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Volume Twenty-Six, Number One



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Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

When 12 pastors and 14 congregations representing some 3,500 to 4,000 members came together in Chicago, Illinois, and signed a constitution establishing *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten* (“The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States”), they were men individually of strong constitutions. And the constitution that they approved was robust as well.

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Roland F. Ziegler

All confession is an unfolding of the basic confession: Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). The preaching of the Gospel, of man’s redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, creates faith in Christ. The believers answer to that Gospel by confessing Jesus as their Savior and Lord. There is only one Lord, and thus there is only one confession.

10 Is the LCMS Still Zealous for Missions?

Robert Zagore

After two years of COVID, many congregations in the LCMS face a challenging future. Before the pandemic, membership was down, and attendance declined. Half of our congregations experienced worship attendance of 100 or less. No one can even try to guess what attendance will be post COVID. Why the losses?

For the Life of the World

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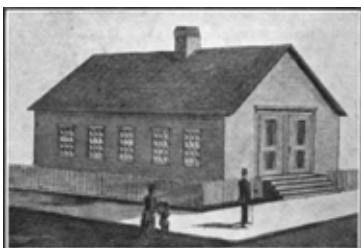
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“A Strong Co



When 12 pastors and 14 congregations representing some 3,500 to 4,000 members came together in Chicago, Illinois, and signed a constitution establishing *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten* (“The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States”), they were men individually of strong constitutions.



George Mezger, published by Concordia Publishing House via wikipedia.org

As a child, I was often puzzled when I heard a person described as having a “strong constitution.” The only “constitution” I was aware of was the Constitution of the United States. Only later did I realize that it was referring to the physical and/or mental and/or spiritual character of the person being described.

When 12 pastors and 14 congregations representing some 3,500 to 4,000 members came together in Chicago, Illinois, and signed a constitution establishing *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten* (“The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States”), they were men individually of strong constitutions. And the constitution that they approved, many parts of which are identifiable in the Constitution and Bylaws of The

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today, was robust as well.

It’s not like there were no Lutheran synods that these men and congregations could have joined. In fact, some of them had previously been members of others synods (“Ohio” and “Michigan,” for example), but they believed that something was lacking in each of the nearly 30 other Lutheran church bodies that dotted the American religious landscape in 1847.

And so, after preliminary meetings in Cleveland, Ohio (in September of

nstitution”

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

1845), St. Louis, Missouri (in May of 1846), and Fort Wayne, Indiana (in July of 1846), the men driving the process of synodical formation published a draft constitution in C. F. W. Walther’s (1811–1887) newspaper, *Der Lutheraner*, on September 5, 1846. They then invited all those interested in exploring participating in the proposed synod to gather in Chicago in the spring of 1847.

Of first importance to the delegates was revision and adoption of the proposed constitution.¹ What emerged was nothing short of a “theological manifesto” regarding what these men thought was not only the proper confession and practice of Christianity generally, but also of Lutheranism specifically. At times the founders are portrayed as “isolated” immigrants who are unengaged in the larger American context. Synod’s first constitution disproves this simplistic assessment.

Already in 1841, Friedrich Wyneken (1810–1876) had published his *Notruf* (“emergency call”) for help for the immigrant church in America. Wyneken’s sustained appraisal of the immigrants’ economic, political, and religious experiences in the United States shows one deeply familiar with the American experience.

The delegates at Chicago built on this as they carved out a space for a distinctively Lutheran synod. Their reasons for establishing the synodical fellowship are well known: 1) the example of the apostolic church, 2) the preservation and furthering of the unity of pure confession and to provide common defense against separatism and sectarianism, 3) protection and preservation of the rights and duties of pastors and congregations, 4) the establishment of the largest possible conformity in church government, 5) that the diversities of gifts be used for

the common good, and 6) the unified spread of the kingdom of God and to make possible the promotion of special church projects.²

More pointed with respect to the American situation, the Constitution was very clear that any pastor and/or congregations that willingly joined the Synod would separate themselves from “all commixture of church or faith, as, for example, serving of mixed congregations by a servant of the church, taking part in the service and sacraments of heretical or mixed congregations, or taking part in any heretical tract distribution or mission projects.” The examples, though not exhaustive by any means, give a sense of the kind of things that the congregations of the Synod were facing at the time. “Commixture of church or faith” actually translates as two separate German terms: *Kirchenmengerei* and *Glaubensmengerei*. A more literal translation of the words might be “mixing of churches” and “mixing of faiths.”

A real problem confronting Lutheran churches in the late 1840s were so-called “Union Churches”—churches that were comprised of both Lutherans and the Reformed. Some of these had their roots in the “Prussian Union” of 1817, where the Prussian King, Friedrich Wilhelm III, had forced the union of Lutherans and Reformed into a single “Evangelical” or “Union Church.” However, far more in American had their roots in the older Union Churches of the American Colonial period, which emerged in the early 1700s. These American Union Churches were voluntary associations of Lutherans and Reformed and posed a significant and immediate threat to the congregations of the newly-forming Synod. Indeed, the very congregation where the Synod was formed was a Union Church, though it divided into discrete confessions in the year following the Synod’s establishment.



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This is merely one example of several instances where Synod very purposefully set itself apart from the larger stream of American Christianity and American Lutheranism because of its firm commitment to the teaching of the Scriptures as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions. Others examples include: “acceptance of all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church...as the pure and unadulterated explanation and presentation of the Word of God,” “exclusive use of doctrinally pure churchbooks and schoolbooks,” and “proper (not temporary) calling of the pastors.” Nowhere was the new Synod more aware of its setting than in Article VI, paragraph fourteen, where it addressed the influence of non-Lutheran worship forms in some of the American Lutheran churches. The innovative practice of revivalism and its “New Measures,” which had been widely adopted, especially in the English-speaking synods of the day, helped Missouri articulate its purpose as a church body and offered a defense for the formation of yet another Lutheran synod. “Synod deems it necessary for the purification of the Lutheran Church in America,” stated the Constitution, “that the emptiness and poverty in the externals of the service be opposed, which, having been introduced here by the false spirit of the Reformed, is now rampant.” Thus, concluded the founders: “All pastors and congregations that wish to be recognized as orthodox by Synod are prohibited from adopting or retaining any ceremony which might weaken the truth or condone or strengthen a heresy . . .”³

This “strong” constitution helped give the Missouri Synod a very distinct identity and mission. As the years flowed by, parts of the original Constitution were changed, but it is surprising just how much of it remained. True, in time the Bylaws received a distinct section in the *Handbook*, and, of course, the old German text gave way to an English translation. Still, the efforts of the founders are easily recognizable in what we have today, testifying to their foresight in establishing such a robust Constitution and, more importantly, drawing God’s people together into a Synod that still has as its reason for forming the synodical union the following two points:

1. The example of the apostolic church (Acts 15:1–31), and
2. Our Lord’s will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit (1 Cor. 12:4–31).

The founders were people of “strong constitutions.” And for this, we can be especially thankful as we celebrate our 175th anniversary as a Synod. 📖

- 1 A helpful translation of the proposed constitution and what the delegates formally adopted is available as W. G. Polack, “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16 (April 1943): 1–18.
- 2 “First Constitution,” 2–3.
- 3 “First Constitution,” 12.

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