

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



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—Prof. Edward Fredrich in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* about the break with the Missouri Synod

THE BREAK WITH MISSOURI

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However, problems began in 1938 when the Missouri Synod resolved that its 1932 confessional declaration, "Brief Statement," together with the "Declaration of the Representatives" from the American Lutheran Church (ALC) be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship without resolving the doctrinal issues that had separated the two church bodies for decades. Later joint confessions of the two groups failed to demonstrate that concord on the disputed doctrines had been reached.

Other events indicated that the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods were drifting apart. The Wisconsin Synod believed that participation in the military chaplaincy as it was constituted presented problems with the divinity of the call and church fellowship. The Missouri Synod approved participation in the chaplaincy. In 1944, the Missouri Synod abandoned its historic opposition to the Scouting movement. The Wisconsin Synod continued to oppose participation because of work righteousness wording inherent in Scouting materials, a false oath, and religious fellowship in the organization without regard to doctrinal differences.

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In 1944, the Missouri Synod made an official distinction between “joint prayer” and “prayer fellowship.” This resolution involved a departure from long-standing Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference teachings of the doctrine of church fellowship and gave official sanction to false practice. In 1945, some 44 pastors, leaders, and theologians of the Missouri Synod issued a statement that rejected the synod’s historical understanding of fellowship. This document was allowed to be withdrawn rather than retracted as false doctrine.

As the years progressed, many instances of the practice of church fellowship occurred between the ALC and the Missouri Synod, even though doctrinal agreement had not been reached nor fellowship declared. A Missouri Synod seminary professor delivered

an essay that challenged the verbal inspiration of Scripture and allowed for errors in the Bible. Though some protested the essay, the author was never disciplined. The Missouri Synod seemed to be unable or unwilling to exercise doctrinal discipline.

When the committee tasked with determining whether the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods were still in doctrinal unity reported that the two synods could not reach agreement in the doctrine of church fellowship, WELS, meeting in convention in 1961, suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

Though some predicted that a break in fellowship would result in the end of the Wisconsin Synod, God blessed the synod with rapid home and world mission growth, an increasing number of parish schools, and expanding enrollments in its ministerial education schools.



The WELS publication announcing the decisions of the 1961 synod convention.

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