



Christ Through Us Companion Study

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Lesson 1

Immigrants Bring Their Faith in Christ (1830–1860)

During the Lesson

1. What were the three kinds of Lutheranism?
2. Which description best fits the Wisconsin Synod in its first years?
3. What are the Lutheran Confessions?
4. What were the main reasons Germans emigrated to the United States during the 19th century?



5. Why did Muehlhaeuser found another Lutheran synod in Wisconsin?

6. The Wisconsin Synod was primarily founded by:
 - a. Lutheran pioneers who migrated west from the original 13 colonies.
 - b. Old Lutherans who immigrated from German lands to preserve their Lutheran faith and to flee persecution.
 - c. German immigrants and pastors from mission societies.

7. How did theological compromises arise in mixed Lutheran and Reformed congregations on the frontier?

8. What were some of the problems that resulted?

9. What were some of the major frontier challenges listed by Fachtmann?

Following the Lesson

1. List the major challenges facing the Wisconsin Synod in its first decade.
2. Which one stands out to you as especially important to have addressed?
3. How did the Wisconsin Synod endeavor to meet these challenges?
4. Describe how laypeople and called workers worked together to spread the gospel in the Wisconsin Synod in its infant years.
5. How can today's WELS members embody the missionary zeal of figures like Muehlhaeuser or Fachtmann in their own lives, workplaces, and communities?

6. How might the early struggles of the Wisconsin Synod encourage modern WELS Lutherans to strengthen their commitment to pastoral training and supporting missions, both locally and abroad?

Three Kinds of Lutherans

Old Lutherans

Traditionalist:

Emphasized strict adherence to the original teachings of Martin Luther and the historic Lutheran Confessions (e.g., the Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord).

Liturgical Conservatism:

Held to traditional forms of worship, rejecting innovations or changes influenced by modernity.

Opposed to Unionism:

Strongly resisted attempts to merge or unify with other Protestant traditions (e.g., the Prussian Union of Churches).

Orthodox Doctrine:

Stressed pure Lutheran doctrine, focusing heavily on justification by faith and the real presence in Communion.

Mild Lutherans

Moderate Approach:

Represented a middle ground between strict application of doctrine and lax liberal theology.

Pragmatic in Doctrine:

While affirming Lutheran principles, they showed more openness to dialogue and collaboration with other Protestant groups.

Flexible Worship

Practices: Less rigid in liturgical traditions, allowing for some adaptations or simplifications in church practices.

Balance: Sought a balance between faithfulness to Lutheran heritage and responsiveness to contemporary needs and evangelism.

New Lutherans

Progressive Theology:

Advocated for a more modern interpretation of Lutheran doctrine, often influenced by rationalism and Enlightenment ideas or broader Protestantism (e.g., the Second Great Awakening).

Innovative Worship:

Open to significant changes in liturgical practices, sometimes moving away from traditional forms altogether (e.g., New Measures).

Ecumenical Spirit:

Strongly favored ecumenism and union with other Protestant denominations, often at the expense of distinctively Lutheran teachings.

Doctrinal Liberalism:

Downplayed or reinterpreted some historic Lutheran doctrines to align with broader Protestant or modern theological trends (e.g., the sacraments, Sabbath, conversion, etc.)



Lesson 2

The Young Synod Embraces Confessionalism (1860–1890)

During the Lesson

1. What concerned Bading about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?
2. Why did the small Wisconsin Synod decide it needed its own seminary institution?
3. How did the Wisconsin Synod come to a stronger public confession of the Word?
4. What does it mean for church bodies to be in fellowship with one another?



5. How did the maturing Wisconsin Synod show the importance of education during this period?
6. What were the fears about the language used to describe God's election unto grace?

Following the Lesson

1. How can modern WELS congregations address challenges of growth and outreach today, while maintaining a strong focus on doctrine, as the synod did in its formative years?
2. How can WELS members today remain vigilant in preserving theological clarity in a world where many religious movements emphasize inclusivity over doctrine?



Lesson 3

The Wisconsin Synod Remains Committed to Christ (1890–1914)

During the Lesson

1. What compelled the Wisconsin Synod (the church) to push back against the overreach of the state?
2. How can your words of encouragement to a person to enter the public ministry have a huge impact?
3. What was the Wauwatosa Theology?



Following the Lesson

1. Review: What four synods formed the joint, or federation, synod?
2. How can WELS continue to prioritize Christian education in an age where secularism and nonreligious schooling dominate?
3. What lessons can we learn from our forefathers' willingness to stand up to state regulations that interfered with their ministry?
4. What legacies do the institutions established in this period have for us today?



Lesson 4

Perseverance in the Face of Challenges (1914–1933)

During the Lesson

1. What did many Wisconsin Synod Lutherans dislike about the US involvement in World War I?
2. What impact did World War I have on the Wisconsin Synod?
3. What was the Protes'tant Controversy?



4. What were the major challenges the Wisconsin Synod faced in the 1910s through 1930s?
5. How did the synod persevere and become strengthened by these ordeals?

Following the Lesson

1. What lessons can we learn about facing challenges as Christians, like the ones in this lesson?



Lesson 5

Opportunities in a Changing World (1933–1963)

During the Lesson

1. In what ways did World War II affect the Wisconsin Synod?
2. Where did the Wisconsin Synod focus its mission efforts in the postwar era?
3. What were the main tension points leading to the break with the Missouri Synod?



4. What were major developments in the aftermath of the break with Missouri?

Following the Lesson

1. How can the lessons from the postwar mission expansion of WELS inspire modern efforts to reach underserved or unreached areas worldwide?
2. What lessons can WELS learn from its decision to prioritize doctrine over unity when engaging with other Christian denominations today?
3. How can WELS schools and congregations today balance their rich heritage with the need to appeal to future generations?



Lesson 6

The Wisconsin Synod Comes Into Its Own (1963–1993)

During the Lesson

1. What major campaign did WELS undertake after the break with the Missouri Synod?
2. What was the response of WELS to the social issues of the 1960s and 1970s?
3. What were some of the other major projects WELS undertook between 1963 and 1993?

Following the Lesson

1. How can WELS congregations effectively address today's cultural challenges while remaining faithful to Scripture?



2. What lessons can WELS learn from its decision to prioritize doctrine over external unity when engaging with other Christian denominations today?

3. How can WELS balance its local and global mission efforts today, ensuring that resources are effectively used to spread the gospel?



Lesson 7

A New Millennium: Still Christ Through Us (1993–2025)

During the Lesson

1. What efforts suffered when our synod lacked offerings?
2. Where has our synod's ministry grown in the most recent generation?
3. What were some of the synod's most recent projects?

Following the Lesson

1. How have you benefited from reflecting on our synod's 175-year history?
2. What about our current lives as WELS Christians do you anticipate telling the next generation?



3. How can WELS members today become more personally involved in mission efforts?

4. How can WELS members today work to ensure that the synod's legacy of "Christ through us" continues for future generations?