Church, and “permit those of us who still believe that the Lutheran Free Church offers something more than ‘bigness’ to its membership, to continue in our own small but humble way to further His work on earth.” The writer continued:

Instead of preaching and printing so much ‘church union,’ it would be to the edification of many of our pastors and congregations to make known the principles upon which the Lutheran Free Church was organized and why our church group is ‘different.’¹³⁵

Indeed, it is at the core of the AFLC’s identity and self-understanding that the Christian church must offer “something more than ‘bigness.’” The sense of “bigger is better” seems to run only slightly beneath the surface in the various merger movements within American Lutheranism, and perhaps within American Christianity at large. However, no such talk could be overt because it stood in contrast to the accepted LFC/AFLC narrative of the early church based on its understanding of Scripture that we have recalled. In an important form of this narrative of identity, the laity in the congregations have sometimes shown themselves better stewards of the church’s theology and unique heritage than were denominational officials, institutional educators or even a number of pastors.¹³⁶ Because of this, it is not uncommon to encounter the AFLC story being told with a fair bit of skepticism towards denominational leadership.

This narrative builds on several passages in the New Testament which warn against “false apostles.”¹³⁷ This story of bad leadership for God’s people goes back well into the Old Testament too.¹³⁸ Here is a conundrum for the people of God by which the AFLC narrative seems to be

¹³⁵ Robert Lloyd Lee, *From Freedom to Life* (Minneapolis: Ambassador, forthcoming).

¹³⁶ See “First Months” and “A Fellowship in Progress” in Lee, *From Freedom to Life*.

¹³⁷ 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2; John 10:5–13; Acts 20:28–30; 2 Pet. 2:1–3. Also in 2 Tim. 2:17 the apostate Hymenaeus and Philetus are disparaged, being examples of those who perform the pastoral work poorly.

¹³⁸ The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, (Lev. 10:1–2) as well as the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, (1 Sam. 2:12–13) are all condemned in Scripture for godless behavior. Multiple times in his prophecy, Jeremiah

strongly shaped—the prophets and pastors provide God’s people with the Word of God but are not consistently faithful. Their false prophecies often misled the people who lacked their own access to the Word. “Would that all the LORD’S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Nm. 11:29). The AFLC’s narrative self-identity focusses on that day when God does put His Spirit on all His people and is also the moment when the first New Testament congregation comes into being.¹³⁹

On a more personal note. In my own experience as a Lutheran parish pastor in the upper plains states of the AFLC for 25 years, the congregations I served received into membership many of what I would call *refugees* from other congregations affiliated with more theologically liberal and less congregational synods—primarily the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessors. These refugees number in the hundreds from over 20 congregations.¹⁴⁰ I have always felt that there was a confluence of stories between these refugees and the AFLC as a whole, as each has sought the freedom to believe and live their Christian faith without having to fight against unfaithful denominational leadership. Through listening to the stories of their difficult experiences, I have come to suspect that almost every one of those congregations would have been better off if it had been able to govern its own affairs and choose its own confession of the Word, rather than be misdirected by the powerful synod or the

criticizes the faithless prophets of Israel (10:21; 12:10; 23:1; 50:6; 23:25–29).

¹³⁹ “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such a thing? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?” (Isa. 66: 8).

The miraculous deed that Isaiah proclaims is the birth of the congregation with the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. The congregation did not come to be by some human exertion or wise calculation. It came as a gracious gift from God, a glorious fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the ascended Savior fulfilled the promise He gave the disciples, before His death, of the Advocate He would send and the Spirit of Truth He would give them. When the Spirit came, when the tempest roared with majesty, when the tongues of fire sat on each of the disciples, and when the Spirit’s blessed witness of God’s great deeds sounded in many languages, then the congregation came to be, “*an entire people brought forth in one moment.*” *Sverdrup Journal* I: 25–26.

¹⁴⁰ Although I tell this as a personal story, it is really a common story told by many AFLC pastors and congregations.

influence of the synodically sympathetic pastors. In my eyes, a tidal wave of false doctrine engulfed God's bride *from above*. What was it that these refugees had in the absence of sound, biblical preaching and teaching? They had a history, a remembrance of earlier faithfulness that had not forsaken them. Their love for and commitment to the teaching they had been brought up with led them to more biblical and confessional congregations.

As the AFLC tells this history it becomes a warning against placing the congregation in subservience to fallible pastors and denominational managers. At the same time, the congregation's freedom is not usually expressed in a way that invalidates the useful role of these leaders in appealing to the free congregation based on the true authority of God's Word—wherever they see error and sin, let them call the congregation to repentance in Christ.

Although not directly connected to any particular historical event, there is another part of the AFLC's narrative identity which merits attention. This narrative element is seen in the church throughout the several millennia of its past. I call this part the story of the *ordinary* congregation.

The congregation, Christ's dearly loved bride, beautiful in His eyes, is frequently subject to scorn in the world. Indeed many congregations are small, backwards, tired, and troubled. Very few that are faithful to Christ are ever honored in this present dark time. But Scripture teaches us to expect such things. "That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). "Blessed are the poor in spirit, ... those who mourn, ... the meek, ... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:3–6). This way of talking about the church is very much a part of the AFLC's narrative identity. From Constantine to Osteen men have tried to lift the church out of its humble state and present it to the world in glory and triumph. Perhaps it seems to them that

the Supreme Lord of all creation ought to have a kingdom that He can be proud of, because it exceeds all other kingdoms, causes and organizations in knowledge, riches, determination, and downright pizzazz. Yet God's revealed will in the understanding of the AFLC is that his bride remain quite ordinary.¹⁴¹

Indeed, the AFLC is especially keen on how the Lord has a fondness for ordinary things: Israel, his chosen people (Deut. 7:7), suffering (2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 2:10), vocation (Matt. 25:40), little children (Matt. 18:3), the means of grace (1 Cor. 1:18, 21), faith (Jer. 9:24; Eph. 2:8–9), John, the Forerunner (Matt. 11:11), the shameful cross (Heb. 12:2), even His incarnate Son (Isa. 53:2b; Phil. 2:7). The humble and ordinary local congregation fits into this pattern nicely (Luke 12:32; Rev. 3:8). This narrative within the AFLC's identity stands in contrast to another narrative (real or imagined) in which the smaller, less significant congregations are supposed to band together and consolidate their influence so as to not remain powerless and subject to ridicule. The AFLC narrative often continues with the suspicion that churchmen with an ambitious eye on higher status often find their way into and thrive in denominational offices. But the narrative seems to stop before the conclusion that church bureaucrats are all plagued with a vainglorious attitude or that the work they do is not beneficial and necessary. The experience of the AFLC persuades it towards just the opposite conclusion.

¹⁴¹ Kurt E. Marquart, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics: Vol. IX: The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*. (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 1990), 6–7:

Since the church is of a piece with Christ, she must share His earthly fate: "As He is, so are we in this world" (I John 4:17; cf. John 15:18–21). "He has become one cake with us by faith" (Luther). This means that "everything that happens with Christ forms a prefiguration for the church." [...]

Christ quite deliberately rejected the high road of easy popularity, and chose the low road of the cross, thus reversing the choice of Adam (Matt. 4:1–11; cf. Gen. 3:1–7). That too is the way of His Church. Just as Christ's divine nature and glory were not self-evident to common sense (John 6:42), so also His church and her dignity are hidden under "weaknesses, sins, errors, and various offenses and forms of the cross ... that it is not evident to the senses anywhere." Unlike the Scarlet Woman of Rev. 17, the humble maid of Christ gives herself no airs (Rev. 12). Relying only on the blessing and protection of the God-man, the pilgrim church cheerfully shares His ignominy "outside" the camp—until her pilgrimage is consummated in the glorious City of God (Heb. 13:11–14). "And blessed is he whoever is not offended in Me" (Matt. 11:6).

The ordinary nature of the Christian congregation as a narrative element stands in true tension to the biblical teaching of the glorious church which also finds its way into the AFLC narrative of the congregation. Christ's church (especially congregations), His precious bride, does have its own peculiar glory.¹⁴² According to this part of the narrative, the decentralization which occurs through congregational self-government places the focus on the congregations over the denomination and prevents the larger denomination from assuming a posture of authoritarian control or self-importance.

In light of God's surprising preference for ordinary, even extremely humble, things, what expression or form for His church should we expect or pursue? The largest and most impressive? Or the smallest and most humble? The AFLC sees itself fulfilling the role of this humble bride and body of Christ, eschewing earthly glory and satisfied with the marginalized life it has in the world and in the contemporary, institutional church.

Summary

God is the great story-teller. Both His created cosmos and the divine work of redeeming it come to pass in and through a narrative which He Himself tells. Scripture is the infallible and inerrant narrative of both creation and redemption. Each Christian led by the Spirit seeks to find his own place in that story, but our additions are never guaranteed to be infallible or inerrant. We tell our part of the story as best we can, laying our hope alone on what God has perfectly said.

The narrative of the AFLC, like all other church bodies, is one of those fallible human attempts to find our story in God's. The Free Lutheran Bible College serves the AFLC by

¹⁴² The church enjoys Christ's unconditional favor and His richest blessings (Eph. 5:27), while sharing His resurrection life and sitting with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:5–6). She is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), holding the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 16:19). Destined to reign with Christ through all the ages (Rev. 22:5) the congregation is that institution—existing by Christ's will and work alone—through which the blessings of salvation come to the dark and dying world.

teaching its students to appreciate and participate in the life of its free Lutheran congregations. By teaching the doctrine of Lutheran congregationalism with both theology and history, it is hoped that the students will have a clearer and more substantive understanding of this theology and its meaning. The study performed by this MAP will see if any success can be documented.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research project made use of the students registered for Salvation Theology (TH 2302) at FLBC in the Spring 2021 Semester. Dr. James Molstre, the school's Chief Academic Officer, was consulted and his approval obtained for the implementation of this project (See Appendix Six). The students in Salvation Theology (TH 2302) were an exact sampling of the target group for this study, the students at FLBC. Fifty students registered for the class. It was hoped that at least half of the class would choose to participate. The class syllabus (Appendix Five) had this notice:

Students in Salvation Theology (TH 2302) will have the opportunity this semester to participate in Professor Mundfrom's Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project research through Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. His research project will attempt to measure the effectiveness of certain teaching techniques related to the AFLC's Doctrine of the Church. Participants will fill out two assessment surveys, one before and one after the project material is presented. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous. Participation or non-participation will not in any way factor into the course requirements or grading.

Besides the notice in the syllabus, it was announced in class several times and numerous students were personally invited to participate. Students who chose to participate signed a consent document that identified their participation as voluntary and not part of the grading of the course (See Appendix Seven). Their responses to the surveys were anonymous. Neither their participation or non-participation, nor their actual survey responses were considered in any way for the grading of the course—no correlation has been attempted between the survey results and the students' identity. Strict anonymity and confidentiality has been practiced throughout the whole course of the MAP preparation, field research and final analysis. Because the students were enrolled in a required class yielding a grade which would impact their GPA and become

part of their permanent academic record, it was deemed unwise to conduct any research that was not completely anonymous. That decision meant that quantitative methods rather than qualitative methods would be used in the field research. Students who did not participate in the research project were granted equal access to the material that was presented to those who did participate.

The classroom setting seems a natural location of study for the vocation that God has called me to. I love to teach and have been told on several occasions that I have noticeable teaching gifts or skills. FLBC student course evaluations seem to bear this out. Still, it is far too much of a temptation for teachers like me to remain static in our abilities and fear may keep us from testing the results of our work in a standardized and controlled manner. Additionally, I would characterize myself as traditional and somewhat rigid in personality and outlook, unlikely to try anything new or edgy without some prodding. The need to conduct this study for the Doctor of Ministry degree was a perfect opportunity to expand both skills and understanding.

The method of selecting the subjects for this study was rather straightforward. There are 50–60 students usually registered for the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) course every spring semester, the whole first-year class. I understood right away that all participation had to be voluntary so the study was structured accordingly. Many students indicated to me casually that they would participate, but in the end there were twenty-two who followed through. This seems like a small number out of fifty registered students, but other observers might consider it a good response. The study ran from late March to early May, with three classroom lectures on theology and three classroom lectures on the historical narrative. There was a rather long delay between the second and third class periods because of spring break. The graph below shows the class and survey schedule as it was conceived and implemented (figure 1). There were no unexpected incidents that necessitated any change or delay in the originally planned schedule.

Figure 1.

Before March 28	Preparation of Lecture Material and Survey
March 28	First Theological, Exegetical Lecture
March 30	Second Theological, Exegetical Lecture
April 20	Third Theological, Exegetical Lecture
After April 20	Survey #1
April 25	First Historical Narrative Lecture
April 27	Second Historical Narrative Lecture
May 2	Third Historical Narrative Lecture
After May 2	Survey #2
After May 2	Field Research Analysis

In accordance with the normal course of the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) instruction participants in the study were taught the AFLC model of church polity focusing on congregational self-government from an exegetical/systematic perspective (See Appendix Two, “Salvation Theology Lecture Notes”). Then an assessment survey was given to measure their awareness and understanding of church polity up to that point. Then the whole class, participants and non-participants, were given additional instruction through an historical narrative about the AFLC related to congregational polity. This historical material was presented as a continuous historical narrative running over the three class periods, interspersed with questions and discussion as prompted by the students. The study participants were then surveyed a second time to see if their understanding had changed any from before the historical/narrative portion was taught. All of the teaching was done during the normally scheduled class times for Salvation Theology (TH 2302). The classes were held in Heritage Hall on the campus of FLBC in Plymouth, MN.

I prepared the survey myself. The primary aim of the survey was to measure the participant’s understanding of the AFLC’s congregational polity. One might characterize the

survey as seeking to find out if the students would learn to “think” like a Free Lutheran when faced with statements about life in the congregation. The survey did not consist of questions *per se*, but of statements with which the participants would either agree or disagree (see Appendix Three). From an initial list of over thirty potential statements that were considered, I narrowed the number down to nineteen. The survey had two sections. The first asked “housekeeping” questions about the student and his participation in the research study. There were four questions in this section. The second section consisted of nineteen statements about the congregation and its life in the larger church body. Each statement was formulated as an affirmation with which the student agrees or disagrees. There were four possible responses: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. The statements were phrased so that a student who understands the AFLC position is likely to *disagree* with the statement. For example, statement #20 states “Once our ancestors left the authority and control of the State Churches of Europe, they no longer faced any threats to their congregational life and freedom.” If a student disagreed with the statement that would show a greater awareness of the variations to self-government which may happen to a congregation. Within the survey there were some statements that aimed mostly at theological understanding such as #9, “Congregational freedom in only one way to understand and interpret the teaching of the New Testament.” Other statements addressed more practical matters, such as #6 “Strong denominational (national) leadership usually helps a congregation to keep itself pure in faith, profession, and practice.” There were also several statements related to the history of the LFC and the AFLC, like #12, “The AFLC’s forefathers (Sverdrup and Oftedal) were widely appreciated for their innovative views of the congregation.” In creating the survey, no particular statements were deemed to be especially significant, and which would therefore give more meaningful results than any other statements. The goal

throughout was to create a survey which could be analyzed as a whole.

The theological portion of the lectures was divided into two parts. The first part reviewed the nature of the church through the lens of the Nicene Creed (One, Holy, catholic, apostolic) and then through the lens of the Augsburg Confession to present the marks of the church: the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments. Several Biblical ideas were also covered during the first part of the theological section including the picture of the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. The second part of the theological section covered the Fundamental Principles of the AFLC (Appendix One). These Principles were covered in order providing a Biblical defense/explanation and some practical considerations for each Principle or group of Principles. For example, Principles two and three were studied together because they form a pair that identifies the true congregation as consisting only of believers (Principle #2) and differentiates it from the congregation's necessary organization (Principle #3).

The historical narrative which was prepared especially for this MAP was also presented over three class periods. The narrative focused on two particular periods of time: the period of immigration when the Lutheran Free Church was formed, including a brief look at the ideas and attitudes towards church life that were carried over to America from Norway by the immigrants.¹⁴³ The second period covered the end of the Lutheran Free Church and the formation of the AFLC in the early 1960s, with special attention to the troubles of one particular congregation: Grace Free Lutheran Church in Valley City, ND. (When the merger occurred the congregation in Valley City was First Lutheran Church, served by Rev. Fritjof Monseth. When

¹⁴³ Because the LFC was conceived of and formed by Norwegian immigrants against the backdrop of their different experiences in both Norway and America, an understanding of their life in Norway prior to emigration is exceedingly helpful in order to grasp the reasons that the LFC was formed.

that congregation was forced, against the will of the majority, into the newly formed ALC, a new congregation was formed by a group of dissenters under the name Grace Free Lutheran Church. First Lutheran Church, later renamed Faith Lutheran Church, continued its membership in the ALC. Pastor Monseth was eventually dismissed by First Lutheran Church and was soon thereafter called to be the pastor of Grace Free Lutheran Church.)

I have a special interest in and awareness of the history of this congregation as I was its pastor for seven years (2008–2015) including the time when the fiftieth anniversary was celebrated with typical reminiscences that occur at church anniversaries. The history of First Lutheran/Grace Free Lutheran is especially noteworthy because of some legal action that was brought at this critical time in its past. A twentieth anniversary yearbook of the AFLC offers an account of the division within the Valley City congregation and the subsequent legal proceedings:

[A] court trial arising out of merger problems was held at Valley City, N. Dak., July 14–Sept. 4, 1964, with Judge Douglas B. Heen presiding. This action was brought by an anti-merger steering committee from within the AFLC to test the legality of procedures used for certifying congregations of the LFC into the ALC. The pastor in Valley City at the time of the merger was Rev. Fritjof B. Monseth. His congregation was split over the merger and certification issue. The pro-merger portion of the First Lutheran Church, the congregation in question, sought to remove him from his pastorate when he refused to resign after the church was certified to the ALC. He believed, with some of his people, that a simple majority could hold the congregation out of the merger. Eventually he was locked out of the church but continued to occupy the parsonage adjacent to the church.

On Mar. 18, 1965, Judge Heen ruled that First Lutheran had been properly certified into the ALC. The portion of the congregation which agreed with Pastor Monseth, having thus lost its church building, later purchased the former Methodist church near downtown Valley City and has prospered in all ways.¹⁴⁴

The decision of Judge Heen became a precedent for other congregations that also took action

¹⁴⁴*The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations: Twenty Years of Beginnings and Blessings 1962–1982* (n.p.: AFLC Board of Publications and Parish Education, 1982), 5.

against joining the new synod.¹⁴⁵ In his decision which affirmed the legality of First Lutheran Church's certification into the ALC, Judge Heen stated: "[P]rior to the time of actual merger the church members had not indicated their intentions of withdrawing from the Lutheran Free Church and by their omission and silence gave an expression of congregational approval of the necessary certification for merger with the ALC."¹⁴⁶ In retrospect, that legal defeat is viewed mostly in a positive light in the present-day AFLC narrative as a useful incentive to "let the past be the past" and move forward with eagerness.

The historical portion of the teaching, developed for this MAP, consisted of three narrative lectures covering the two historical periods just mentioned. These narratives were presented along with time for discussion in three fifty-minute class periods. Salvation Theology (TH 2302) was a two-credit class comprising about twenty-eight total class periods. The combined theological and historical sections amounted to roughly a quarter of the total course material presented, or six individual class periods. Thus the newly created historical presentation related to this MAP took up one half of the total portion allotted to the discussion of the AFLC's congregational polity.

Implementation Timeline

The historical narrative prepared for this MAP was presented to the students during the Spring 2021 semester of Salvation Theology (TH2302) on the following dates: April 25, April 27, and May 2.

First, the historical narrative was composed based on my historical studies and reading.

¹⁴⁵ Lee, "Before the Magistrates."

¹⁴⁶ Lee, "Before the Magistrates." If this were a longer (or different) project, a lot could be said about the ramifications of Judge Heen's decision.

Quite a bit of my knowledge of the AFLC's history has been absorbed gradually over the years growing up in the AFLC as the story has been told and retold. In many ways it was internalized in bits and pieces. Besides the "facts" of the story as they have been frequently told and remembered, I also acquired an attitude towards the people and events—a "feeling" about who the heroes were and what parts of the story are tragic and what parts are delightful. I experienced first hand the working of a narrative identity and its influence. For the purposes of this MAP (and other classroom presentation) my intuitions needed to be substantiated by other more accurate historical recollections, such as published history texts.

The participants were first surveyed to measure their understanding of the congregational church model after the exegetical and systematic instruction as normally occurs in this course. This happened during three periods of classroom instruction. Then the historical narrative which was prepared for this MAP was presented to the class also using three periods of classroom instruction, and then students were surveyed a second time. The same survey statements were given for both the first and second times that the survey was administered. The surveys were prepared using Microsoft Forms with no name required. Each student was given a randomly generated four-digit ID number so that I could match their first set of answers with their second set of answers. The ID number also enabled me to remove surveys of students who were disqualified (one student was absent from class and missed part of the historical narrative). I kept a list of those names and numbers, but I have not looked at it since the numbers were assigned. The ID numbers pose a potential risk that the students anonymity could be compromised, but the ID numbers were necessary to track any changes in responses. The surveys were completed by the students on their own time outside of class. The average time to complete the survey was about five minutes. Students were strongly encouraged to take the online survey as soon as

possible after the conclusion of each section of the lecture, both theological and historical. Twelve days elapsed between the first time the participants took the survey and the second time. The surveys were taken online using Microsoft Teams.

Finally, the survey results were examined by me to discover if any measurable change in viewpoint or understanding was evident. Now the findings are presented here in the MAP for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Concordia–St. Louis.

After the completion of the study, the survey data will be stored on a USB flash drive where it will be held for seven years in the archives of the FLBC library in a locked cabinet or container. Then the data will be destroyed. The material that was developed for teaching will be adjusted for effectiveness and may be used in future FLBC courses as opportunity arises.¹⁴⁷

Methodological Approach

The methodological approach of this study was to use Action Research. Action research seeks to study a problem or concern while also applying a solution, that is, I did more than simply look at the problem, I also acted to remedy it. So, my concern that the students might not effectively be taught the theology and practice of congregational self-government was addressed in two ways. I surveyed the students to see what they actually knew and understood and I attempted to improve the quality of the teaching by adding an additional component in the form of an historical narrative. The goal was to measure an increase in comprehension of church polity and congregational self-government by teaching the history of the LFC/AFLC. The measurement apparatus was a pair of anonymous surveys given to the participants before and after the historical narrative was presented.

¹⁴⁷ Since the field research was completed, the teaching assignments at FLBC have been rearranged and some changes in the curriculum have occurred. The primary responsibility for teaching the doctrine of the church has been taken on by another professor.

Research Methodology

The implementation of this study involved quantitative research. By using the same assessment survey before and after the MAP material, it was hoped that the study would demonstrate the effectiveness of using an historical narrative along with theological instruction to teach the concept and value of congregational self-government. A quantitative method was chosen over a qualitative method because of the nature of class-room instruction. At FLBC we have a variety of students from various denominational backgrounds. The students do not come to the college with the expectation that they must embrace either Lutheran theology or the congregational vision of our founders in order to succeed in their educational goals. That is, students are graded based on their understanding of Lutheran doctrine and AFLC polity, not on their belief in or acceptance of these positions. It can be seen from the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) syllabus that one of the program outcomes at FLBC is that students will “Understand and embrace the New Testament model of the congregation and its commitment to scriptural evangelism, discipleship, worship, education, servant leadership, and stewardship, as guided by the AFLC Fundamental Principles” (see Appendix One). While we hope that students will “embrace” the doctrine, the specific goal on which the students are graded is understanding, and the manner of instruction (primarily lecture and classroom discussion) is most directly aimed at the transfer of knowledge. It is freely granted that more needs to be done to pass along this heritage and foster sympathy for it besides the telling of the AFLC story. Within the limitations of the course and the classroom, it was not considered workable to engage in additional activities of this kind (e. g. liturgical practices) which aim more towards affection than towards cognitive understanding. Furthermore, the quantitative method was deemed best to safeguard the anonymity of the research subjects.

Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher

Inasmuch as the AFLC identifies its Lutheran Confession to be the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, those confessions were the focus of any confessional issues that arise.

This study was limited in these ways:

This study did not attempt to measure the teaching effectiveness of different presenters or the effectiveness of the material in different teaching environments or with a different demographic. Only my own teaching to this specific class of students was measured. Further, the study did not look at the individuals in the class and attempt to track the results for any subgroup within the general population. The group was only studied as an aggregate.

This study did not attempt to judge the biblical validity of the Confessional positions related to church form and structure. It was assumed that past events are still exerting an influence on the life of the church today as expressed in the doctrinal portion of the MAP.

My role in the research was as both course instructor and MAP researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA

Data Analyses

After the field research, consisting of theological instruction, an initial survey, the presentation of the historical narrative and a follow-up survey, twenty-two valid responses were available for evaluation. As previously stated, the surveys were structured to provide data on the students' understanding of congregational self-government as it is practiced in the AFLC, specifically looking for an increased understanding after the historical narrative was given. It has been projected that the later survey results (after the historical narratives had been presented) will show a better grasp of the critical ideas as conceived in this project's objectives, based on what has been discovered both theologically and philosophically about the importance and impact of narrative and history in people's understanding. The surveys were analyzed shortly after they were taken. I have summarized the results here and the raw data is included in the MAP as an appendix (see appendix four). In the following analysis, the major conclusions are drawn from the overall statistics for the nineteen survey statements responded to by twenty-two students. Altogether, there were four hundred and eighteen responses given, (19 statements x 22 surveys = 418 total responses). These results are analyzed in aggregate.

The first survey was administered after the April 21st class period at which time the first section of lectures covering the theological teaching on the congregation was concluded. The data is presented in the chart below (figure 2). The primary purpose of the first survey is to provide a baseline to evaluate the second survey and was not meant to be analyzed as a stand-alone artifact. Since I desired to know what change would take place with the additional teaching of the historical narratives, it was necessary to measure the knowledge of the students before that

teaching material was presented. A good baseline has been recorded, which was the main goal. However, there are several observations of a limited scope that can be made very cautiously with respect to the first survey. In figure 2 the horizontal axis contains the statement item numbers from the survey and the vertical axis contains the ID numbers of the student participants. In the colored cells there are numbers 1 through 4, 1 indicating a response in agreement with the AFLC viewpoint and 4 indicating a response that lacks agreement with the AFLC viewpoint. These numbers are color-coded for easier recognition. Light blue corresponds to the number 1, medium blue with number 2, medium dark blue with number 3 and dark blue with number 4.

Figure 2.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
1516	A	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	4	1	2	1	1
2179	nA	2	1	2	4	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	1
2322	A	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	3
2371	A	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
2465	nA	3	2	2	3	2	3	4	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	4	2	2	3	2
2526	A	2	2	2	4	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
2817	nA	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2
2851	A	4	3	2	4	1	4	2	2	3	1	1	4	1	4	4	2	2	3	1
2952	A	3	1	2	2	1	3	3	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	4	1	2	2	1
3441	A	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	1	3	2	4	3	2	2	3	2
5703	A	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	4	2	2	2	3	2
5778	nA	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	1
6071	nA	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	1	4	2	2	4	3	2
6095	A	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	3	2	2	3	1	1	3	1
6425	A	3	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
6523	A	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	1
7246	A	3	3	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	1	4	3	1
7304	A	4	3	2	3	1	3	1	1	4	2	4	4	1	4	4	3	1	3	1
7943	nA	4	2	4	4	2	3	4	1	1	2	3	3	1	3	2	1	4	3	1
7986	nA	2	2	1	4	1	4	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	3	3	1	2	3	1
8723	nA	4	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	3	2	2	2	1	2
8727	A	3	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	3	1

It will be noted that already, before the historical narratives were presented, 21% of the total responses to all of the survey statements received a “strongly agree” with the AFLC position (a 1 with light blue shading) and 37% of the total responses to all of the survey

statements received a “somewhat agree” with the AFLC position (a 2 with medium blue shading). Together, these two possible responses to the survey statements show that a correct understanding of the AFLC position has been given for 58% of the total survey statements. The breakdown for each of the possible responses on the first survey was as follows:

- 1 (strongly disagree)—87 (21%) light blue shading
- 2 (somewhat disagree)—155 (37%) medium blue shading
- 3 (somewhat agree)—128 (31%) medium dark blue shading
- 4 (strongly agree)—48 (11%) dark blue shading

It may be that the AFLC position was already well understood through widespread teaching of the denomination’s theological understanding of its polity which occurs in the congregations themselves and which the students possessed before attending FLBC. This observation may undermine the initial assumption that I had made at the very beginning of the project, that many FLBC students do not grasp the AFLC’s polity of congregational self-government. Or perhaps the theology is not expressly taught as much as the stories are told—which is a much more natural part of human social interaction. The sense has been caught more than taught. As has been seen in the theological section of the MAP, stories are often a better medium for the communication of meaning than theological propositions, what we normally think of as theology. It is certainly possible that I drew the conclusion that the AFLC view of congregational self-government was not well understood because my theological questions to the students were not answered with theological propositions as I expected they would be.

Rather than hastily discard that initial concern, other possibilities should be considered. It may also be the case that other courses at the Bible College have covered this subject more than I realized and perhaps in a more narrative fashion. As an instructor, I have not conducted a formal inquiry of the other faculty to find out precisely how much time or emphasis is placed on teaching these doctrines in their classes. Several anecdotal accounts that I had heard from time to

time had suggested that at times not much effort had been put towards that end. Even if they cover it more than I realized, my responsibility in teaching the doctrine of the church is to give as thorough and effective a presentation as the opportunity allows. Another possible ramification of the rather high level of knowledge after only the theological instruction had been presented is the likelihood that the students at FLBC have developed a significant ability to grasp course material through Bible exposition and doctrinal instruction alone. While I have argued that teaching theology and history together is likely to be most effective, that does not warrant the conclusion that the bare teaching of theological propositions is pointless. Most of the teaching in most of the courses in the whole FLBC curriculum involves the exposition and/or application of Scripture in a largely traditional, higher-educational manner—with its strongly narrative character. The curriculum consists mostly of Bible-centered classes (such as *Pentateuch* or *Prison Letters*) augmented by classes using Scripture which are centered on theology (e. g. *Salvation Theology*) or practical application (e. g., *Children's Ministries*). It can be hoped that the students get a lot out of these courses as they have been taught from the Word of God. It must be assumed that the students who choose to attend FLBC are already highly motivated to study the Bible and grow in their Scriptural knowledge. They have learned to make the most of their classroom instruction even when the best techniques are not always used. As a researcher, I have to recognize that with this apparently high level of understanding before the historical narrative is presented, it may be difficult to move many students upwards towards an even more thorough understanding.

The second survey was administered after the May 2 class period, at which time the historical narrative was completed (figure 3). The second survey marked the end of the field research for this MAP. All of the material had been presented and the data had been collected. The second survey was taken to make a comparison with the baseline measured by the first

survey. In figure 3 as in figure 2, the horizontal axis contains the statement item numbers from the survey and the vertical axis contains the ID numbers of the student participants. In the colored cells there are numbers 1 through 4, 1 indicating a response in agreement with the AFLC viewpoint and 4 indicating a response that lacks agreement with the AFLC viewpoint. These numbers are color-coded for easier recognition. Light green corresponds to the number 1, medium green with number 2, medium dark green with number 3 and dark green with number 4.

Figure 3.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
1516	A	2	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1
2179	nA	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	1
2322	A	4	4	2	3	1	1	1	2	3	2	3	3	1	3	3	1	1	3	2
2371	A	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
2465	nA	3	2	2	3	3	3	4	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2
2526	A	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
2817	nA	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
2851	A	3	2	2	4	1	4	1	3	4	1	1	4	2	4	4	1	2	1	1
2952	A	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	3	1
3441	A	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	4	3	2	3	3	1
5703	A	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	1
5778	nA	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	1	3	3	1
6071	nA	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2
6095	A	2	1	1	4	1	1	4	1	2	1	1	4	1	3	3	2	2	1	1
6425	A	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
6523	A	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	4	3	1	2	2
7246	A	1	2	4	4	1	2	1	1	2	1	4	4	1	3	1	1	4	1	1
7304	A	2	3	2	3	1	1	3	1	3	1	4	4	1	4	2	4	2	3	1
7943	nA	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	1	1	2	3	3	1	4	3	1	4	4	1
7986	nA	4	3	2	4	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	2	1	2	3	1
8723	nA	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	1
8727	A	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	2

Again, a “1” (light green) indicated the highest level of understanding of the AFLC viewpoint and a “4” (dark green) represents the lowest level. On this second survey the ratio of 1s to 4s was 122 to 34. That is, there were 3.6 times more responses that strongly favored the AFLC position than there were responses that strongly disfavored it. In the first survey this ratio was less than 2 to 1 (exactly 87 to 48). The breakdown for each answer on the second survey was

as follows:

- 1 (strongly disagree)—122 (29%) light green
- 2 (somewhat disagree)—138 (33%) medium green
- 3 (somewhat agree)—124 (30%) medium dark green
- 4 (strongly agree)—34 (8%) dark green

Again, the statements in the survey were worded so that a participant who understands the AFLC teaching of congregational polity as it has been taught will *disagree* with that statement. Also, within the structure of the study, neither survey was intended to be very significant in itself. The valuable data would come from a comparison of the two surveys, the matter to which I now turn.

The following graph (figure 4) provides a combination of the data from figures 2 and 3 of the research. In this graph, as in the previous figures the horizontal axis contains the item number of the survey statements and the vertical axis indicates the ID# of each student who participated in the survey. The second column indicates whether the student was raised in an AFLC church or not. (The present study did not make use of this data except to show the balance of each group participating in the survey.) The rest of the columns (3–21) correspond to the survey statements that the students have responded to (see appendix three. Survey questions 2 and 4 have been omitted from this graph¹⁴⁸). In the body of the graph, each cell has a number followed by a “greater than” symbol followed by another number (3>2). The first number corresponds to the student’s response on the first survey and the second number corresponds to his response on the second survey. The “greater than” symbol indicates movement from the first to the second survey. In this way, the graph indicates which students’ responses suggest a greater understanding of the material after the historical narrative was presented. A value of 1 (strongly disagree) suggests a better knowledge of the AFLC’s congregational structure while a value of 4

¹⁴⁸ Question #2 asked for the student’s gender. Fourteen females and eight males took the survey. Question #4 asked what days, if any, the student was missing from the lecture classes. Only the responses of students with perfect attendance during the whole course of the MAP field research have been used.

(strongly agree) suggests a poorer knowledge. Note that this numbering is somewhat counterintuitive in that movement to a lower number indicates a better understanding.

Figure 4.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
1516	A	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2179	nA	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2322	A	2 > 4	3 > 4	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 1	3 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 1	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 2
2371	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2
2465	nA	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2526	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3
2817	nA	4 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 4	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2851	A	4 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
2952	A	3 > 3	1 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	1 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	1 > 1
3441	A	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	2 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1
5703	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1
5778	nA	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 3	1 > 1
6071	nA	3 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	4 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 2	4 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2
6095	A	1 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
6425	A	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
6523	A	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	4 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 2
7246	A	3 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 4	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 3	3 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 1	1 > 1
7304	A	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 3	2 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 2	3 > 4	1 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
7943	nA	4 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 4	1 > 1
7986	nA	2 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 3	4 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
8723	nA	4 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1
8727	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 3	1 > 2
		Unchanged: 229/418		55%																
		Minus 1: 96/418		23%																
		Minus 2: 22/418		5%																
		Plus 1: 62/418		15%																
		Plus 2: 9/418		2%																
		Plus 3: 1/418		0.2%																

I have used shading to indicate how much change the students' responses had from survey 1 to survey 2, as is indicated in the figures at the bottom of the graph. Again, a "1" indicated the highest level of understanding of the AFLC viewpoint and a "4" represents the lowest level. The raw data of this comparison graph is as follows:

unchanged:	229 responses	55%	no change	dark gray shading
minus 1:	96 responses	23%	minor improvement	pale yellow shading
minus 2:	22 responses	5%	major improvement	bright yellow shading
plus 1:	62 responses	15%	minor decline	pale red shading
plus 2:	9 responses	2%	major decline	bright red shading
plus 3:	1 response	0.2%	maximum decline	bright blue shading

Over half of the students' responses (55%) showed no change between the two surveys (dark gray shading). It was noted after the first survey that over half of the responses were already in agreement with the AFLC viewpoint before the historical narrative was presented. Little or no change would be expected for these responses. It can also be seen that there was both improved understanding and declining understanding. Each of these results will be addressed separately.

Before I analyze the responses that changed, I will briefly discuss the responses that showed no change between the first and second survey. This data is contained in figure 5.

Figure 5.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
1516	A	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2179	nA	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2322	A	2 > 4	3 > 4	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 1	3 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 1	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 2
2371	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2
2465	nA	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2526	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3
2817	nA	4 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 4	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2851	A	4 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
2952	A	3 > 3	1 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	1 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	1 > 1
3441	A	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	2 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1
5703	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1
5778	nA	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 3	1 > 1
6071	nA	3 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	4 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 2	4 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2
6095	A	1 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
6425	A	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
6523	A	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	4 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 2
7246	A	3 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 4	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 3	3 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 1	1 > 1
7304	A	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 3	2 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 2	3 > 4	1 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
7943	nA	4 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 4	1 > 1
7986	nA	2 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 3	4 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
8723	nA	4 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1
8727	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 3	1 > 2
		Unchanged: 229/418 55%																		
		strongly disagree = greatest understanding of AFLC view										63 – 15% of all responses					28% of the NO CHANGE subset			
		somewhat disagree = good understanding of AFLC view										79 – 19% of all responses					34% of the NO CHANGE subset			
		somewhat agree = poor understanding of AFLC view										64 – 15% of all responses					28% of the NO CHANGE subset			
		strongly agree = poorest understanding of AFLC view										23 – 6% of all responses					6% of the NO CHANGE subset			

Of the 418 total responses representing all of the responses to all of the survey statements, 229 did not change between the first and second surveys (all the color shaded cells). These 229 responses make up 55% of the responses, over half of them all. For this largest segment of

survey responses, the historical narrative presentation apparently prompted no change. Within this subset of no change responses, 28% already show the greatest level of understanding of the AFLC view and 34% show a good understanding of the AFLC view. The 28% which already show the greatest understanding of the AFLC view cannot improve, while the 34% that show a good understanding could become a little better. On the other hand 40% of all the survey responses that could improve did not change at all despite the historical narrative presentation.

Improved Understanding

Almost one quarter of all responses (23%) showed a one-step improvement from survey #1 to survey #2, what I call a minor improvement. (A “one-step” improvement would be from strongly agree to somewhat agree, from somewhat agree to somewhat disagree, or from somewhat disagree to strongly disagree. See figure 6.) Only a handful of students’ answers (5%) showed a major improvement in understanding of the congregational viewpoint indicated by a “two-step” movement. (A “two-step” improvement would go from strongly agree to somewhat disagree or from somewhat agree to strongly disagree. See figure 6.) These distinctions are visualized and summarized in the following chart (figure 6).

Figure 6.

minor change, one-step (improvement or decline)			
strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree
major change, two-step (improvement or decline)			
strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree
maximum change, three-step (improvement or decline)			
strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree

For all 418 statements responded to in the survey, 28% showed an increased knowledge of the

AFLC's congregational polity. This suggests that a significant benefit has been measured from the first to the second survey, indicating that the use of the historical narrative was beneficial.

The primary research question of this study was whether the overall understanding of the AFLC's polity could be taught in a more effective way using historical narratives alongside the current theological/exegetical instruction. It was not the goal to explore which of several polity paradigms was the most prevalent view, nor which most faithfully represents the Scriptural teaching. Several paradigms were explored in Chapter 2 that set the AFLC teaching in clearer relief. That clarity can be further sharpened by looking at several specific survey responses.

The benefits of the historical instruction previously observed can now be seen in a closer look at some of the details of the survey results. The survey statement which saw the greatest positive movement was #7. Twelve responses moved one step towards greater understanding and three responses moved two steps. Statement #7 is "If we have to choose between the freedom of the local congregation and the strength of unified, corporate action, we should probably choose the benefits of unified action." After the historical narrative was presented, this statement showed a dramatic drop in agreement. Several times in the history of the LFC/AFLC as related in the historical narrative the minority of the church body was pressured to go along with the majority. A common refrain used by the majority to discredit the concerns of the minority was the need for and great benefit of a united voice for the church. This aspect of the merger movements in the LFC were emphasized in the historical narrative. On those occasions the minority was convinced that such a larger, united voice would be a less faithful voice which compromised the teaching of Scripture. Perhaps there is a challenge here to the primarily organizational view of Kloha. (See pages 17–18.) I see his view as primarily organizational in that it does not reckon with the intrusion of a dysfunction (for example: heresy) which would

force the church to ask how important is the unity of the congregations over against the need to stand for Biblical truth. (It is not my suggestion that Kloha would opt for heresy over schism, but that his admittedly brief account of the trans-congregational church does not call for theology to intervene at this point.) The question arises whether the congregations which have been catechized in the great value of catholicity will stand up for truth when the majority is wrong. The historical lesson highlighted in this study reinforces the theology of the church which was taught from the Nicene Creed, that only those who are faithful in confession of the Word can really be considered united in the Biblical sense. The change in perspective which this survey response shows is a welcome benefit for the student at FLBC.

Statement #1 showed the second largest increase in participant understanding in the second survey. Five responses moved one step and four responses moved two steps towards an improved understanding. Statement #1 said, “Most US churches are free to believe, organize and act however they want to.” An important point made in the historical narrative was the prevalence of the state-church paradigm in European Protestantism and how many church bodies in America still have remnants of that structure. Such remnants include the placing of pastors in congregations by the synod or the synod’s possessing final claim to the ownership of a local congregation’s property. For churches with a Norwegian Lutheran heritage, the majority of congregations belong to church bodies that still exercise quite a bit of control over the local congregations. As recently as the 1988 merger which formed the ELCA several congregations were prevented or dissuaded from choosing a more desired synodical affiliation by the denomination’s use or threatened use of force. The most common use of force that I am aware of was the confiscation of property or withholding of a pastor. Perhaps an aspect of Ensign-George’s paradigm is related to this question, highlighting a potential weakness. Ensign-George

placed the denomination over the congregation with his statement that the denomination mediates the universal church to the congregation. (See pages 24–25.) In this mediatorial role the denomination can lord its position over the congregation and delegitimize the congregation’s ministry. If the denomination mediates the universal church to the congregation, what happens when the denomination kicks a congregation out? Does its preaching of the Word and ministry of the sacraments still count though it is done in faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is good to see that the participants have been reinforced in the viewpoint that external power is a potential risk in the kingdom of God. Jesus applies His power in the church through the right preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments. This is the only power that cannot be corrupted or misused. If the students at FLBC become future leaders of congregations or even of the church body, they will be well-served to be on guard against the misuse of power in the church.

The statement which showed the third most improved responses (with eight one-step improvements and one two-step improvement) was #14, “Being a free and living congregation simply means that we do not get orders from the national church body/organization, we only get suggestions.” A related survey statement was #2 which said “The most important part of being a free church is that the people at the headquarters leave us alone to do what we want to do.” (Statement #2 showed much less change between surveys than did #14.) There are several reasons to be glad about this good improvement. The freedom of the local congregation is not *simply* self-government. It is mostly about being in the right condition to govern itself by its submission to the Word and Spirit of God. Oftentimes, when asked how the AFLC is different from other Lutheran church bodies in the USA, the quickest and easiest answer is to point out the political freedom of the congregation. It might be more easily noticed and explained, but it is not

the most important thing. Certainly there are many Christian congregations in this world which are in submission to the Word and Spirit of God which do not function as self-governing congregation. This is wonderful, because the condition of true submission to Christ through the Word and Spirit of God is the most important thing for a congregation—this is its true freedom. It can be hoped that the students at FLBC will learn to make this distinction carefully through many of their courses.

Again, the view of the church that I am presenting to the FLBC students stands out in relief against the other paradigms that have been examined, this time against the viewpoint of Wells. I have previously criticized Wells for his overly negative portrayal of the church throughout history (see pages 49-50), failing to account for the difference between the larger, external organization and the true remnant of God’s faithful people. Similarly, the true freedom of the congregation is not political but spiritual. A free congregation is one which submits to Christ through the Word and Spirit, despite its external circumstances. Self-government is only a blessing in so far as it permits the congregation to follow Christ faithfully.

Retrograde Responses

It must also be noted that some student responses showed a decline in understanding from the first survey to the second survey (about 17%). Of these 15% declined by one-step and 2% declined by two-steps. In was in this group that the only response with a three step change was recorded (moving from strongly disagree to strongly agree, 0.02%; see figure 6). I will call these “retrograde responses” in the following discussion. The retrograde responses are shown in figure 7. The horizontal and vertical axes are the same as in previous figures. A pale red shade indicates a one-step retrograde, a bright red shade indicates a two-step retrograde, and the bright blue shade represents a three-step retrograde, the only three-step change recorded in the whole survey.

Figure 7.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19
1516	A	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2179	nA	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
2322	A	2 > 4	3 > 4	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 1	3 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 1	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 2
2371	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 2
2465	nA	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2526	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3
2817	nA	4 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 4	4 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2
2851	A	4 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
2952	A	3 > 3	1 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 3	1 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	1 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 3	1 > 1
3441	A	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	2 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 1
5703	A	2 > 2	2 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 1	4 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 1
5778	nA	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 3	1 > 1
6071	nA	3 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	4 > 2	4 > 4	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 2	4 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 2	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2
6095	A	1 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 1	2 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1
6425	A	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1
6523	A	3 > 3	3 > 2	3 > 2	4 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 3	4 > 3	3 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 3	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 3	3 > 2	4 > 4	3 > 3	2 > 1	3 > 2	1 > 2
7246	A	3 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 4	2 > 4	1 > 1	3 > 3	3 > 1	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 1	1 > 1
7304	A	4 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 3	2 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 4	1 > 1	4 > 4	4 > 2	3 > 4	1 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
7943	nA	4 > 3	2 > 3	4 > 4	4 > 4	2 > 3	3 > 3	4 > 2	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	3 > 3	1 > 1	3 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 1	4 > 4	3 > 4	1 > 1
7986	nA	2 > 4	2 > 3	1 > 2	4 > 4	1 > 3	4 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 2	1 > 3	1 > 1	2 > 3	2 > 2	1 > 1	3 > 2	3 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 1
8723	nA	4 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 2	2 > 1	2 > 3	4 > 3	2 > 2	3 > 2	2 > 3	2 > 1	2 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 1
8727	A	3 > 2	2 > 2	2 > 2	3 > 3	1 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 1	1 > 1	1 > 1	2 > 2	1 > 1	2 > 1	3 > 2	2 > 1	1 > 1	3 > 3	1 > 2

It will be noted in figure 7, that the retrograde responses were dispersed somewhat evenly among the survey statements and the participants. Every statement had at least one retrograde response and every participant gave at least one retrograde response. (The statement with the most retrograde responses had nine; and the participant with the most retrograde responses had eight.) If the retrograde responses had been confined to only a few statements then those statements could be considered especially confusing or unclear. Likewise, if the retrograde responses had come from only a handful of participants, then those participants could have had a particularly difficult time understanding either the class material or the survey statements themselves. However, it does not appear that the retrograde responses can be explained by either a few “bad” statements or by a few struggling participants. The reason or reasons seem to lie mostly in some broader issue.

One possible explanation of the large number of retrograde responses is the lack of any neutral response option in the survey. The survey options provided only the possibility of agreeing or disagreeing with the expressions of the AFLC viewpoint. This was intentional. I

didn't want to be faced with a large number of indifferent responses, so I chose not to offer a neutral response. However, when a person actually is ambivalent, but is required either to agree or disagree with the survey, he may arbitrarily choose to agree at one time and to disagree at another. As noted earlier in the Implementation Timeline, there was a time lapse of twelve days between the two survey dates. Again, noting figure 4, thirty-four of the sixty-two retrograde responses that only moved one step were from somewhat disagree to somewhat agree—the two middle options. Participants who were ambivalent about the AFLC viewpoint would tend to respond with the two middle options (somewhat agree or somewhat disagree). The question arises at what point does the faintest level of an opinion really become ambivalence? In my attempt to measure that slightest level of agreement or disagreement, those who were truly ambivalent had no option.

Since it is probable that some arbitrary responses were given by ambivalent participants the strength of the 28% positive responses noted earlier is also somewhat undermined. The lack of a neutral option almost certainly caused students with an ambivalent viewpoint to give an arbitrary response. There is no way of knowing after-the-fact if those arbitrary responses generally favored the AFLC viewpoint or not. So, the lack of a neutral survey response option appears to have been unwise.

Another possible cause for the apparently high number of retrograde responses might have been the phrasing of the survey statements as a whole. The large number of retrograde responses prompted me to look at the survey statements in a different light after the field research was finished. Was it clear for each statement what the pro-AFLC response would be, or did the statements require a lot of interpretation by the participants? For example, statement #17, which garnered five retrograde responses, says, "If a congregation is free it has no obligation to

participate in the ministries of the national church body (AFLC).” It is clear to me that every Christian congregation has obligations to the larger church, but the self-governing congregation is led to pursue those obligations through its own experience of the Word and Spirit of God. So, those obligations are not placed upon it by some other outside, human entity. But how was the idea of “obligation” understood? This question requires a fair amount of interpretation that may have led participants to answer it in several disparate ways. Again, statement #8 says, “When it comes to understanding God’s Word correctly or finding the best way to win the lost for Christ it is usually best to follow the majority.” This statement requires the participant to interpret the word “majority.” Is it the majority of its own members, the majority of like-minded Christians (Free Lutheran) or the majority of the people in nominally Christian denominations in America or the world. Different interpretations of the statement will clearly yield a wide range of possible responses. On the other hand, I believe it to be an important aspect of the AFLC congregational viewpoint, that the congregation carefully considers its own work of confession and outreach and seek to follow Scripture as led by the Holy Spirit, without relying simply on what is most popular or most commonly done. It seems like there is a fine line here between making the survey as objective as possible without requiring too many unpredictable interpretive options for the respondents. The more interpretation the survey requires, the more volatile the responses are likely to be.

Further, statement #5 said, “It is uncertain or doubtful whether local congregations seeking God’s will for themselves will be able to confess the truth of God’s Word faithfully or make a difference for Christ in this world.” This is the statement that generated the most retrograde responses. In retrospect after the surveys have been completed, I believe that this statement is too unclear. Some participants might disagree with the statement because they do not think that a

local congregation that confesses God's word is handicapped by its self-government. In fact, that congregation may make a better confession than a denomination or synod would direct it to. Other participants might have agreed with the statement because failure to make faithful confession is a real factor of being sinful people in a sinful world, quite apart from the congregation's polity. I may have assumed that statements like this one would be taken in a sense which assumes that polity is the focus of the whole survey, but the participants may not have seen it that way.

Consequently, the large number of retrograde responses might have been reduced with a neutral option among the survey responses and by making some of the statements more specific or clear and needing less interpretation. It may also be the case that the instructor did an unsatisfactory job of teaching the history and created a lot of confusion. If I could have been less concerned about participant anonymity, some participants might have been interviewed to discover how they interpreted the statements that yielded the higher number or retrograde responses.

If we recollect several earlier discussions from chapter 2 about various church paradigms and chapter 3 about fact and myth, it will cast a valuable light on this analysis. Kloha, Ensign-George, Horn, and Wells all presented their views of the church in quite unique ways (pages 50–51). As noted in an earlier citation, C. S. Lewis said that “every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley.”¹⁴⁹ The reality of the church throughout Scripture and in all of the history since then presents us with a mountain-sized reality. That reality yields a great variety of truths. I do not make this observation to relativize all ideas about

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 67.

the church and thereby make room for contradictory conclusions or unbiblical doctrine. My point would be that some students after hearing about the history of the LFC/AFLC may apply that history in different ways. I drew conclusions that were consistent with the points I had previously made theologically. But the reality is immense and might yield different conclusions that are legitimate in their own way.

In summary, the survey responses showed almost twice as many student responses moved towards greater comprehension than moved towards lesser. These results need to be viewed in light of the fact that only 22 of a possible 50 students from the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) class participated in the survey. This was a smaller participation rate than was anticipated.

Expected Findings

As has been demonstrated, a robust historical awareness is significant for a church's character, and it can be expected that the students' appreciation and understanding of the AFLC's polity will be shown to increase through the prepared teaching material. Did I get what I expected? Generally yes, but partly no. The results that have already been noted indicate that approximately 25% of the students' responses suggested an increase in comprehension of the AFLC's polity. This is a significant benefit and evidence of a successful study. In order to assert the most possible benefit, it would be necessary to explain the 17% retrograde responses as solely a statistical anomaly or an unfortunate result of the survey's structure, particularly my use of shorter, less precise statements in the survey that invited various interpretations. If these two factors can account for even half of the retrograde responses, then the positive survey results are strong. Fifty-seven percent of all the final survey responses showed a correct understanding of the AFLC's polity.

Additionally, I found that the theological instruction was probably more impactful than I

had expected, and perhaps that students knew more about what the AFLC believes and does than I anticipated. Students do not always open up when asked about their basic theological understanding, especially when questioned by a theology professor. As a novice teacher, I was unable to engage the students in a way that they felt comfortable giving honest answers. Perhaps the greater need is not merely to understand *what* the AFLC believes and does, but *why* it believes and does those things. To that end, historical background is always helpful for answering questions about *Why?* The observation can also be made here that the presentation that was made of the AFLC's congregational polity for this MAP (both theological and historical) is not the only occasion on which these lessons are taught at FLBC. Several other courses at the Bible College address this theology directly, and it is likely discussed when appropriate in several New Testament exegetical courses. It is possible that many students already understood the concept rather well, so that it would be difficult to move the scale upwards. This conclusion may also be indicated from the large percentage of responses that showed no change from the first survey to the second. As has been noted 44% of the students in the class participated in the survey, which as research surveys go, may have been good, but still less than half. Given the anonymity of the participants it is not possible to discern potential reasons for this deficiency. The primary research question has been answered with a qualified yes, the additional instruction in the history of the AFLC does result in greater understanding of the AFLC's polity. I said earlier in this MAP: It has been projected that the later survey results (after the historical narratives had been presented) will show a better grasp of the critical ideas as conceived in this project's objectives, based on what has been discovered both theologically and philosophically about the importance and impact of narrative and history in people's understanding (page 104). I consider this projection to have been realized even if not as conclusively as was hoped. The data

provides a number of quantitative results that support an affirmative answer to this MAP's primary research question. As a researcher, I am not discouraged by some mixed results or inclined to alter the philosophical and theological analysis of this project. A strong case has been made in this paper that historical knowledge is vitally important for us to answer questions of meaning in life as well as to appreciate the deeply historical and narrative quality of Scripture and our relationship with God.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY

This Major Applied Project and the corresponding research has examined the impact of a specially developed teaching curriculum in the college classroom setting. It had been suggested that the Salvation Theology (TH 2302) students at the FLBC generally have a knowledge gap related to the nature and importance of congregational church polity. Some of the findings of this project suggest that the gap may not be as wide as was initially feared. What might be bad news for the MAP, is good news for the students, the school and the AFLC. Many students showed significant grasp of the AFLC polity in the early survey. This survey was administered after the theological and exegetical material had been presented, suggesting that they are good learners of theology. Such results do not warrant an embrace of the *status quo*, teachers should always pursue the finest pedagogy of which they are capable.

I must admit that the project that was originally envisioned while sitting in my advisor's office has proven to be much more effort than I suspected. After all, *How hard can it be?* I thought. This MAP has turned out to be the hardest work- or ministry-related project that I have ever undertaken. I have made use of a number of lessons from the DMin course work and have benefitted from the broader theological perspective provided by this program. In the summary sections that follow, I speak mostly about the benefits of the MAP research and writing, but benefits have also accrued through the whole Doctor of Ministry program.

Personal

In choosing the MAP subject that I have explored, a central concern of mine was to become a more effective teacher. It is a personal goal that concerns mostly my own self-improvement, but was never, for that reason, intended to be selfish. It is not surprising, then, that

mostly personal results are evident.

Being an effective teacher involves good pedagogy. It should be quite evident after the argument I have tried to build that good pedagogy will make use of stories. I suspect that most teachers (and preachers, for that matter) have had the experience of a listener testifying to the meaningfulness or impact for them of a personal story related by the teacher or preacher. True stories are even more impactful. So true stories of the students own background might be expected to have the most impact. There are many ways to make an impact, from flashy visual elements to dancing puppies. But so many of these approaches are artificial and gimmicky and thus lack authenticity and diminish the potential impact. The actual history that brought about a major theological emphasis of our congregations and which turned our ancestors lives towards the good, would presumably be interesting, valuable and educationally felicitous. In a course evaluation for another class I teach, a student commented on his desire to know the history of the AFLC better, including a grasp of the way our story fits into the larger story of the historic Christian Church. The history and pedagogic lessons learned in connection with this MAP will enable me to meet that desire, whether in that course or in others.

For another thing, I have been impressed by the fact that Christianity is not just a set of true propositions—an important insight for one who teaches systematic theology! Not that I ever really believed that it was just propositions, but the current-day erosion of confidence in any true propositions (especially Christian ones) had made me quite reactionary, operating with the idea that when part of our faith is under attack, we must rally to its defense. But, in truth, we must not let the opposition set our whole agenda. I gladly affirm the propositional character of Christian faith and truth. But the narrative element is equally needed. Perhaps it was C. S. Lewis' essay on *Myth* that was most helpful for me in this regard. He argued that propositions are useful to talk

about the Faith in an abstract way. But you do not actually experience the reality of Christ while dealing with those abstractions. The story of Christianity, introduced so well by Kilcrease, is the means by which we participate concretely in the reality. Many of the most recent cultural developments demonstrate that reality itself is up for grabs in much of the world today. The transgender movement exposes this fact alarmingly well. If you want to live an alternate reality than the gender with which you were born, many in our world would say that your desires are sovereign and you may do as you please—reality be dam***. In the face of that monstrosity of hyper-individualism, something solid and meaningful nevertheless exists. It is the concrete past. None of us appeared out of thin air just moments ago. Our existence and current reality has been developing through many generations over all of the past. While we can, and as much as we are able, we need to capture and hold on to that past through the stories of our individual and shared lives. In some little way, this MAP has made some of our history more solid in some students' minds, so that at least for them, it will not be lost! We have a memorable history. How wonderful when Christ takes our story into His, and into the story of His body on earth. As much as I have always loved history and studied it in college, I can't say that I was ever able to make a strong connection between history and theology like I am able to do now. The link between them is strong and important. This project has paid special attention to history and the theology of the congregation, but each area of theology can be enhanced by a more robust grasp of history, how the doctrine has developed over time as well as human problems that the doctrine has exposed or ameliorated.

Another benefit on the personal side is that besides seeing the depth that is present in theology, I also appreciate better the depth in each student who comes to FLBC. The old caricature of the human person as a brain on stick has new relevance for me. I can't say that I

ever accepted that caricature myself or ever thought it was very commonly held, still, it does illustrate something important. The educational mission is so much more than putting facts in student's heads. Before my work on this MAP, I was reluctant to admit a deeper mission in a Bible College education because I was fearful that the facts would be marginalized or forsaken. That marginalization still remains a huge problem, but the fullness of the human being must be affirmed. As a teacher I need to continue to grow and see each student as a whole person. I will always endeavor to put facts into their heads, but to do it in a way that those facts can become part of their stories, their whole eternal existence. I wonder if I haven't had some intuition all along that this was so, but the understanding and training to express it and deal with it critically has been much enhanced by the rigors of this project.

Finally, on a personal level, I can attest that working with the survey of the students has been a challenge. Surveys do not always come out the way you expect them to—nice and neat. I should have known this. Every school assignment or test is a kind of survey, an attempt to find out where the students are academically and spiritually. A lot of work can still be done to create and use more useful surveys, and more accurate and meaningful student assessments. For reasons that were stated in Chapter Four, it was not considered helpful to attempt a more qualitative type of research, such as personal interviews with some or all of the survey-takers. The fact that I did not do it, does not take away from the value of it. In fact, this MAP has (probably by accident) demonstrated that qualitative research is necessary. I attempted to give some possible reasons for the apparently high number of retrograde survey responses. That issue might have been easily resolved in a few interviews with students.

Still, as a teacher who rubs shoulders with students on a regular basis, there are countless opportunities to do continued informal research. I will endeavor to engage students in brief

conversations about classroom topics and find out some things that the quantitative measurement (assignments and tests) have not provided. This is an area where further study and exploration can be done and could be very helpful for me.

Corporate

In order to provide a summary that looks towards the larger context of the academy and church, I ask myself: Why would someone pick up this MAP and read it?

Thinking first about the Free Lutheran Bible College where this research was conducted, I am only minimally aware of the exact content of other teachers' courses at the Bible College. I know that their course content is biblically and theologically sound and that students appreciate them and learn a great deal. Perhaps other teachers in our school or other schools could consider ways in which an historical component could enhance that teaching. For many courses, the relevant history might be marginal or barely known. Still, everything has a history of some kind: the exegesis of Colossians, children's ministry, sacred music, even women's' basketball. At the very least, the history that bears on these subjects should be known in some way to the teacher, director, or coach. The most basic level of sufficiency for our tasks requires it. It is fundamentally true that the church has been teaching Christian things to the younger generations for millennia. What has been done in specific areas? Did it work? Who in the past has made a real difference?

In the designing of this project and its research, I decided early on that for the sake of students who might be very concerned about negative consequences in their course grade, it was best to perform only anonymous research. That decision prevented me from conducting the kind of interviews that might have added to the overall benefits of the study. Perhaps another researcher working in a different context can design a project that would engage learners on a

more intimate and qualitative level. In some respects I regret that a fuller measurement of the teaching experiment could not be made.

The primary research question for this MAP asked whether it might be helpful if the theological teaching that already occurs was augmented with an historical component. In light of the strong assertion that Hauerwas made that “There is no more fundamental way to talk of God than in a story,” perhaps a line for future research has been suggested. I only augmented the theological with the historical. If Hauerwas is correct, and this would have to be studied, then perhaps the best format is to structure a course in which the AFLC history is the main component and the theology is the augment. Certainly such a course, still aimed at a faithful impartation of Christian truth about God, humanity, and salvation, would strongly communicate the value that history, as a true narrative, holds for our Faith.

The research data from this MAP suggests that a combination of conceptual/cognitive data as well as narrative/concrete material can result in fuller student understanding. The way MacIntyre put it seems essentially true to me, that shared historical stories serving as a kind of moral foundation or background function as a “relatively indisputable historical fact.” Even more basically, our common history provides a medium for grasping the meaning of our lives. A better understanding of history will inevitably benefit the mission of any school. Of course, no one needed this MAP to realize that. Perhaps, it isn’t that we accept the persistent jab that “history is bunk,” but we nevertheless just never quite get around to learning and using it. Well in the course of accomplishing the work of this MAP, I did get around to it, finally. And my work can encourage others. Seeing that the use of historical narratives as an addition to theological instruction was apparently effective, the teachers at FLBC and other schools can be better equipped to design a curriculum that will succeed in preserving the denomination’s long-held

passion for the congregational church model and the self-governing congregation, and other important aspects of our Christian, Lutheran, and congregational heritage.

In these present times, and for a sizeable number of Christians, the church and its institutions cannot change fast enough. They see a church which is horribly and inexcusably out-of-touch with the world. For them everything old and established must be deconstructed and something new must be made out of the detritus (or perhaps made entirely from scratch). In such a climate, my research question seems almost ludicrous: how can we effectively teach the old ways? For me, deconstruction holds no mystique. If we can understand better why we believe what we believe, then our faith can stand strong and become stronger. The movement towards such understanding needn't be *destructive*. Our faith does not need to be torn apart for us to understand how it works, or how it came to be in the first place. In fact, genuine Christian faith that has been wrought in the Spirit by the working of Law and Gospel is always deeply aware of its own progress. One cannot stand in faith today without knowing his own sordid past and what Christ did in time and space to save us all. So Christian faith must be understood for the historically grounded thing that it is. Without a constant eye to the past, there can be no Christian faith or Christian church. It is my hope that some contribution to a more historically committed Church has been achieved through this MAP.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +

APPENDIX ONE

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

(The Guiding Principles of the Lutheran Free Church from 1897)

1. According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth.

2. The congregation consists of believers who, by using the means of grace and the spiritual gifts as directed by the Word of God, seek salvation and eternal blessedness for themselves and for their fellow men.

3. According to the New Testament, the congregation needs an external organization with membership roll, election of officers, stated times and places for its gatherings, and other similar provisions.

4. Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such members often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation. It is therefore the sacred obligation of the congregation to purify itself by the quickening preaching of the Word of God, by earnest admonition and exhortation, and by expelling the openly sinful and perverse.

5. The congregation directs its own affairs, subject to the authority of the Word and the Spirit of God, and acknowledges no other ecclesiastical authority or government above itself.

6. A free congregation esteems and cherishes all the spiritual gifts which the Lord gives for its edification, and seeks to stimulate and encourage their use.

7. A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

8. Such assistance consists partly in the mutual sharings of spiritual gifts among the congregations through conferences, exchange visits, lay activities, etc., whereby congregations are mutually edified, and partly in the voluntary and Spirit-prompted cooperation of congregations for the accomplishing of such tasks as exceed the ability of the individual congregation.

9. Among such tasks may be mentioned specifically the training of pastors, distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, home missions, foreign missions, Jewish missions, deaconess homes, children's homes and other work of mercy.

10. Free congregations have no right to demand that other congregations shall submit to their opinion, will, judgment, or decision; therefore, domination by a majority of congregations over a minority is to be rejected.

11. Agencies found desirable for conducting the joint activities of congregations, such as conferences, committees, officers, etc., cannot in a Lutheran Free Church, impose any obligations or restrictions, exert any compulsions, or lay any burden upon the individual congregation, but have the right only to make recommendations to, and requests of, congregations and individuals.

12. Every free congregation, as well as every individual believer, is constrained by the Spirit of God and by the privileges of Christian love to do good and to work for the salvation of souls and the quickening of spiritual life, as far as its abilities and power permit. Such free spiritual activity is limited neither by parish nor by synodical bounds.

APPENDIX TWO

SALVATION THEOLOGY (TH 2302) LECTURE NOTES

Free Lutheran Bible College
Salvation Theology (TH 2302) - Spring 2022

20. The Church (*CBTC*, pages 387-404)

1. The Nature of the Church
 - Established by God
 - Describing the Church
2. Attributes of the Church
 - One
 - Holy
 - Catholic
 - Apostolic
 - Enduring
3. Marks of the Church
 - Word and Sacrament
 - Other Activities of the Church
4. Is the Church Visible?
 - The “Visible” and “Invisible” Church
 - One Church, Many Churches
5. Church Governance
 - One Flock, One Shepherd
 - Organizing the Visible Church
 - Two Kingdoms and the Church

The Doctrine of the Church aka – <i>ecclesiology</i>

General Scriptural Overview: *What is the church?*

Matthew 16:18; 18:17

John 18:36

Acts 2:41-47

Ephesians 1:23; 2:19-22; 4:15-16

Exodus 12:3

1 Timothy 3:15

1. The Identity/Definition of the Church

When we use the term “church,” what are we talking about?

Possibilities:

What do you mean by:

The church is on Bass Lake Road.
Hurry up, you'll be late for church!
I am a member of Faith Free Lutheran Church.
Martin Luther broke away from the Roman Catholic Church.
The Lutheran church believes in infant baptism.
HM 202—Church History II.
Israel was the Old Testament church.
America has the separation of Church and State.
Are any of these the same?

When the Bible describes the church, what is it describing?
How does the Bible talk about the church?

What does the Bible teach?

“body of Christ”

What does “body of Christ” mean?

e. g. “a book of clowns”	“about”
“people of God”	possession
“trunk of the tree”	“part of”
“cup of coffee”	contents
“a gift of \$20”	equality

Colossians 1:18, 24
Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4
Romans 12:4-5
1 Corinthians 12:27

“bride of Christ”

Ephesians 5:23-33 the ideal or actual church?
Hosea 2:19-20
Revelation 19:6-10; 21:1ff

The church is not a
religious community of
worshippers of Christ but is
Christ himself who has
taken form among people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“kingdom of God/heaven”

Matthew 13:37-43
Matthew 16:19-20
Luke 9:27
Luke 12:32
Luke 17:20-21
John 18:36-37

Romans 14:17
Colossians 1:13
Hebrews 12:28
Revelation 1:6; 5:10
“The right-hand kingdom.”

“congregation” – ekklesia (ekklhsia): used 114x in NT
⇒ ekklesia in ancient Greek usually means “assembly” or “town meeting”
⇒ the smallest, most basic unit of government
⇒ most accessible
⇒ most inclusive
1 Corinthians 1:2
2 Corinthians 1:1
1 Thessalonians 1:1

v In 1604 when King James commissioned a new translation of the Bible, he made a few stipulations before work began:
v one stipulation: ekklesia must be translated “church”
fueling speculation that he was a crypto-catholic.
v What?!?!
v previously “congregation” had been widely used.
v a tradition was established that is not based on the best understanding of the original language

What images come to mind with “church”?

What images come to mind with “congregation”?

What is a congregation?
“church” vs. “congregation”

Matthew 16:18
Matthew 18:17
Acts 12:5
Acts 13:1
Acts 15:4, 22 [v.30: not *ekklesia*]
Acts 20:28
Ephesians 5:24-32
Colossians 1:18
1 Timothy 3:15

So, when Scripture talks about the church, what is it talking about?

G Scripture only talks about the church in two ways:
the universal body
the local congregation

G everything else is extra—to use or not use as needs require.

G What’s the difference between the universal body of believers and the local congregation?

According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God

on earth.

2. The Attributes of the Church:

Nicene Creed: And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

The Augsburg Confession: Article VII – *The Church*

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

The Hidden or Invisible Attributes of the Church:			
one	holy	catholic	apostolic
Ephesians 2:14-16 Ephesians 4:3-4 1 Corinthians 12:12 John 17:20-21 John 10:16	1 John 1:7 Ephesians 5:27 John 13:10 John 15:3 1 Peter 2:9	Matthew 18:20 Revelation 5:9-10 Revelation 7:9 Acts 2:5-11 Matthew 8:11	Ephesians 2:20; 3:5 Acts 2:42 2 Peter 3:2 John 17:20 Jude 3
Definition:			
All true believers in Christ, worldwide—for all time, comprise one body of believers.	While we always strive for greater holiness in our conduct the Christian church is already holy through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.	Each local congregation is the whole, not a fragment. AND The universal church is a whole—essentially undivided.	The church is apostolic because it stands on and continues in the complete and sufficient teaching and faith of the Apostles.
Individual Significance and Application:			
⇒ He makes us one and we live in it. (Ephesians 4:3) ⇒ Human efforts to “unite” the church into one organization can be kind of risky. ⇒ Outward divisions are real, and wrong – 1 Corinthians 1:10ff ⇒ sin and untruth ALONE divide the	⇒ We do not attempt to identify the church/ congregation by measuring how holy it is or isn’t. ⇒ Holiness comes from Christ through the preaching and believing of the word rather than through human works.	1. The local congregation is not part of the real church, but it is the church. 2. The local congregation does not seek to be unique, but to be catholic (connected to the whole in faith and life).	⇒ Holding apostolic doctrine from Scripture. New “apostles” do not make the church apostolic. ⇒ Imitating the practices of the NT may deny the power of Holy Spirit to create a genuine life in a congregation today.

church		Do churches look for their niche?	⇒ Following a strong personality with apostle-like qualities is not being apostolic.
Overall Significance			
Why hold and teach that these attributes are hidden and invisible? ⇒ if these attributes are basically VISIBLE, then they only exist when we can see them. ⇒ then, when we talk about the holiness of the church, we have to say and hear the Law: “Be holy!” ⇒ then, what happens to the Gospel?			



The Marks of the Church.

⇒ Why aren't these attributes also the marks of the church?

- one*
- holy*
- catholic*
- apostolic*
- eternal*

⇒ The marks have to be visible and identifiable.

Marked by the Gospel and the Sacraments

1 Timothy 3:15; 4:6, 16; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:9

Acts 2:41-42; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; 12:13

Matthew 28:18-20; Galatians 3:27

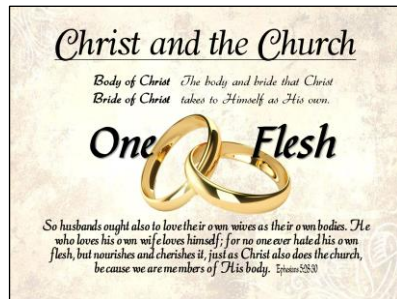
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

⇒ the Gospel-Word

⇒ the Sacraments: Baptism & Communion

Why the sacraments?

- v Jesus' Special Commands: "*baptize . . . do this*"
- v for *absolute trust and confidence in Christ*
- v They are outward by their very nature!



How do you find Christ?

Through His Word and Sacraments

How do you find Christ's body?

Through His Word and Sacraments

This is all it takes to recognize the true church!

"purely taught" and "correctly administered"

Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1-5

Acts 19:1-6 and Ephesians 4:5; Galatians 3:27

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

Luther, in *The Bondage of the Will* [LW33:88]

I call them saints and regard them as such; I call them and believe them to be the Church of God; but I do so by the rule of love, not the rule of faith. For love, which always thinks well of everyone, and is not suspicious but believes and assumes the best about its neighbors, calls anyone who is baptized a saint; and no harm is done if it makes a mistake, for it is in the nature of love to be deceived, seeing it is exposed to all the uses and abuses of all men as the general servant of good and bad, faithful and unfaithful, true and false alike. But faith calls no one a saint unless he is declared so by a divine judgment, because it is in the nature of faith not to be deceived. Therefore, although we ought all to be regarded as saints by one another according to the law of love, yet no one ought to be decreed a saint according to the law of faith, so as to make it an article of faith that this or that person is a saint.

What is the church?

"The Body of Christ" and "The Bride of Christ"

"The Kingdom of God"

"Church" and "Congregation"

Nicene Creed: "one holy, catholic and apostolic church"

Augsburg Confession:

"the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered"

Other Biblical Descriptions of the Church?

G hospital for souls: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
 G body of believers: Ephesians 4:4-6.
 G gifted community: Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12.
 G place of order and organization: Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 2:8ff.
 G mission and purpose: Acts 20:20-21; Acts 1:8.
 G pillar and support of the truth,
 1 Timothy 3:15, Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 15.

What should a person/family look for in a congregation?

The Doctrine of the Church

“one, holy, catholic, apostolic” The Nicene Creed
 “body of Christ”—“bride of Christ”

congregation -- ekklesia
 used for the universal body
 used for the local organization

The Form of the Church

What is *form*?
 the visible and tangible
 external or outward
 shape, structure
 organization

What forms of the church have there been?
 family, tribe (Abraham)
 the nation of Israel
 the remnant or exiles?
 house-church, Acts 16:14-15; Romans 16:3-5
 congregation
 council, Acts 15

diocese, a district under the pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church
consistory, a court presided over by a bishop, for the administration of ecclesiastical law
in a diocese
 denomination
synod, an ecclesiastical governing or advisory council: such as an assembly of bishops in
the Roman Catholic Church, or the governing assembly of an Episcopal province
bishop, a senior member of the Christian clergy, typically in charge of a diocese and
empowered to confer holy orders
 bishop e archbishop e cardinal e pope
 “the Roman Catholic Church”
 association, free church

God desires that the Church have a *form*, —that it exists in a particular way.

Georg Sverdrup (1848-1907):

“The congregation is the right form of the kingdom of God on earth.”

When the universal church organizes (as God desires) it will look like this---it will be congregations.

⇒ Scripture shows this:

Acts 2:42, 46

Acts 6:2-6

Titus 1:5-9

1 Corinthians 14:40 (14:33)

In the Bible, wherever there are Christians, there is a congregation.

⇒ history shows this---the universal church’s most enduring form

MARCH 28

Sverdrup’s “Principles” (1897)

1. According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This claim is based on:

B a respect for the nature of the Kingdom of God as seen in the Bible, especially the New Testament.

Deuteronomy 7:7; Jeremiah 23:3; Isaiah 10:22

Luke 12:32; John 10:16

Luke 17:20-21 “among you”

[plural: *ya-all*]

John 3:3, 6

1 Corinthians 1:25ff

What best fits the humble, spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God:
complex, elaborate organization?
simple, local organization?

C the usage of *ekklesia* in the New Testament

ekklesia = *the local assembly of the common people*

Matthew 16:18; 18:17

1 Corinthians 1:2

2 Corinthians 1:1

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Acts 13:1

Acts 20:28

Ephesians 5:24-32

D the practices of Jesus and the early church throughout the NT

What did Jesus do?

What are some issues that Christians face?

disciplining sin: 1 Corinthians 5:1-7; Matthew 18:15-17

settling disputes: 1 Corinthians 6:1-4

care of the poor: Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 5:8-10

missions: Acts 13:1-3; Philippians 4:14-17

worship: Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 2:47

care of souls: 1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:25-32

doctrinal purity: Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:1-10

Time after time, the New Testament presents a congregational solution to these issues and problems.

E Congregationalism is consistent with the value Scripture places on ordinary things:

What are God's ordinary things?

(Ordinary things that God values and blesses)

God's ordinary things:

the local congregation

the physical creation: this life in the body

the means of grace

⇒ words on a page

⇒ water

⇒ bread and wine

faith, as simply receiving God's good gifts

suffering

vocation

service

relational evangelism (witnessing)

the humanity of Jesus

The Cross

1 John 1:1-3

¹What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Georg Sverdrup, on Fundamental Principle #1: (TSJ, iii:51)

It was for this form of the Kingdom of God, the congregation, that all the apostles and first Christians worked. They did so because the Spirit impelled them to it. Nothing is said within the revelation of the New Testament about any other form for the Kingdom of God.

We mean that in the New Testament nothing is said about an episcopate over, or in, more than one congregation. Nothing is said about a papacy, church department, consistory, council, or synod. In every place where there are Christians there is a congregation. This congregation has its elders or bishops, but there is no “consistory” of any kind.

There are indications of decline and decay when not long after the time of the apostles there began to be “consistories” of one sort or another over greater or lesser portions of the church, thinking thereby to get a better form of the Kingdom of God. In reality there has never been a common church government over the whole Christian church. There is not such in our day either.

It therefore seems to us to be an unreasonable and unjust demand when it is often put forth that all congregations are duty-bound to participate in one or the other external church body so as to be able to come under the proper church government. Those who do not regard a common church government as necessary and obligatory are called anarchists. But something which was not to be found in the apostolic age, which never existed later in the church, and which is not found in the present age can scarcely be a necessity for Christianity. For if this was necessary, there has never been thus far the proper kind of Christianity.

According to the New Testament, it is necessary for the Kingdom of God to have a congregation, but we cannot see that some other outer organization over the congregation is a necessary part of Christianity.

It is, therefore, a principle in the Free Church, which submits only to God’s Word and nothing else, that the congregation is an adequate form for the Kingdom of God, and that no other form is required from the time of the outpouring of the Spirit until Christ’s return. But according to God’s will, as revealed in His Word, the congregation, on the other hand, is absolutely necessary wherever it is possible. When an individual Christian lives alone, such as in prison or other restriction, the lack of a congregation will not cause him to perish. But where Christians can be a congregation and will not, there is certainly a great danger for their souls.

2. The congregation consists of believers who, by using the means of grace and the spiritual gifts as directed by the Word of God, seek salvation and eternal blessedness for themselves and for their fellow men.

Properly speaking the Congregation is the believers alone.

The True Marks of the Church:

Means of Grace

-Gospel-Word

-Sacraments

Those who participate in these *by faith*.

With the means of grace the Holy Spirit supplies the believers (creates and sustains); with the spiritual gifts the believers through the Holy Spirit serve one another and the needy world.

The Congregation is:

A spiritual body doing spiritual things —in a place.

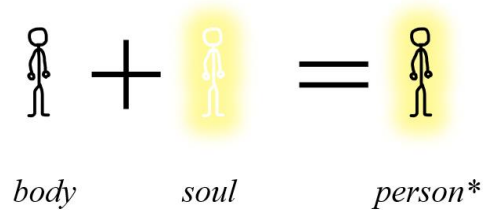
Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Luke 17:20-21;

John 3:3, 6; Romans 14:17

The congregation *is* believers.

The congregation *has* an external organization.

Body and Soul



*The New Testament uses person-language for the church: “bride” “body” “man”

As the soul needs the body, so the congregation needs and outer organization.

3. According to the New Testament, the congregation needs an external organization with membership roll, election of officers, stated times and places for its gatherings, and other similar provisions.

Organization is necessary.

body of Christ – Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12ff; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:11-16

Where do we see organization in the New Testament?

counting members, Acts 2:41; 4:4; 1 Peter 5:3

electing leaders, Acts 6:3; Titus 1:5

meetings (services), 1 Corinthians 5:4; 14:26

meeting place, Acts 3:11; 5:12

conferences, Acts 15

The Two Kingdoms Doctrine

Has the Kingdom of God ever existed without some outward, visible nature?

the families of Adam, Noah, Abraham

the tribe (sons) of Jacob (Israel)

the Nation (Kingdom) of Israel

...

The necessity comes from the presence of the spiritual kingdom in the material world of time and space.

What need does the outward form meet for the church?

Does your soul need your body?

4. Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such members often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation. It is therefore the sacred obligation of the congregation to purify itself by the quickening preaching of the Word of God, by earnest admonition and exhortation, and by expelling the openly sinful and perverse.

The external organization includes unbelievers/hypocrites.

The congregation is not content with this, but what can we do?

We cannot attempt to remove all of the unbelievers by direct, organizational action--- that is, remove them as members by an action of the organization *because of unbelief*.

⇒ It is admitted that we cannot determine exactly who are true believers.

(Matthew 13:24-30; Colossians 3:3)

⇒ The spiritual kingdom is “ruled” by the means of grace, not by a constitution.

What can we do? *Preach the Word!* (2 Timothy 4:2)

“The sacred obligation of the congregation”

Also: Christian encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17)

Church discipline *only* addresses outward, visible behavior, it never tries to judge faith directly.

5. The congregation directs its own affairs, subject to the authority of the Word and the Spirit of God, and acknowledges no other ecclesiastical authority or government above itself.

Congregational self-government.

The congregation willingly assumes the responsibility to study Scripture and seek God in prayer for its needs.

The congregation will be guided and directed *from within* by its own spiritual body of believers and not from without by “ecclesiastical authority.”

civil or governmental authority is NOT rejected

⇒ in it’s proper role

The congregation directs its own affairs:

Enacting a constitution

Calling a pastor

Paying the expenses, owning property

Committing itself to various causes: missions, education, etc.

What opinion of church authority is meant here?

Negatively: heavy-handed church officials quench the Spirit

Positively: the congregation is blessed when it accepts responsibility for its own doctrine and spiritual life

Only: the Word

the Spirit of God

(two separate authorities or one?)

6. A free congregation esteems and cherishes all the spiritual gifts which the Lord gives for its edification, and seeks to stimulate and encourage their use.

Spiritual Gifts provide the internal resources for the congregation to govern itself.

Romans 12:6-8

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

To whom does the Lord give spiritual gifts?

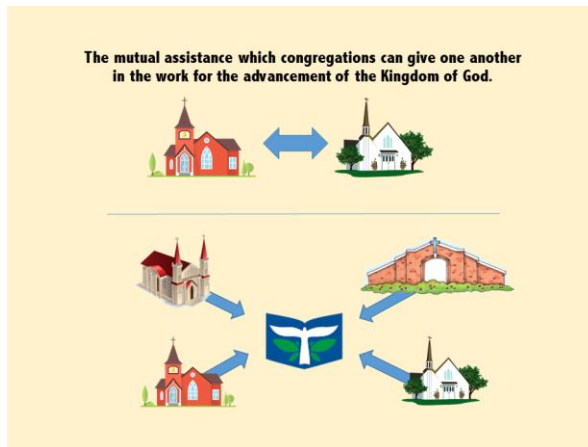
Is leading a youth Bible study at church an individual or a congregational activity?

7. A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

8. Such assistance consists partly in the mutual sharing of spiritual gifts among the congregations through conferences, exchange visits, lay activities, etc., whereby congregations are mutually edified, and partly in the voluntary and Spirit-prompted cooperation of congregations for the accomplishing of such tasks as exceed the ability of the individual congregation.

9. Among such tasks may be mentioned specifically the training of pastors, distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, home missions, foreign missions, Jewish missions, deaconess homes, children's homes and other work of mercy.

Inter-congregational cooperation.



Tasks that usually require multiple congregations and a wider administration:

Eight things are mentioned.

Bible School, Youth Ministry, Camps & Conferences.

??

⇒ the larger ministry needs the congregations

“gladly accepts” – no force or resistance

NOT legally binding, but spiritually/morally binding

What can be done about indifference among the congregations towards the common ministries?

10. Free congregations have no right to demand that other congregations shall submit to their opinion, will, judgment, or decision; therefore, domination by a majority of congregations over a minority is to be rejected.

11. Agencies found desirable for conducting the joint activities of congregations, such as conferences, committees, officers, etc., cannot in a Lutheran Free Church, impose any obligations or restrictions, exert any compulsions, or lay any burden upon the individual congregation, but have the right only to make recommendations to, and requests of, congregations and individuals.

Once congregations have begun to cooperate in “larger tasks” what is the proper relationship of the congregation to that wider organization?

There is always a danger that Majority Rule turns into Bullying.

The very nature of Christianity excludes all external coercion!

John 8:36

Galatians 5:1, 13

These “agencies” exist only so that the congregations can obediently fulfill their obligations to Christ.

However, this is MUCH MORE than a political technicality.

The Ministries of the AFLC should have their origin and impetus in the congregations.

Support for the common work is ultimately that congregations follow through on their commitments.

12. Every free congregation, as well as every individual believer, is constrained by the Spirit of God and by the privileges of Christian love to do good and to work for the salvation of souls and the quickening of spiritual life, as far as its abilities and power permit. Such free spiritual activity is limited neither by parish nor by synodical bounds.

2 Corinthians 5:14

Research Participants: take their first survey here

The Story of Free Lutheran Congregations

The congregation-centered church form/structure we have been studying came into being amid significant events in Lutheran church history.

The Lutheran Reformation.

Luther: *On the Papacy in Rome* (1520), LW 39:65:

. . . according to Scripture . . . Christendom means an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ, as we pray in the Creed, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints.” This community or assembly means all those who live in true faith, hope and love. Thus the essence, life, and nature of Christendom is not a physical assembly, but an assembly of hearts in one faith.

Luther wrote:

The German Mass and Order of Service (1526), *LW* 53:63f

... a truly evangelical order should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works. . . . Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, 2 Corinthians 9. Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing. Here one could set up a brief and neat order for baptism and the sacrament and center everything on the Word, prayer, and love. Here one would need a good short catechism on the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Our Father.

In short, if one had the kind of people and persons who wanted to be Christians in earnest, the rules and regulations would soon be ready. But as yet I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation . . . for I have not yet the people or persons for it, nor do I see many who want it. But if I should be requested to do it and could not refuse with a good conscience, I should gladly do my part and help as best I can. In the meanwhile the two above-mentioned orders of service must suffice. . . . until Christians who earnestly love the Word find each other and join together. For if I should try to make it up out of my own need, it might turn into a sect. For we Germans are a rough, rude, and reckless people, with whom it is hard to do anything, except in cases of dire need.

Lutheranism and the State Church.

pietism: the conventicle, *collegias pietas*
Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705)

Germany
Scandinavia

Lutheran State Church in Norway.

the Reformation - national
two revivals
Hans Nielson Hauge (1771-1824)
Gisle Johnson (1822-1894)
Church reform movement

Two elements of church life in Norway in the 1800s

Norwegian state church:

- Lutheran by confession
- confirmation through the public schools
- department of national government:
Ministry of Church and Education
- church buildings owned by the Crown/state
- pastors appointed to their church by the government
- pastors paid by the government
 - ⇒ considered part of the aristocracy
- moral and spiritual conditions were generally bad
- public worship: formal, liturgical, rationalistic
- official acts: baptism, confirmation, weddings, funerals
- “emphasis upon organization, ritual, and pastoral authority”

informal spiritual life gatherings

- awakenings, Hauge
- Johnson
- prayer houses, led by “farmer-folk”
- not an organization, only a movement—
- generally did not compete with church-going
- informal gatherings: prayer & Scripture, very solemn
- spiritual life: repentance and faith

In the New World, what did the immigrants want?

from *The Years of Our Church*, Clarence J. Carlsen (1942)

During the first three decades of immigrant history in this country, 1840-1870, the Norwegian, Americans were divided, broadly speaking, into the same two groups that had existed in Norway: those who favored the State Church pattern for the emerging church in their new homeland and those who favored a church which would perpetuate the ideals and methods of the revival movement. The former organized themselves in 1853 into a church body known popularly as the Norwegian Synod. The latter were gathered in 1847 into what came to be commonly known as the Eielsen Synod. The leaders of the Norwegian Synod were pastors who had been trained at the University in Norway. Their aim was the establishment of a church in this country which would follow as closely as possible the lines of the State Church of Norway, with its emphasis upon organization, ritual, and pastoral authority. The Eielsen Synod . . . endeavored principally to transplant the revival movement to American soil. They paid little attention to congregational or synodical organization, matters with which they had had nothing to do in Norway and with which they were not willing to concern themselves any more than absolutely necessary in this country.

Thus the Norwegian Synod represented one extreme and the Eielsen Synod the other.

Many immigrants did not feel at home in either of these two organizations. Accordingly, in 1870, a third church body appeared among the Norwegian Lutherans in this country. In fact, a fourth

one appeared almost simultaneously. . . Both of these groups took a mediating position between the extremes of the first two groups. In 1890 these two bodies . . . merged to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church.

The “Old School” and the “New School”
old direction *new direction*

The Views of the Norwegian Immigrants

Old School	New School	Haugeans
organization	real church	a movement
ritual	that meets	revival
pastoral authority	spiritual needs	spiritual life

Efforts to form a *new school* church body in America.

The Norwegian-Danish Augustana Conference, 1870

August Wenaas, theological leader and seminary professor

honored the heritage of the Church of Norway
 following Gisle Johnson: balance between doctrine and life,
 overemphasis on either leads to distortions
 The Conference was a middle way between Norwegian Synod and the Eielsen’s group
 The Synod: rigid orthodoxy, polemical spirit, authoritarian attitude
 Eielsen’s: anti-church (structure and ritual), sectarian, fear of educated clergy
 The Conference should steadfastly adhere to correct doctrine and channel its efforts into
 sound and fresh congregational life
 (1876, returned to Norway)

1871, Seminary in Minneapolis – Augsburg

Sven Oftedal, 1873 – new professor at Augsburg

Georg Sverdrup, 1874, another new professor

deep convictions about congregational freedom and
 democratic principles ⇒ Church Reform Movement
 much more energetic, even militant (fighting for free congregations against opposing
 ideas & efforts)
 pastors-in-training need extensive exposure to the living congregation and its ideals
 Lutheran Church life (and unity) can be maintained with the existing Lutheran

Confessional theology, especially the Catechism. (Further theological distinctions may be helpful, but should not be required.)

several theological disagreements had recently resulted in doctrinal treatise/theses on controversial topics

some demanded that congregations pick a side □

Sverdrup: a congregation can take any doctrinal stance it wants to, but should not be forced into it or intimidated.

“A Free Congregation in a Free Church” 1882

When we look back to the apostles' simple way of proceeding we find that what they did was to gather voluntary groups of people into congregations by means of the word and sacraments. They then permitted these congregations to govern and rule themselves in Jesus' spirit and power, while they followed them with intercessions and admonitions of love. There ought not to be any doubt on our part that this is also the way in which we should proceed in the work of building a foundation for our church. . . .

Following the footsteps of Jesus and the apostles, and with the discouraging example of the European churches before us, we venture to make this assertion: since God has given us the opportunity in the free America to start over again with the building of a church, let us seek to lay the right foundation. And so we can define our calling more precisely: it is the calling of the Norwegian church in America to build the kingdom of God among us by establishing and developing free congregations with full self-rule.

Unification (merger) of Norwegian Lutheran Church bodies in the late 1800s.

⇒ The United Norwegian Lutheran Church, 1890

About the merger, there were efforts . . .

- to displace Augsburg as the college of the United Church
- to compel congregation to adopt new theological statements
- to “make a sin” of holding strong convictions
- to empower determined (head-strong) leadership
- to deny voting rights to opposition leaders (1895, Sverdrup & Oftedal)
- to exclude congregations that dissent (12 Uncertified Congregations)
- to withhold Home Missions support of “disloyal” congregations (1893)
- to deny ordination to young pastors were not complete supporters on the Church's practice (1894)

The Friends of Augsburg ⇨ ⇨ ⇨ the Lutheran Free Church

Issues in the transfer of ownership to the United Church

The Lutheran Free Church

Constituting Convention, June 9-13, 1897,
Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.
Fundamental Principles & Rules for Work



Association of Free Lutheran Congregation, 1962-2012



The Lutheran Free Church (1897-1963)

Constituting Convention, June 9-13, 1897, Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.
Fundamental Principles & Rules for Work

A Conference/Association . . . not a Synod.

synod – a gathering of churches or church leaders (e. g. pastors) for the purpose of governing churches or a church body.

conference

association – a gathering of churches or church leaders for the purpose of fellowship, mutual edification or cooperation in common endeavors.

Started with a handful of congregations, maybe 20

1963: 328 congregations - 94,500 members

1950s – a lot of talk about merger, joining Lutheran Church groups together.

Pros: a larger denomination could have more influence and stability, a united front against many evils of the day

we are different than our forefathers who chose to be separate efficient operations

“Scripture teaches Christian unity.”

Cons: congregational freedom will not be guaranteed

a different view of Christian piety is spreading
theological liberalism in many Lutheran groups (ALC)
procedural issues

The Merger with the American Lutheran Church, 1963

277 congregations joined

51 remained outside the ALC.

The ALC was a synod, not an association.

Churches who joined would not be able to preserve their self-governing rights.

The Merger Process

A congregational referendum ⇔

not the decision of the Annual Conference.
each congregation will have it's own vote.

first attempt:

1955 congregational referendum (required 75%)

210 *for*

117 *against*

2nd: 1957 referendum (required 66.67%)

190 *for*

147 *against*

allocated voting, 1-10 “votes” based on congregational size

65.1% *for* (without allocated voting: 56%)

3rd: 1961 referendum

201 *for*

128 *against*

allocated voting:

69.4% *for*

30.6% *against*

(61% of total votes cast were “for merger”)

The Merger was declared accomplished.

But what about First Lutheran Church in Valley City, ND

Pastor Fritzof Monseth

committed to Scripture and Evangelism
strong opponent of merger



his congregation voted against merger three times, but was divided on the question of its future denominational home.

the majority of First Lutheran Church were opposed to the merger, but were not able to get the super-majority needed to leave the denomination.

without ever agreeing to the merger (voting three times against) the congregation was certified into the new ALC as one of its congregations.

legal action was pursued in Valley City in the summer of 1964, but failed to affirm the freedom of the congregation.

In a separate legal action in Minnesota, the court ruled that there was no substantial difference between an LFC congregation and an ALC congregation.

at one point, Pastor Monseth and his congregation
were locked out of their church.

they were eventually forced to begin over as a new
congregation named Grace Free Lutheran Church.



Many/most Christians are not particularly concerned about congregational freedom.

It doesn't appear that many people even understand it.

Freedom is so much more than a legal/constitutional item.

faith relationship with Christ
following His Word
taking responsibility for oneself } *spiritual life*

Free and Living Congregations

APPENDIX THREE

ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

Q1. What is your ID number?

Q2. What is your gender?

Q3. What is your primary church background?

Q4. Check any days that you have missed class during the research period.

S1. Most US churches are free to believe, organize and act however they want to.

S2. The most important part of being a free church is that the people at the headquarters leave us alone to do what we want to do.

S3. A free congregation is not responsible for what the AFLC leadership does.

S4. It is very helpful for free congregations to have strong and assertive pastors.

S5. It is uncertain or doubtful whether local congregations seeking God's will for themselves will be able to confess the truth of God's Word faithfully or make a difference for Christ in this world.

S6. Strong denominational (national) leadership usually helps a congregation to keep itself pure in faith, professions and practice.

S7. If we have to choose between the freedom of the local congregation and the strength of unified, corporate action, we should probably choose the benefits of unified action.

S8. When it comes to understanding God's Word correctly or finding the best way to win the lost for Christ it is usually best to follow the majority.

S9. Congregational freedom is only one way to understand and interpret the teaching of the New Testament.

S10. There is little connection between congregational freedom and the spiritual lives of the members.

S11. If we always go along with the AFLC's ministry direction and spending plans we will not be a truly free congregation.

S12. The AFLC's forefathers (Sverdrup and Oftedal) were widely appreciated for their innovative views of the congregation.

- S13. A congregation that maintains its freedom of self-government rather than following the directions of a centralized and/or authoritative denomination is acting against the Biblical pattern of Christian unity.
- S14. Being a free and living congregation simply means that we do not get orders from the national church body/organization, we only get suggestions.
- S15. Most Christians (pastors and laypersons) would naturally prefer to belong to a free and living congregation.
- S16. Once our ancestors left the authority and control of the State Churches of Europe, they no longer faced any threats to their congregational life and freedom.
- S17. If a congregation is free it has no obligation to participate in the ministries of the national church body (AFLC).
- S18. Congregations become free by putting a statement of non-submission in the legal documents, such as a constitution.
- S19. Threats to a congregation's freedom can only come from forces outside the congregation.

APPENDIX FOUR

ASSESSMENT SURVEY RAW DATA

Assessment Survey #1, given before the historical narrative was presented.

(1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=strongly agree)

ID #	Church	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q15
8727	AFLC	3	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	3	1	1
4139	AFLC	3	2	2	2	1	4	2	1	1	1	1
2322	AFLC	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3
1349	non A	3	2	2	3	1	3	3	1	3	3	
5703	AFLC	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	3
6071	non A	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	
3116	AFLC	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	1	3	2	2
2851	AFLC	4	3	2	4	1	4	2	2	3	1	1
2179	non A	2	1	2	4	2	3	3	3	2	2	
7304	AFLC	4	3	2	3	1	3	1	1	4	2	4
8723	non A	4	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	
6095	AFLC	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	3	1	2
5778	AFLC	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
7027	AFLC	3	4	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	2	3
3441	AFLC	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	1
6523	AFLC	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	3
17248	non A	4	1	1	4	2	1	3	1	2	1	
2526	AFLC	2	2	2	4	3	1	3	3	3	2	3
1516	AFLC	2	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2
6133	non A	3	2	3	3	3	4	3	1	2	3	
2465	non A	3	2	2	3	2	3	4	2	3	2	
7246	AFLC	3	3	3	4	1	3	3	1	2	2	1
7943	non A	4	2	4	4	2	3	4	1	1	2	
2371	AFLC	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	2
7986	non A	2	2	1	4	1	4	1	1	1	1	
2817	non A	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	1	
6425	AFLC	3	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2

Assessment Survey #1 – continued

(1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=strongly agree)

ID #	Church	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23
8727	AFLC	2	1	2	3	2	1	3	1
4139	AFLC	3	1	4	3	1	1	3	2
2322	AFLC	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	3
1349	non A	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	1
5703	AFLC	2	2	4	2	2	2	3	2
6071	non A	4	1	4	2	2	4	3	2
3116	AFLC	3	1	3	2	1	1	2	1
2851	AFLC	4	1	4	4	2	2	3	1
2179	non A	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	1
7304	AFLC	4	1	4	4	3	1	3	1
8723	non A	4	2	3	2	2	2	1	2
6095	AFLC	3	2	2	3	1	1	3	1
5778	AFLC	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	1
7027	AFLC	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3
3441	AFLC	3	2	4	3	2	2	3	2
6523	AFLC	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	1
17248	non A	4	1	1	3	1	1	1	1
2526	AFLC	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
1516	AFLC	3	2	2	4	1	2	1	1
6133	non A	3	3	1	3	1	2	1	2
2465	non A	3	3	2	4	2	2	3	2
7246	AFLC	2	1	3	3	1	4	3	1
7943	non A	3	1	3	2	1	4	3	1
2371	AFLC	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
7986	non A	2	1	3	3	1	2	3	1
2817	non A	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2
6425	AFLC	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1

Assessment survey #2, given after the historical narrative was presented

(1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=strongly agree)

ID #	Church	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15
6133	non-A											
2526	AFLC	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	3
2851	AFLC	3	2	2	4	1	4	1	3	4	1	1
2371	AFLC	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3
1516	AFLC	2	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1	2
5778	AFLC	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
5703	AFLC	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	3	1	2
2465	non-A	3	2	2	3	3	3	4	2	3	1	3
2500	non-A	3	1	1	4	2	4	1	1	3	1	1
8723	non-A	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	3
9547	AFLC	2	3	3	3	1	2	1	1	3	2	2
2322	AFLC	4	4	2	3	1	1	1	2	3	2	3
7943	non-A	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	1	1	2	3
	AFLC	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	2	1	2	3
2329	AFLC	2	1	2	3	2	1	1	1	4	1	3
3441	AFLC	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2
6523	AFLC	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2
8727	AFLC	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
2952	AFLC	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	1
6071	non-A	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	2	3	2	2
7304	AFLC	2	3	2	3	1	1	3	1	3	1	4
6905	AFLC	2	1	1	4	1	1	4	1	2	1	1
7246	AFLC	1	2	4	4	1	2	1	1	2	1	4
2739	AFLC	1	2	1	3	2	2	1	1	4	1	3
2179	non-A	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3
2817	non-A	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	3
0014	AFLC	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	3
7986	non-A	4	3	2	4	3	3	2	2	3	1	3
6425	AFLC	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
	non-A	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	3	2	2

Assessment survey #2 – continued

(1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=strongly agree)

<u>ID #</u>	<u>Church</u>	<u>Q 16</u>	<u>Q 17</u>	<u>Q 18</u>	<u>Q 19</u>	<u>Q 20</u>	<u>Q 21</u>	<u>Q 22</u>	<u>Q 23</u>
6133	non-A								
2526	AFLC	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
2851	AFLC	4	2	4	4	1	2	1	1
2371	AFLC	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
1516	AFLC	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1
5778	AFLC	3	3	3	2	1	3	3	1
5703	AFLC	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	1
2465	non-A	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2
2500	non-A	4	1	3	2	2	1	1	1
8723	non-A	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	1
9547	AFLC	4	2	4	3	3	3	3	2
2322	AFLC	3	1	4	3	1	1	3	2
7943	non-A	3	1	4	3	1	4	4	1
	AFLC	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	2
2329	AFLC	4	1	3	3	1	2	3	2
3441	AFLC	1	2	4	3	2	3	3	1
6523	AFLC	3	3	2	4	3	1	2	2
8727	AFLC	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	2
2952	AFLC	2	1	1	4	1	1	3	1
6071	non-A	3	2	3	4	2	2	3	2
7304	AFLC	4	1	4	2	4	2	3	1
6905	AFLC	4	1	3	3	2	2	1	1
7246	AFLC	4	1	3	1	1	4	1	1
2739	AFLC	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	1
2179	non-A	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	1
2817	non-A	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
0014	AFLC	3	3	4	4	1	2	2	2
7986	non-A	2	1	2	2	1	2	3	1
6425	AFLC	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
	non-A	2	1	3	1	1	1	3	1

APPENDIX FIVE

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 3 SYLLABUS

TH 2302: *Salvation Theology* Free Lutheran Bible College

Instructor: Pastor Steve Mundfrom, M. Div.

Class times: Monday, 9:00-9:50am; Wednesday, 8:00-8:50am. Room: 202.

Office hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 1:00-3:30 and by appointment

Contact Information: Office phone # 763-412-2060. Email: steve.mundfrom@flbc.edu

Spring 2022 Semester, First-Year Students, (2 credits)

PREREQUISITES: None.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The great doctrines of the Bible are studied systematically by means of assigned Bible passages and lectures. Comparisons are made with the confessional writings of the church. Theology of Salvation examines the doctrines of Salvation by Faith in Christ.

COURSE RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES:

This required course is offered in partial fulfillment of the Program Outcomes (PO) of FLBC:

FLBC Program Outcomes

- 1) Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Scripture, subscribing to its inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy without reservation, confessing its authority and demonstrating the ability to accurately interpret it.
- 2) Communicate the assurance of personal salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by explaining the basis for their faith and be able to explain the Lutheran perspective of the Means of Grace.
- 3) Demonstrate growth in spiritual maturity that is informed by the Law and motivated and empowered by the Gospel.
- 4) Understand and embrace the New Testament model of the congregation and its commitment to scriptural evangelism, discipleship, worship, education, servant leadership, and stewardship, as guided by the AFLC Fundamental Principles.
- 5) Describe and communicate God's work in the past through His Church, and exhibit a willingness to participate in making disciples today, especially through involvement in the local congregation.

Course Objectives	Assessment of Student Learning
This course contributes to the accomplishment of one or more of the program outcomes listed above by enabling the student to:	The means for evaluating success in achieving these objectives:
Understand, explain and accept the revelation of God in His Word and conform his faith and life to it. (PO 1, 2, 3, 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v Written assignments v Classroom discussion
Understand and express God's revealed will to save fallen humanity through in Jesus Christ. (PO 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v Exams v Written assignments v Research paper
Comprehend and personally apply the Biblical truth of the consecrated Christian life as a true response to justification by faith for the glory of Christ. (PO 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v Classroom discussion and student/teacher witness v Written assignments v Bible Doctrine Essay

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Bible, (ESV or NASB are recommended for AFLBS study)
 Steven P. Mueller, ed., *Called to Believe, Teach and Confess* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).
Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Readers' Edition of the Book of Concord, Paul Timothy McCain, Ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005.)

CLASSROOM POLICY: (FLBC *Student Life Handbook*)

It is assumed and expected that students are here to study God's Word. In the classroom we seek to provide an environment that is as free from distractions as possible and gives God the honor and reverence His Word deserves. In order to maintain this atmosphere, cell phones must be shut off during class time, except with instructor permission, and other devices are not to be brought to class. Laptop computers are allowed solely for the academic proceedings of the class period in which the student is attending. Students who use computers or cell phones for internet or other inappropriate uses (including messaging) during class will be disciplined, including fines and likely loss of electronic privileges.

Bells are used to notify students and faculty of class times.

- v Two bells = two minutes until class begins
- v Three bells = class begins
- v One bell = class dismissed

We desire the classroom to be a clean and welcoming environment, and students are responsible to keep it neat during and after classes. Food is not permitted in the classroom, but hot or cold beverages are allowed provided they are in a closed lid container.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY (FLBC Student Life Handbook)

In order to uphold the highest standard of academic integrity, tests and quizzes are to be taken on the day they are scheduled. A student should not assume that they can take a test or quiz at a later date for a personal absence. If a student misses a test or quiz **for any reason**, whether excused or personal, the student must notify the professor for the class they miss, and request permission to take the test/quiz with a staff proctor. The instructor reserves the right to deny the request.

If permission is granted, the test/quiz **must be taken within three calendar days** of the original test/quiz date, or a zero will be entered for that test/quiz. In the event of a pre-approved, unexcused absence (e.g. a family trip or vacation), the student must take the missed quiz or test by the deadline listed on the Extended Absence Form located in the Populi files or in the Registrar's office.

Faculty reserve the right to modify make-up tests/quizzes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Class Attendance (10% of grade)

Two attendance policies apply to students in **TH 2302 – Theology of Salvation**:

FLBC Attendance Policy: (FLBC Student Handbook)

As it is understood and expected that students are here to study God's Word, it naturally follows that this can best be done by students placing themselves in situations to have the living, breathing Word of God active and at work in their lives. Therefore, students (including those auditing a class) are required to be on time and attend all classes in which they are enrolled. A student is allowed a specified amount of personal absences for each class. However, exceeding the designated amount of personal absences will have a significant impact on the final grade for each course. There will be an automatic one grade level deduction off the final grade based on the number of credits per course (see attendance grid). An additional 1/3rd grade level deduction will occur if a second threshold of absences is reached. Personal absences will be categorized as Unexcused Absences in the attendance portion of Populi.

Course Credit	Grade Level deduction
2-credit class	One grade level deduction off final grade when 4th unexcused absence occurs; Additional 1/3rd level deductions for every subsequent absence

Please note: a personal absence will be assessed when a student accumulates three tardies. Students who are tardy will be marked absent unless they speak to the instructor at the end of the class.

Cumulative personal absences equaling three times the total number of credits a student is enrolled in will result in suspension through the end of the term. It is the student's sole responsibility to know and comply with the attendance policy, monitor their absences in

Populi, notify their instructor prior to any missed class, and complete any missed assignments or quizzes per the Academic Integrity and Incomplete Policies. Supplemental work to remove an absence may be available at the discretion of the instructor. It is solely the student's responsibility to ask the instructor for this accommodation.

Adopted: 6-28-21

TH 2302: Theology of Salvation – Attendance Policy:

Personal absences will be recorded as a part of your class grade. Up to three personal absences may be made up in the following manner: submit answers "For Review and Discussion" questions, (at least 150 words per answer). Due within two weeks of the absence.

First absence:

Chapter 12, Question #1 (page 257) and Chapter 13, Question #4 (page 279)

Second absence:

Chapter 12, Question #3 (page 257) and Chapter 14, Question #4 (page 295)

Third absence:

Chapter 13, Question #5 (page 279) and Chapter 15, Question #1 (page 309)

2. Assigned Readings and Discussion Questions (20% of grade)

Students will read pages 231-310 of the assigned text (*Called to Believe, Teach and Confess*, by Steve P. Mueller) and submit answers to the specified "For Review and Discussion" questions.

Due January 26: Chapter 11, Question #3 (page 244)
Chapter 11, Question #4 (page 244)

Due February 9: Chapter 12, Question #2 (page 257)
Chapter 13, Question #1 (page 279)

Due March 16: Chapter 13, Question #2 (page 279)
Chapter 14, Question #1 (page 295)

Due March 30: Chapter 14, Question #3 (page 295)
Chapter 15, Question #3 (page 309)

Please submit each assignment on one side of a single sheet of paper.

FLBC Systematic Theology: Discussion Questions Grading Rubric

A **basic grade of 90%** will be granted for a paper that:

- / clearly and thoughtfully answers the questions posed in the textbook
- / has doctrinal integrity—faithful to the whole of Scriptural teaching
- / meets the expectation of adequate length—150-200 words
(not counting quotations or unnecessary repetition)
- / uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation (including quotation marks)

Grade will *increase* with:

- + applicable Scripture citations that are properly interpreted
- + insightful application or comments about the topic of the question
- + clear and concise writing style (a formal writing style is preferred over a casual, conversational writing style)

Grade will *decrease* with:

- vague, irrelevant or confused answers to the author's questions
- carelessness with Scripture and Biblical doctrine
- mere repetition of textbook (or other sources) material—provided it is properly cited
- excessive writing errors or general sloppiness
- short or incomplete answers:
 - less than 110 words ⇒ minus 1 letter grade
 - less than 70 words ⇒ minus 2 letter grades
- plagiarism (results in 0%) EVERY TIME you get information for an assignment from a source (a class lecture, a book, a footnote in your Bible, a webpage, etc.) you **MUST** acknowledge where that information came from—whether you use the words of the original source or put the information into your own words. A direct quotation must appear in quotation marks followed by the author, book name and page number in parentheses. An indirect quotation does not need quotation marks, but must still be followed by the author, book name and page number in parentheses. SEE: FLBC Student Handbook, *Plagiarism Policy*, pages 49-50.

3. On-line Quizzes (20% of grade)

There will be 6-8 quizzes given on random days at the conclusion of the class period covering material from that period or previous, recent class periods. These quizzes will be taken by logging into Populi. Each quiz will have from 10 questions and 7-10 minutes will be given for each quiz. Students will be expected to have a device available to take these quizzes unless **prior** arrangements have been made. Dates: Surprise!! **(Quiz dates on Populi are NOT accurate.)**

Quizzes missed because of a personal absence may NOT be made up unless the personal absence is made up first in the previously indicated manner. Quizzes missed because of an

excused absence must be made up within 3 calendar days of the absence (SEE Academic Integrity Policy).

4. Large Catechism Report (10% of grade). Due March 2.

Read *Luther's Large Catechism*. (*Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions*, pages 351-440)
Answer the assigned questions on Populi. You would be wise to read all the questions first and to keep them in mind as you read the book.

This reading report is on Populi as a "test" but it is not like a real test. You may work on it at any time and come back to it as often as you need to. You may use your Bible and the assigned book while doing the assignment. None of your work is finalized until you click "Submit" at the bottom of the Populi page. If you accidentally submit the assignment before you are finished, Mrs. Bierle can open it up for you again.

5. Research Project, (15% of grade) April 20.

Read assigned selections:

Called to Believe, Teach and Confess, pages 231-244.

Luther's Large Catechism (*Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions*, pages 351-440)

"Apology of the Augsburg Confession" (*Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions*, pages 82-114.)

I Know Whom I Have Believed, by Carl F. Wisloff, pages 81-95. (on Populi)

Suggested, but not required:

"The Righteousness of Faith before God" in *Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions*, pages 479-482 and 536-546.

Another excellent work on this subject is Martin Luther's little book, "The Freedom of a Christian" (aka: "Concerning Christian Liberty") available on Populi.

Submit a 5-6 page research project in which you discuss the following questions/topics:

- 1) Cite the main Bible passages related to justification by faith.
- 2) What are some other ways the Bible teaches the same truth as justification by faith but using different terms/ideas? Explain these.
- 3) How is the doctrine of justification related to the basic Biblical distinction between Law and Gospel?
- 4) Discuss the distinction between objective justification and subjective justification, including the idea of justification *by faith*.
- 5) What is the role/place of justification in the ongoing life of the believer?
- 6) How would you explain the biblical meaning of justification by faith to a friend?
AND/OR Suggest several everyday illustrations that are useful to explain justification by faith.
- 7) Relate anything else that you have been helped by from your research and study.

6. Mid-term and Final Exams (25% of grade)

The Mid-Term Exam will be on February 23.

The Final Exam will be on Tuesday, May 4 at 8:00-9:25am.

7. Extra Credit

There is no guarantee that Extra Credit work will be offered!

The primary concern of the instructor regarding extra credit is fairness to those students who do their work adequately and on-time. In an effort to be fair to every student, any extra credit to make up for poor or late work must demand more of the student than the original assignments.

Extra credit work will not be announced to the whole class. Any student who would like the chance to earn extra credit must contact the instructor and ask for the opportunity.

LATE WORK POLICY:

All assignments must be submitted via Populi by 11:59pm on the due date indicated in the syllabus for each class. Any assignments not received will be entered as a zero in the Populi grade book. Once late work is received, the assignment grade will be adjusted with a 5% reduction of score for every weekday it is late.

Once the assignment is two weeks late (ten weekdays), the entered grade of zero will stand and the assignment may no longer be submitted for credit. The instructor reserves the right to require a submission of a specific assignment(s) as a stipulation for completing a course, even if no credit can be given due to being outside the two-week window. Failure to submit designated assignment(s) will result in an automatic "F" for a course grade.

No assignments will be accepted after the last day of the semester.

Students who will miss class due to an excused absence must submit assignments by the due date or late work policy will apply (see Excused Absence).

FINAL EXAMINATION POLICY:

Final examinations are required in most lecture courses of two credits or more. Students should exercise extreme diligence in taking final exams on the day and time they are given. Final exam dates are listed in the Annual Academic Calendar. No final examinations shall be given to individual students before or after the regularly scheduled time without the approval of the course instructor in advance.

An early/late/off campus location testing fee of \$25.00 per exam will be charged and must be paid before the student will be allowed to take the test. All other school fines must be paid prior to taking finals. A student who is absent from a final examination, unless excused, automatically receives a grade of zero for the exam.

A \$25.00 fee will be assessed when a student is absent from a scheduled final examination time slot that does not include an examination.

GRADE SCALE:

98-100	A+	4.0	Superior
94-97	A	4.0	Superior

90-93	A-	3.7	Excellent
87-89	B+	3.3	Good
84-86	B	3.0	Good
80-83	B-	2.7	Good
77-79	C+	2.3	Average
74-76	C	2.0	Average
70-73	C-	1.7	Average
67-69	D+	1.3	Below Average
64-66	D	1.0	Below Average
60-63	D-	0.7	Below Average
Below 60	F	0.0	Failing

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GROUPS:

L = Leader, R = Reporter

A: Michelle Abel, Kassi Adkins, Madi Demo (L), Luke Dryburgh, Kiah Jensen (R)
 B: Lydia Baerbock, Erica Bang (R), Hale Berntson, Trevor Blom (L), Joshua Fernandez
 C: Christian Boen, Kevin Bump, Soren Grothberg (R), Samantha Meyer, Anders Ryden (L)
 D: Andrew Carlson, Hannah Cree (R), Janay Helms, Victor, Hembree, Mason Mitchell (L)
 E: Vicky Davalos, Jonas Fairrow, Stephenie Kelso (R), Miri Klusova (L), Arielle Kneeland
 F: Josh Greven, Magdalena Grothberg (L), Jaelynn Kozicky, Jesse Kupser, Nicholas Lunde (R)
 G: Talia Nessa, Christine Niessen, Kelvin Olson (R), Levi Steele (L), Jackson Stimer
 H: Alec Opegard, Abby Peterson (L), Sophia Lucht, Katie Strommen, Ethan Vogelsberger (R)
 I: Meghan Quanbeck, Lydia Rieschl (R), Britta Roehrich, Reise Stromstad (L), Trinity Sucher
 J: Lauren Seeba (L), Megan Smith (R), Jacob Thornblad, Natalie Tormanen, Malena Twedt

COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1: January 10 & 12

Intro, Review

WEEK 2: January 17 & 19

The Holy Spirit

CBTC 247-256

WEEK 3: January 24 & 26

The Holy Spirit. Divine Monergism

CBTC 281-290

WEEK 4: January 31 & February 2

Divine Monergism. Justification

CBTC 290-295

WEEK 5: February 7 & 9

Justification

CBTC 297-309

WEEK 6: February 14 & 16

Justification, Repentance and Faith

CBTC 297-310

WEEK 7: February 23
Mid-Semester Exam
WEEK 8: February 28 & March 2
Repentance and Faith
CBTC 297-310
WEEK 9: March 7 & 9
Unity with Christ/New Birth
CBTC 311-319
WEEK 10: March 14 & 16
Sanctification
CBTC 319-328
WEEK 11: March 21 & 23
Sanctification
CBTC 329-335
WEEK 12: March 28 & 30
TBD
CBTC 336-346
WEEK 13: April 20
TBD
CBTC 347-356
WEEK 14: April 25 & 27
TBD
CBTC 356-369
WEEK 15: April 2
Review

NOTICE

Students in Systematic Theology 3 will have the opportunity this semester to participate in Professor Mundfrom's Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project research through Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. His research project will attempt to measure the effectiveness of certain teaching techniques related to the AFLC's Doctrine of the Church. Participants will fill out two assessment surveys, one before and one after the project material is presented. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous. Participation or non-participation will not in any way factor into the course requirements or grading.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology):

Frederick Dale Bruner and William Hordern, *The Holy Spirit; Shy Member of the Trinity*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.)

Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit; God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption and Everyday Life*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2017.)

J. N. Kildahl, *The Holy Spirit and Our Faith*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937, 1960.)

John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness; The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*. (Downers

Grover, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.)

John F. Vogt, *Holy Spirit; The Giver of Life*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.)

Fredrik Wisløff, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1949.)

Salvation (Soteriology):

Siegbert W. Becker & Armin W. Schuetze, *His Pardoning Grace: Six Essays on the Doctrine of Justification*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1966.)

Martin Chemnitz, *Justification: The Chief Article of Christian Doctrine as Expounded in "Loci Theologici"*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986.)

Wilhelm Dantine, *The Justification of the Ungodly*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968.)

G. H. Gerberding, *The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1919.)

Adolf Koeberle, *The Quest for Holiness*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1936.)

Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. In *Luther's Works*, volumes 26 & 27. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963.)

_____, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), W. A. Lambert, trans. In *Luther's Works*, volume 31 – "Career of the Reformer I." (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957.)

Wayne D. Mueller & Curtis A. Jahn, *Justification: How God Forgives*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002.)

J. A. O. Preus, *Just Words; Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983.)

C. O. Rosenius, *A Faithful Guide to Peace with God*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1923.)

Thomas R. Schreiner & Matthew Barrett, *Faith Alone; The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.)

John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971.)

Norvald Yri, *What Is Salvation? Essentials of Christian Faith*. (Minneapolis: Yri Bible Institute, 2001.)

FLBC | Systematic Theology Writing Guide

1) Each student is expected to submit original work even if you work on the assignments together. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. EVERY TIME you get information for an assignment from a source (a class lecture, a book, a footnote in your Bible, a webpage, etc.) you MUST acknowledge where that information came from—whether you use the words of the original source or put the information into your own words. For most assignments, the following example will be sufficient when used at the end of the material that has been used, with or without quotation marks as appropriate:

e. g. (Mueller, *Called to Believe, Teach and Confess*, page 84).

2) Assignments should be submitted in type-written form, with 11-point font and 1 inch margins. Discussion questions should be single-spaced; essays and research papers should be double-spaced. All assignments should be printed on only one side of the paper.

3) Proper Page Heading:

<p>Your Name [the instructor knows his own name] Course Name [in case you have more than one class with him] Assignment Name [because assignments get mixed up in “the pile,” find on Populi] Date Submitted [the due date is in the syllabus]</p>
--

4) Assignments should be submitted on Populi. In Populi drag-and-drop a PDF or Microsoft Word document, DO NOT submit .pages (Apple/Mac) documents, the system is not designed to handle these.

5) Spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors will be counted against your grade (except on tests) at the rate of ½ of a letter grade per 5 errors—not to exceed 2 full letter grades.

6) Students will be expected to know everything that is discussed in class, including answers to individual questions.

7) Assignments are usually given with a suggestion regarding the number of words or pages. Shorter, more concise, papers are preferred where Scripture and other sources are explained and applied, rather than just quoted. You should regard these measurements as applying to *your* writing and ideas, not the writing and ideas which you cite from sources. As a rule, any quotation from an outside source should be followed by some explanation or application *in your own words* that demonstrates that you grasp the significance of what has been quoted.

8) Work for extra credit is **not** guaranteed. If extra-credit work is made available it will be significantly more demanding than the original work. LESSON: do your assignments well the first time!

9) Rules for Populi regarding on-line tests and quizzes. While these online resources can be accessed anywhere online, no student has permission to take tests or quizzes except at the assigned time and place. Unapproved use of these resources will incur an automatic 25% grade reduction before actual grading. If you miss a test, talk to the instructor before doing anything else.

10) **NOTE TO DISSENTERS:** Martin Luther said at the Diet of Worms, April 17, 1521: “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason . . . my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

If your conscience does not allow you to answer class questions in line with the Lutheran Confessions as presented in class or in the assigned readings you may follow this procedure: provide an answer that accurately expresses the Lutheran doctrine as required in the question, identifying it as the “Lutheran position,” “CBTC answer” or the “classroom/Professor Mundfrom view.” This part should be *at least* 2/3 of your assignment. In the remaining 1/3 you may provide substantial, Biblical reasons why you disagree. Arguments against what is presented in class will be graded by the strength of the argument in the opinion of the instructor.

September 2020

APPENDIX SIX

LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH FROM THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER OF THE FREE LUTHERAN BIBLE COLLEGE



Free Lutheran
BIBLE COLLEGE & SEMINARY

February 8, 2022

Dear Institutional review Board,

I give access and permission for Rev. Steve Mundfrom to do research using the Free Lutheran Bible College classroom. Rev. Mundfrom has permission to survey, test, and gather results from the FLBC classroom and online survey, and to include the results in his thesis. Rev. Mundfrom also has approval to store the study data in the FLBCS archives for seven years after the study with access granted only to the researcher.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Molstre
Seminary Dean
Chief Academic Officer
Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary
James.molstre@flbc.edu

(763)-412-2049

Establishing students in God's Word for life in Jesus Christ.

3134 East Medicine Lake Blvd, Plymouth, MN 55441-3008 | Phone: 763-544-9501 | Fax: 763-412-2047 | flbc@flbc.edu | www.flbc.edu

APPENDIX SEVEN

STUDENT PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM (BLANK)

Study Title: HOW CAN THE AFLC'S HISTORY BE USED TO TEACH FREE AND LIVING CHURCH POLITY?

Researcher: Stephen M. Mundfrom

Email Address and Telephone Number: steve.mundfrom@flbc.edu (763-412-2060)

Research Supervisor: Dr. Joel Biermann

Email Address: biermannj@csf.edu

You are invited to be part of a research study. The researcher is a student at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri as part of the Doctor of Ministry program (D.Min.). The information in this form is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. This form describes what you will have to do during the study and the risks and benefits of the study.

If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the researcher. Do not sign this form unless the researcher has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This study is to observe the effectiveness of a teaching technique for the communication of the AFLC's understanding of the freedom of Christian congregations.

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THE STUDY?

You are invited to be in the study because you are:

- a student at FLBC taking Salvation Theology (TH 2302) course.

If you do not meet the description above, you are not able to be in the study.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?

About 30-40 participants will be in this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher is a teacher at the Free Lutheran Bible College.

WILL IT COST ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to pay to be in the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study, your participation will last about 6 hours. You will have to come to the regularly scheduled Salvation Theology (TH 2302) class in Heritage Hall six time(s) during the study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study and if you sign this form, you will do the following things:

- give personal information about yourself, such as your age, gender and church background (from AFLC congregation or not from AFLC congregation).
- complete two surveys about your understanding of free and living congregations.

While you are in the study, you will be expected to:

- Follow the instructions you are given.
- Tell the researcher if you want to stop being in the study at any time.

WILL BEING IN THIS STUDY HELP ME?

Being in this study will not help you. Information from this study might help researchers help others in the future.

ARE THERE RISKS TO ME IF I AM IN THIS STUDY?

No study is completely risk-free. However, we don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

WILL I GET PAID?

You will not receive anything for being in the study.

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to be in the study and you can change your mind about being in the study at any time. There will be no penalty to you. If you want to stop being in the study, tell the researcher.

The researcher can remove you from the study at any time. This could happen if:

- The researcher believes it is best for you to stop being in the study.
- You do not follow directions about the study.
- You no longer meet the inclusion criteria to participate (e. g. missed class periods).

WHO WILL USE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT MY BEING IN THIS STUDY?

No information that identifies you personally will be collected during this study. In any written reports or publications, no one will be able to identify you.

The researcher will keep the information you provide in a password protected computer and/or a locked file cabinet in the FLBC archives and only the researcher will be able to review this information.

Limits of Privacy (Confidentiality)

Generally speaking, the researcher can assure you that she/he will keep everything you tell him/her or do for the study private. Yet there are times where the researcher cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person might harm themselves or another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to hurt themselves or another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS STUDY?

You can ask questions about the study at any time. You can call the researcher if you have any concerns or complaints. You should call the researcher at the phone number listed on page 1 of this form if you have questions about anything related to this study.

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read this form, and I have been able to ask questions about this study. The researcher has talked with me about this study. The researcher has answered all my questions. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I agree to allow the use and sharing of my study-related records as described above.

By signing this form, I have not given up any of my legal rights as a research participant. I will get a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I attest that the participant named above had enough time to consider this information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.
- Allen, Diogenes. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.
- Amerman, Nancy T., Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.
- Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. *The AFLC: Twenty Years of Beginnings and Blessings, 1962-1982*. Minneapolis, 1982.
- Bergendorff, Conrad. *I Believe in the Church: Confessions and Convictions*. Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1937.
- Biermann, Joel D. *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.
- Bingenheimer, Michael. "Autonomy or Multi-Site? A Policy Capturing Study of Two Models of Church Planting for the Guidance of Future Site Planting at Ascension Lutheran Church, Wichita, Kansas." DMin MAP, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2011.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.
- Booth, Alan. *Teaching History at University: Enhancing Learning and Understanding*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Brown, Stewart J., and Timothy Tackett. *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Vol. 7, *Enlightenment Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Bruce, Gustav M. *The Apostolic Church: Founding, Nature, Polity, Worship, Impact*. Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1963.
- Carlsen, Clarence J. *The Years of Our Church*. Minneapolis: Lutheran Free Church, 1942.
- Carson, D. A., ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Christopherson, Marian Quanbeck, Loiell O. Dyrud, and Martin L. Horn, eds., *Free and Living Congregations: The Dream that Would Not Die*. Minneapolis: Ambassador, 2002.
- Collingwood, R. G. *The Idea of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Colson, Charles. *The Body*. Dallas: Word, 1992.

- Cragg, Gerald R. *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.
- Crisp, Oliver D. and Fred Sanders, eds. *The Voice of God in the Text of Scripture: Exploration in Constructive Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.
- Durnbaugh, Donald F. *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1968.
- Edwards, Paul. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967.
- Ensign-George, Barry A. *Between Congregation and Church: Denomination and Christian Life Together*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Fevold, Eugene L. *The Lutheran Free Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Goldberg, Michael. *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001.
- Granquist, Mark. *Lutherans in America: A New History*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.
- Gurion, Vigen. *Tending the Heart of Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Haendler, Gert. *Luther on Ministerial Office and Congregational Function*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981.
- Hamre, James Stanley. "Georg Sverdrup's Concept of the Role and Calling of the Norwegian-American Lutherans: An Annotated Translation of Selected Writings." PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1967.
- Hart, Trevor A., and Richard Bauckham. *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 2000.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony. A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.
- Helland, Andreas. *Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message*. Minneapolis: Messenger, 1947.
- , ed. *Professor Georg Sverdrups Samlede Skrifter i Udvalg*. Translated by Larry Walker. Minneapolis: Free Church, 1910.
- Hinlicky, Paul R. *Luther and the Beloved Community*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

- Horn, Martin Lein. “Georg Sverdrup’s Concept of the Free Congregation: The Congregation as the Bride of Christ.” PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021.
- Jensen, John M., Carl E Linder, and Gerald Giving. *Biographical Directory of Pastors of the American Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962.
- Kaasa, Harris E. “The Doctrine of the Church in Norway in the Nineteen Century.” PhD diss., University of Durham, 1960.
- Kilcrease, Jack D. *Holy Scripture*. Ft. Wayne: Luther Academy, 2020.
- . *Self-Donation of God: A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Christ and His Benefits*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
- Kloha, Jeffrey. “The Transcongregational Church in the New Testament.” *Concordia Journal* 34, no. 3 (January–April 2008): 172–90.
- Kolb, Robert. *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives As a Foundation for Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.
- Lathrop, Gordon, and Timothy J Wengert. *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- Lee, Robert Lloyd. *From Freedom to Life: A History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations*. Minneapolis: Ambassador, forthcoming.
- Lewis, C. S. *God in the Dock; Essay on Theology and Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.
- Luther, Martin. “That a Christian Assembly Has the Right and Power to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture (1523).” In *Church and Ministry I*. Edited by Eric W. Gritsch. Vol 39 of *Luther’s Works*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.
- McKim, Donald K. *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.
- Marquart, Kurt E. *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*. Vol. IX, *The Church and Her Ministry, Governance, and Fellowship*. St. Louis: Luther Academy, 1990.
- Nelson, E. Clifford, and Eugene L. Fevold. *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960.
- Nichol, Todd W. *Crossings: Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a Transatlantic Tradition*. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2003.

- Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- . *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Nygren, Anders, ed. *This Is the Church*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1952.
- Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. Volume 1. St. Louis: Concordia, 1950.
- Rengstorf, Karl Heinrich. *Apostolate and Ministry: The New Testament Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1969.
- Sasse, Hermann. *Here We Stand*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1938.
- . “We Confess the Church.” In *We Confess Anthology*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1999.
- Shearier, Jeffrey. “Engaging Ecclesia: A Model for Training and Leading Circuits to Engage in Mission as Ecclesia” DMin MAP, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2012.
- Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- Sumner Jr., George R. “Postliberal Theology,” *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*. Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster, 2000.
- Tappert, Theodore G., ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.
- Thayer, John Henry, ed. *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book, 1886.
- Trueman, Carl F., *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin. *The Drama of Doctrine*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- Walker, Larry, ed., *The Sverdrup Journal 1–20*, (Georg Sverdrup Society, Minneapolis, Minn., 2005–).
- Walther, C. F. W. *Church and Ministry*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1987.
- . *The True, Visible Church and The Form of a Christian Congregation*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2005.
- Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Williams, Daniel H. *The Free Church & the Early Church; Bridging the Historical and Theological Divide*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.