

WELS Historical Institute

# Journal

Volume 27, Number 2  
October 2009

DEC 18 REC'D



*In Memoriam*  
*Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann*  
*1914—2009*

WELS Historical Institute  
**Journal**

Volume 27, Number 2  
October 2009

- 3 In Memoriam: Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann  
*John M. Brenner*
- 5 "He was a man and a Christian":  
The Life and Work of John W.O. Brenner  
Part Two  
*Mark E. Braun*

Editor: John M. Brenner

The *WELS Historical Institute Journal* is the official publication of the WELS Historical Institute, 2929 N. Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI 53222. Copyright 2009 by WELS Historical Institute.

## In Memoriam +Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann+

Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann, 95, of Watertown, Wisconsin, passed away on Monday, August 24, 2009, at Watertown Regional Medical Center. Funeral services were conducted on Saturday, August 29, at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Watertown with the Rev. Mark Gartner and the Rev. Anthony Schultz officiating. His mortal remains were laid to rest in Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Union Grove, Wisconsin, awaiting the resurrection on the last day.

Dr. Lehmann was born on April 14, 1914, in Stanton, Nebraska, son of the Rev. Philipp L.H. and Elenore F.A. (Grosnick) Lehmann. On October 3, 1941, he married the former Esther J. Burhop at Calvary Lutheran Church in Madison.

He received his bachelor of arts degree from Northwestern College in Watertown in 1936, a bachelor of music from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1938, a master of arts in music from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1940, and finally his Ph.D. in musicology from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1966. During World War II he served in the U. S. Army in the Signal Corps-Signal Intelligence as a cryptographer from 1942 until his honorable discharge in 1945.

During his long career Lehmann held various music positions including assistant band director at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1937 to 1939; part-time music director, Fall River schools, from 1938-1940; music director, Colfax schools, from 1940 to 1942; chairman of the music department and music director at Concordia College in Fort Wayne, Indiana., and lecturer in music at Indiana University-Fort Wayne Extension from January 1946 to June 1950; and choral director at Cleveland Lutheran High School, Cleveland, Ohio, from 1950 to 1962 (while a student at Case Western Reserve University). From 1962 to 1979 he was the head of the music department and music director at Northwestern College in Watertown.

Lehmann also served a number of local congregations as choir director and organist. From 1936 to 1940 he was the organist and choir director at Calvary Lutheran University Chapel in Madison and at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Lakewood, Ohio, from 1951 to 1959. He was the choir director and assistant organist at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Lakewood, Ohio, from 1959 until 1962. In retirement he served from 1988 until 1997 as the assistant organist at Trinity Lutheran Church in Watertown as well as the choir director and organist at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Watertown.

He was a member of the American Musicological Society for 60 years and the American Legion. Lehmann was a former member of the College Band Directors Association and the American Guild of Organists.

Lehmann's synodical service included membership on the WELS Joint Hymnal Committee which produced *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.

Readers of the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* may best remember his

long and productive service in the research and preservation of the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He helped found the WELS Historical Institute and served on its board. From 1990 until the present he was the editor of the Institute's *Journal* and *Newsletter*. For many years he was involved in transcribing and preserving the early official correspondence of our synod together with his NWC colleagues, Prof. Erwin M. Schroeder and Dr. John F. Sullivan. When those two were no longer able to continue, Dr. Lehmann carried on the work alone. Lehmann also devoted long hours in retirement to translation, making available in English the early synodical *Proceedings* on the pages of the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*. These translations have proven to be an invaluable resource for a new generation researchers.

Dr. Lehmann was preceded in death by his parents; his wife, Esther on May 12, 2005; and sisters, Winfred Lehmann and Doris Urban. Survivors include his three sons, Rev. Philipp Lehmann of Zilwaukee, MI, Rev. Richard (Debra) Lehmann of Janesville, WI, and Rev. Edwin (Elizabeth) Lehmann of Marshfield, MO; eleven grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; a sister, Ruth Bentley of Maine; and other relatives and friends.

*"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them"* (Revelation 14:13).

Adapted from the obituary which appeared in the *Watertown Daily Times*, August 25, 2009.

## **"He was a man and a Christian": The Life and Work of John W.O. Brenner (Part Two)**

by Mark Braun

### **President Brenner**

Wisconsin Synod President G.E. Bergemann made efforts throughout his 16-year tenure to retire the Synod's indebtedness, which stood at \$24,000 when he took office in 1917. Although the debt was declared liquidated in 1925, additional building projects and growing operating expenses outstripped congregational offerings, and by 1931 it rose to \$696,000.<sup>1</sup> Bergemann reported to the Synod's 1933 convention that "under prevailing conditions there could be no thought of the enlargement of our work." Growth in the number of parish schools was stagnant, Most of the Seminary's 1933 graduates and even some 1932 graduates remained unassigned.<sup>2</sup> Salaries of professors were reduced by 36 percent during the previous biennium, and those of missionaries by 28 percent<sup>3</sup>

The Protest'ant strife also unfolded during Bergemann's presidency and in 1933 remained unresolved. As *ex officio* member of the Northwestern College board, he witnessed the beginnings of the conflict. The Western Wisconsin District asked him to chair a special district convention to settle the matter, and he established the Peace Committee in 1929, but neither effort proved successful.<sup>4</sup> Protest'ant literature then and since has leveled accusations against Bergemann for his handling of the matter, but the evidence does not merit the conclusion that he should be held responsible for failing to resolve it peacefully.<sup>5</sup>

Synodical debt and Protest'ant unrest combined to make Bergemann the only Synod president to be unseated while still willing to serve. Because John Brenner had gained valuable experience during the Seminary building program and debt retirement efforts of the 1920s, some believed he would be a better steward of the synodical treasury. And because he had been a member of the Northwestern board and gained an initial measure of confidence among protesters, some hoped he could resolve the dispute where others had not.<sup>6</sup>

And so Brenner was elected as the Synod's 8th president at its 1933 convention, held at St. Matthew's Church in Milwaukee. Some have even intimated that there was some manner of behind-the-scenes electioneering in the changeover of presidencies, though they do not accuse Brenner of participating in it or even being aware of it. "That he was chosen for this task surprised no one," E.E. Kowalke recalled.<sup>7</sup> At 59 years of age, he had more than 35 years of congregational, synodical, and administrative experience. Throughout his service as president he continued his work as a parish pastor, as others had done before him and as his successor would do during the first years of his presidency. Congregational statistics for 1934 showed that St. John's had 1450 baptized members and 1200 communicants, a day school enrollment of 122 stu-

dents, 41 children's baptisms, 23 children's confirmations, and 22 funerals.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, he probably would not have accepted the presidency had it been a full-time position. Throughout his life, he insisted on the policy of "*Kein Praeses ohne Amt*"—no presidency without the ministry. He believed every pastor "ought to be in the active ministry to be in touch with its joys and sorrows" and "dreadfully feared" a growing, top-heavy synodical administrative structure because of the natural tendency of men to speak "*von oben herab*"—that is, to dictate "from headquarters."

He never had a full-time secretary, and when in need of secretarial help he generally paid for it out of his own pocket or accepted volunteer assistance from "Wisconsin Synod girls." His son John F., when a seminary student, served as his father's secretary on weekends. In the early years he received no expense account and paid postage costs and long distance phone expenses for synodical business out of his own pocket.<sup>9</sup> He generally typed his own letters—not surprising, in retrospect, as President Franklin Roosevelt did the same<sup>10</sup>—and he appears to have used the same typewriter throughout his presidency.

The dual responsibilities of parish pastor and Synod president gave Brenner an expedient excuse to refuse to do something he apparently did not enjoy much anyway: traveling. He declined a preaching invitation early in 1934, for example, saying he was "trying to save the Synod the expense of an assistant minister by carrying the work of my synodical office together with that of my pastorate." He felt he must "conserve [his] time and energy by confining [himself] to the direct duties of [his] office," and concluded, "I know you will understand and agree."<sup>11</sup>

On another occasion, although admitting that "a pleasant drive and a day with the hospitable people of New Ulm" offered a great temptation to accept a speaking invitation at D.M.L.C.'s commencement, he sighed that "as [is] often [true] in the life of man, there are other considerations. I have been compelled to put in very much time on intersynodical affairs and have for months been a lap behind in my work."<sup>12</sup> One Missouri Synod official suggested (a bit facetiously, perhaps) that the Synodical Conference would have been better served "if we could get Brenner to travel or schedule more meetings in Milwaukee."<sup>13</sup>

#### **"We would be committing a sin against the Gospel"**

The hard times of the 1930s weighed heavily on Brenner in both pastoral and presidential roles. As pastor, he was remembered as one who "really lived his faith" by giving charity to those in need. "Living on 8th and Vliet during the Depression," recalled one pastor, "we will never know how many people he fed" who came to his door in need. As president, together with Pastors Paul Pieper and Leonard Koeninger on the Board of Trustees, he helped the Synod stand up under the financial stress of the times. "It was a period that required tact and good judgment of its leaders, and the Synod was fortunate to get just that."<sup>14</sup> The Synod's treasurer, Theo. Buck, would call Brenner after each mail delivery to report the amount of the offerings that trickled in from the districts. Pieper, Koeninger and Brenner then had to go through the agony of deciding

which professors and missionaries could be paid each month and which had to have their paychecks postponed.<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly, the grim experience of holding congregation and Synod together financially left him "forever wary of any rapid expansion, especially the kind that did not accord with strict syndical protocol."<sup>16</sup>

When informed in July 1935 that no congregational contributions had been received during all of May and June and that the banks would soon be forced to take action on the Synod's overdrafts, Brenner sent a Western Union Telegram to every pastor in the Synod. He had been planning to inform pastors of the state of the Synod's treasury by letter rather than in *The Northwestern Lutheran* because church publications "are read by strangers," and, "in plain words, I felt ashamed to tell the world of our neglect." He asked pastors pointedly, "Why are you breaking faith with us and unnecessarily permitting us to bear such humiliation and want" by allowing salaries of missionaries and professors to go unpaid? "Why? They have a right to ask. Why? We cannot evade the question." He urged pastors to "search our own heart, our own life, our own ministry. . . . Am I cold toward my Synod, or even constantly critical of everything it does? . . . Have I been afraid to present the needs of the Cause of the Lord to my people? . . . Have I set my congregation a good example in Christian Giving?" He portrayed the Lord Jesus asking: "Why do you permit My servants to suffer humiliation and want and My Cause to languish? . . . Can you truthfully tell Me that I have kept you so poor in earthly goods that you are unable to support My Work in your Synod by your offerings?"<sup>17</sup>

Brenner spoke unflinchingly about the Synod's financial dilemma and its responsibilities. "The men dependent upon us get their greatly reduced salaries eventually, but not regularly. We left them without a cent of money during the Christmas month." Assuming 50,000 families in the Synod, and estimating that the "extras" for Christmas dinners cost an average of \$1.00 per family, Brenner reckoned, "If we had denied ourselves these 'extras,' the saving effected would have sufficed to take care of the current expenses for November and December, and the men in the service of our Synod would have been able to celebrate Christmas without 'standing off' so and so many merchants."<sup>18</sup> In summer 1935, he charged, "If we had submitted ourselves wholly to the mighty working of His Spirit," there would not have been "so many candidates standing idle in the marketplace," new missions could have been opened, and "it would have been possible to restore the cuts in salaries, enabling the men in the direct service of our Synod to do their work with greater joy without suffering hardships and incurring debts."<sup>19</sup>

In 1937, he charged that while every congregation "was left perfectly free as to the choice of a plan" to reduce the debt, failure to accomplish the task was directly attributable to "a lack of brotherly cooperation." The Synod, he explained, "is not a governing body that levies assessments on its members" but "it gathers in the free-will thankofferings of the faithful and employs them in the service of the Gospel." Even "common honesty and a sense of fairness demand that everyone assume his fair share" of responsibility for paying off the debt.

Brenner's concern extended well beyond paying the bills:

It is to the effect on the inner life of our Synod that I feel it my duty to call your attention. . . . There is danger, briefly, that the faithful will grow discouraged and weary; that mutual confidence is undermined; that hearts become embittered and quick to judge and condemn uncharitably; and that pastors and churches feel aggrieved when the officials . . . urge them to increase their contributions in order not to offend the Lord and to grieve the brethren.

Speaking generally, I see a danger in this whole situation, the constant shortage in funds for the work, this, that we, particularly as officers and pastors, become finance-minded. So much thought, time, and effort have to be given to the financing of our work that the mind easily may be distracted from the work itself. We must not put the dollar mark on our nose as a pair of spectacles and look at the church through it, evaluating its members and pastors and their work as they appear when viewed through the lenses of finance. That would give us an incomplete, yes, a distorted picture.<sup>20</sup>

He opposed the solicitation of local businessmen to support the church as an act of community charity. "Let us teach our members to give directly to their church, get along without the things for which they cannot pay, and pay for what they buy just as individuals do. That will make for character in our Christians, and the good results will soon be seen."<sup>21</sup>

Of all his presidential correspondence, his most empathetic letters were those he wrote to comfort called workers in difficult straits, some of whom had written to him desperately, repeatedly, and not always with good grace. "Distressing as your circumstances are," he told one despondent pastor, "you have gone into them in obedience to the Lord and have His promise, 'I will not forget thee nor forsake thee.' If we do not now see an immediate way out of your troubles, neither did the disciples in the wilderness know how 5000 men could be fed with five loaves and two fishes. But the Lord knew what He was going to do. He knows this also in your case. It is for us to pray and to wait patiently for His solution to our problems."<sup>22</sup>

Gently he admonished another: "We will have to be very patient with each other, for every one of us has faults and shortcomings that burden his brethren. But the Lord does his work effectively through a Church composed of poor and sinful men. That is why we should not be discouraged, 'his strength is made perfect in weakness.' Let us suffer, labor, and battle in faith in him. Then we cannot fail, and the crown will be ours."<sup>23</sup>

He assured yet another pastor that he was serving his present congregation "through a divine call, and the Lord's promise, 'I will not forget thee, nor forsake thee,' is his personal promise to you.' Trust in it, and continue in prayer. Bear your cross patiently and do not permit your present affliction to embitter your heart."<sup>24</sup>

Brenner felt the weight of obligation for men called to serve. "The responsibility rests on us, and we would be committing a sin against the Gospel if we do not provide sufficiently for the men we have called to preach in our name."<sup>25</sup> He reminded troubled mission pastors that "the pastors of self-serving congregations are in the same predicament. Many have received no salary for months, yet have sent in contributions to the Synod." He warned: "Do not be too ready to judge [Synod] officials incompetent. It is easily done, but may be very unjust."<sup>26</sup>

Confronted with a balance in the synod's treasury that had dwindled to \$35.41, and facing a \$7,000 shortfall in funds on hand to pay synodical salaries, he wrote to all the Synod's pastors: "This is a **most deplorable state of affairs**. Just let us put ourselves in the place of the men who have been waiting nearly three weeks for their meager-enough checks to meet the obligations they have incurred." The Synod was forced to seek a short-term loan and hope to repay it later, a solution Brenner called "**entirely unnecessary**. If we had all explained the conditions to our members when we were asked to do so, these Christian men and women would surely have provided sufficient funds to prevent an occurrence of this kind." The facts, he believed, spoke so eloquently for themselves that "immediate and decisive action should result in every one of our congregations."<sup>27</sup>

#### "True loyalty to one's synod has true spiritual values"

By elected obligation and by personal inclination, Brenner felt a high regard for the Synod. "As a merely human sentiment, synodical loyalty has little or no value," he wrote in a 1941 letter; in fact, "it may become a fault." But "true loyalty to one's synod has true spiritual values. It is gratitude to God for the instrument or agent by which He has blessed us and is blessing us. It is brotherly love which freely assumes the obligation of Christian fellowship and partnership in the service of the Lord." Those who stress the autonomy of the local congregation "sometimes forget that brotherly love recognizes its responsibilities and is willing to meet them."<sup>28</sup>

Yet he was well aware that sinful weaknesses plagued any human organization, and he was not blind to the peculiar failings of this Synod. A snarky article appearing in the November 1937 issue of *The Black and Red*, the student magazine of Northwestern College, lamented the advantages that pastors' sons enjoyed. The author, presumably not a pastor's son, complained that although pastors' sons were the "children of pious parents," nurtured "in a pure Christian atmosphere" and expected to be "a perfect example of piety," such advantages proved to be a miscalculation, and "the exact opposite is nearer the truth." Preachers' sons grew up expecting they would go to college, where they would get an education but also have a good time. Too easily the pastor's son "merely does what his dad expects," recalling "how dad often tells how they 'pulled the good ones' on the profs, how many classes they 'bummed,' and how many nights they went out!" Preachers' sons soon recognize the superiority they enjoy over other students, whose "parents undoubtedly belong to that class of people to whom the many social opportunities and advantages are not

offered." Preachers' sons are "usually broke" and "readily known for the debts" they incur; they mostly all smoke; and "as for coarse speaking and pulling devilish pranks, they rank with the best." Thus "their true nature is revealed; the traits of outward piety are only of a second nature, exposed on special occasions."<sup>29</sup>

Not surprisingly, the article prompted fierce student rebuttals—some defensive, others derisive—<sup>30</sup>and it also caught the eye of the Synod President. The ensuing exchange between Brenner and Northwestern President Kowalke offer a window into their personalities and the tenor of their relationship. The "Preachers' Sons" author "evidently felt that he had to get certain things out of his system," Brenner wrote. "I am perfectly willing that he be given the opportunity to air his opinion. But this should be done in the proper place, within the student body. If there are any soiled linens about, let them be displayed in the back yard and not at the curb." *The Black and Red* was being "read in wider circles," and Brenner feared the article had "done our institution harm." On another matter, Brenner observed: "Again we have the mention of the Seminary 'Paps' (Pope). I fear that the laymen, to whom we appeal for support of our 'Prophetenschul' (School of the Prophets), find it very difficult to appreciate our 'seminary humor.'"<sup>31</sup>

Responding almost by return mail, Kowalke admitted that student comments regarding the article surprised him only "in that they showed that the *B & R* is really [being] read." He discounted much of the original article as "adolescent exaggeration" and had initially "hesitated about letting the article go through." He acknowledged that "there was considerable uproar over it in the student body, [though] most of it [was] rather good-natured, it seemed." Kowalke had grown used to "thinking that the *B & R* is not read, since it bores me greatly once a month when I have to read it at all."<sup>32</sup>

#### **"We do not want to see any great deviation from the simple liturgical forms now in use"**

Brenner voiced his views on worship long before he became President. When Wisconsin's English *Book of Hymns* was completed in 1917, he announced that it contained "everything that is necessary and no more," considering it an advantage that the book included no psalms, collects, or other elements "rarely, if ever, used in our services." Wisconsin Synod church members "often do not take part in the liturgical service, as they know neither the words nor the melody of the responses."<sup>33</sup> They preferred a simple style of worship. "Our liturgical forms should be fully in harmony with the doctrines we preach," and so there was no reason for churches to have vested choirs. To the claim that a choir processing in full robes was "impressive" to many worshippers, Brenner replied, "The thoughtless are readily attracted to such innovations and are misled to consider churches that adhere to our good old Lutheran forms [to be] far behind the times and no more able to minister to our present generation."<sup>34</sup>

In 1935 Michigan District President Karl Krauss shared with Brenner a

circular letter written by a Detroit layman, Walter Dreyer, who expressed "strong objections" to the Liturgical Society of St. James, a Missouri Synod group advocating liturgical reform. "What are some of our Lutheran ministers and laymen thinking about?" Dreyer asked.

Has the time arrived when they have nothing to do but create and further the cause of a new evil instead of practicing what has been preached from our pulpits? Or has the Lutheran Church disintegrated to such an extent that we are not large enough, or do not know enough, or are not sufficiently independent to have a Lutheran worship, but must copy the customs of the [Roman Catholic] Church which persecuted the early Lutheran Church?

Dreyer accused the Society of "wasting much time and effort and money" to promote "extreme elaborate ceremonies, which are only man-made." Such "repulsive" and un-Lutheran practices included "much repetition in 'bowing' and 'crossing,' reminding one of the 'rosary habit.'" While we "plead for money to carry out our mission work," the Society encouraged "a most elaborate ceremonial form of worship, using assistant ministers and others to swing the incense in great pomp" and promoted "a Solemn Choral Eucharist or Solemn High Mass" with "Celebrant, Deacon, Sub-Deacon, Master of Ceremonies, two Acolytes, Thurifer, a Book-Boy, two to eight Torch-Bearers, and a full ceremonial." To Dreyer, this revealed misplaced priorities: "They encourage young ministers to engage in these ceremonials instead of His command, 'Go, preach the Gospel.'"

Dreyer understood that "this society does not advocate the Roman Catholic doctrines in which we differ, but refer[s] only to the man-made ceremonies," yet he asked, "Does this society realize the harm they are doing to those who are not as strong in faith as others, who hear and see this 'Catholicism'?" Why make it possible for anyone to say, "After all, there is not much difference between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church?" The Society of St. James "cannot defend their stand within the confines of the New Testament," and so "laymen like myself cannot sit idly standing by [*sic*]." He pledged himself "to help stop this anti-Lutheran movement now, before too much harm has been done, and more of the pernicious literature distributed."<sup>35</sup>

Brenner thanked Krauss for sharing Dreyer's comments: "I have read the letter three or four times, with deep appreciation and keen enjoyment. May his tribe increase!"<sup>36</sup>

By the late 1930s, Synodical Conference representatives had begun work on a new hymnal. A Wisconsin member of the committee, Pastor Gervasius Fischer, said it was "not [his] business as a member of the committee to try to bring about a reform in liturgics, but to offer our people a Hymn Book which supplies a demand." Reforms in liturgical style "must come through education and very gradually," beginning with "a better trained ministry." Aware of the Society of St. James, he wrote, "Everything that is introduced [into the worship service] for mere show, even if it draws people to it temporarily, is out of place

in church, and will not build the church, but make it still more superficial."<sup>37</sup> Brenner replied: "I laid the matter before our city conference," and "the remarks of the speakers showed plainly that we are very conservative and do not want to see any great deviation from the simple liturgical forms now in use among us."<sup>38</sup>

A year later, Fischer offered further reflections on worship. "On all sides efforts are being made to beautify the service, [but] much of it is copied either from the Reformed or the Episcopalian [services], both [of which are] really a degeneration of the original Lutheran." Yet "we must put a halt to a critical spirit which condemns as Roman Catholic some of the old Christian and established forms and then turns around and mocks every Tom, Dick and Harry from the Reformed Churches and devises all kinds of innovations in order to draw the crowd from the other fellow." Fischer called it "high time" for the Synod's pastors to "stop fooling around with Suppers, Dinners, Breakfasts, socials, etc., and concentrate all our strength and effort to save our church from becoming worldly." He granted that the Society of St. James had put "all the emphasis upon the Word" in its reforms, yet he would not favor the existence of a similar society in the Wisconsin Synod: "Societies, to say the least, are always dangerous in the church."<sup>39</sup>

### The military chaplaincy

A question came to President Brenner in 1935 from a pastor who had been asked to conduct worship services at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. Two possible methods of government remuneration for his service were proposed. "Can you tell me whether or not our church has taken a stand in the matter?" the pastor asked. "If not, would our ministers be free to enter into such a contract, providing none of its stipulations are at odds with sound evangelical practice?"<sup>40</sup> Brenner answered that although the Synod had "never thoroughly discussed" this question, his "personal stand would be that we finance the work of our missionaries ourselves, which would be in accordance with our Lutheran principles and sound Americanism." When considering whether to accept "material advantages" for such service, "we should keep the separation of church and state clear in our own minds and in the minds of others."<sup>41</sup>

Later that year, delegates to the Missouri Synod's convention instructed their President John Behnken to appoint a committee to investigate whether calling men as chaplains into the army and navy could be done without violating scriptural principles.<sup>42</sup> The committee reported in 1938 that it did not believe offering the Synod's pastors the opportunity to serve in the chaplaincy would violate Missouri's "accepted Scriptural position" regarding the separation of church and state. Men were to be appointed as chaplains by the government but called by their respective church bodies. "They represent us only as long as they conform to the principles and practices of our Synod as members in good standing."<sup>43</sup>

Soon the Wisconsin Synod was also being asked for the names of pastors willing to serve as government-sponsored chaplains. Brenner reported to Wisconsin's 1937 convention, "My stand has been that we have no authority to do

this, as long as our Synod has not included such work in its program." Faithfulness to the divine call would prevent a minister from looking for a new field of labor on his own initiative.<sup>44</sup> A Committee on Chaplaincies reported to Wisconsin's 1939 convention that it was "of the unanimous opinion that we do not commission pastors to function in this capacity according to governmental regulations."<sup>45</sup> In 1941, the committee repeated its position that participation in the chaplaincy program would "conflict with Wisconsin's understanding of the divinity of the pastoral call," create "a violation of the principle of the separation of Church and State," and expose pastors to "the spirit of doctrinal indifference" which pervaded the War Department's regulations.<sup>46</sup>

The Synod's decision was not met with universal acceptance. "That resolution which our Synod passed regarding army and navy chaplains has been bothering me for some time," wrote one pastor to Brenner in May 1941. "According to all present indications our own boys, as well as hundreds of thousands who belong to no church, will soon be fighting. If anyone needs the Word of God, they do. We have it—but we are not giving it to them."<sup>47</sup> Brenner met this emotional plea with a logical response: "Even if our Synod had nominated from six to ten men, and they had been given chaplaincies, how many of our own men, do you think, we would reach through them?" A more workable solution would be to send civilian pastors to nearby military camps, "the very thing we are planning to do as soon as we have done the necessary survey." Despite its highly publicized and popular effort, the Missouri Synod had "made but little more progress than we have" in this mission. "To give service to all our men is a thing that is impossible. The most we will be able to do is to place men near camps where we have larger groups." Regarding the chaplaincy position itself, he said: "We are still bound by the resolution of our Synod. We have given the matter much study, and I am not inclined to believe that the Synod will reverse itself."<sup>48</sup>

Brenner publicly acknowledged that Wisconsin's position on the military chaplaincy was "not shared by other Lutherans, and, it seems, by some of our own members."<sup>49</sup> But he believed that wartime exigencies should not be allowed to alter the Synod's stand: "We do not find that the present emergency demands a change in the character of true leadership in the Church or in the nature of its work."<sup>50</sup>

The chaplaincy position provoked local tensions between Missouri and Wisconsin Synod congregations. A Wisconsin pastor in Milwaukee, for example, planned to host a joint meeting of members of the Walther League, at which a member of Missouri's Army and Navy Commission was scheduled to speak about "the grand work the chaplains are doing." Only days before the meeting was to take place, the pastor's circuit visitor warned him that "since the Wisconsin Synod [was] most emphatically opposed to this business," he would very likely be "charged with open 'revolt' against the synod if [he] permitted that meeting to be held on our premises." Rather than provoke direct conflict, the pastor found a neighboring Missouri congregation willing to host the event, but the incident confirmed the Wisconsin pastor's growing sense that he was "in the wrong camp." He charged the Wisconsin Synod with being



“orthodox to such an extent that it falls over backwards” and wished he could join the Missourians “to gather a half million dollars for the spiritual care of our men in military service.”<sup>51</sup>

Concordia Seminary Professor Theodore Graebner complained to a Wisconsin Synod pastor about “the nasty letters our chaplains get from your clergy and the letters your soldier boys get directing them away from our chaplains and into a parish twenty miles distant.”<sup>52</sup> Graebner thought he could detect “a certain amount of resentment on the part of the [Wisconsin] boys in the service” and claimed that “some of the [Wisconsin] clergy are quite outspoken in their disagreement with the synodical resolution which condemns the chaplaincies as a violation of the call, the separation of Church and State, and unionistic.”<sup>53</sup>

To some Wisconsin pastors who still raised questions about the Synod’s position in 1950, Brenner replied that the Synod had informed the Department of Defense that it would be willing to send chaplains “if they would be permitted to minister to our members in the service as they minister to our members at home.” But the government “makes the chaplain the pastor of, I believe, some 1,200 men, the most of whom may not be members of his denomination.” To accept such an arrangement meant “to declare ourselves satisfied to have a Catholic priest or a Jewish rabbi minister to the spiritual needs of our men.”<sup>54</sup>

Other Wisconsin pastors, fully in support of the Synod’s position, came to believe they were no longer in fellowship with Missouri pastors and members at all. Since we do not “see eye-to-eye with the Missouri Synod in the chaplaincy question,” one pastor asked Brenner in 1946, would it be unionistic for a Wisconsin pastor to preach a sermonette for a *Tre Ore* Missouri service in which a Missouri ex-chaplain was also participating?<sup>55</sup> Brenner answered that as long as the chaplaincy issue remained under discussion, “the [Missouri] pastor in question is still our brother. To preach in a service in which he has a part as a pastor, not as a chaplain, could, therefore, not be construed as a unionistic act.”<sup>56</sup>

### Wisconsin and Lutheran Union efforts

In 1934, the United Lutheran Church in America in its Savannah Declaration invited other American Lutheran bodies “to confer with us with a view to the establishment of closer relations between them and ourselves.”<sup>57</sup> The U.L.C.A. claimed that subscription to the Lutheran Confessions was “a sufficient testimony to orthodoxy and a basis for fellowship,” to which Wisconsin Synod delegates in 1935 responded with “two facts”: (1) doctrinal issues may arise which did not exist and could not be foreseen when the Confessions were written; and (2) confessional writings and Scripture itself “may meet with varying and often contrary interpretations.” Wisconsin then raised three “practical considerations” which would preclude any U.L.C.A.-Wisconsin conversations: (1) the U.L.C.A. endorsed doctrinal statements not in harmony with Scripture and the Confessions; (2) the U.L.C.A. continued to tolerate participation of its members in lodges; and (3) the U.L.C.A. showed a tendency toward

unionism, demonstrated by increasing pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans.<sup>58</sup>

Discussions between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, formed from the Iowa, Buffalo and Ohio Synods in 1930, appeared more promising because Missouri and the A.L.C.’s constituent bodies had been discussing doctrinal issues during the previous two decades. Missouri resolved in 1935 that “we declare our willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies” and authorized the appointment of a committee for that purpose, which came to be called the “Committee on Lutheran Church Union.”<sup>59</sup> In 1938, A.L.C. representatives “accepted the doctrinal contents” of Missouri’s *Brief Statement*, but “in order to supplement and emphasize their position” offered a document of its own, the *Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church*, also known as the Sandusky Resolutions.<sup>60</sup> The floor committee at Missouri’s 1938 convention acknowledged that unresolved differences remained between the two church bodies yet recommended that the *Brief Statement*, together with the A.L.C.’s *Declaration*, “be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.” The resolution was adopted.<sup>61</sup>

In Wisconsin, an *ad hoc* committee reporting to the Synod’s 1939 convention charged that the doctrinal basis tentatively established by Missouri and the A.L.C. was unacceptable. “No two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement,” but “a single, joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically, and accepted by both parties to the controversy, is imperative.” Such a statement “must be made in clear and unequivocal terms which do not require laborious additional explanations.”<sup>62</sup> Wisconsin Seminary Professor Edmund Reim protested that Missouri “has come to its sister synods bearing an agreement negotiated between itself and a third church body,” had “already given it substantial endorsement,” was “submitting it to us for our approval,” and was “trying to sell” Wisconsin on it. “Does not the burden of proof now clearly lie with those who have claimed that the agreement constitutes ‘a settlement of the doctrinal controversies?’” Reim asked. “We are waiting, open to conviction.”<sup>63</sup>

Frustrating to President Brenner and others was a growing number of incidents in which it became evident that Missouri leaders were already practicing *de facto* church fellowship with the A.L.C. *The Lutheran* reported on a testimonial dinner for Lutheran Radio Hour speaker Walter A. Maier, sponsored by 225 laymen and pastors “representing every one of the larger Lutheran groups and several of the smaller ones.” An unstated purpose of the meeting was that “if all the major Lutheran groups would cooperate, a long step forward would be taken in the further development of a more intimate fellowship among both laity and clergy.”<sup>64</sup> *The American Lutheran* cited with approval an editorial assertion in *The Lutheran Standard* that “a growing sense of togetherness” characterized the annual meeting of the Lutheran Editors’ Association meeting in September 1943 at Blair, Nebraska. “We prayed together,” *The American Lutheran* reported, and “fervent use of joint prayer will do much to promote togetherness throughout the Lutheran Church in America.”<sup>65</sup>

Similar opportunities for intersynodical meetings and cooperation came

across Brenner's desk, and in his responses he sought to delineate the true reasons for his refusal to participate. He declined an invitation to attend a general conference of Lutherans from all synods in 1941 to discuss "the question of Lutheran cooperation" in foreign mission fields. "While we most assuredly consider it our duty of Christian love to do good also to those who are not within our fellowship," he explained, "we do not find it proper and for the good of the Church to do this as a church and in cooperation with religious bodies with which we are not united in doctrine and practice."<sup>66</sup>

To the Denver Area Regional Lutheran Home Mission Council, Brenner wrote, "We are firmly convinced that the welfare of the Lutheran Church and of the Christian Church as a whole will be truly served only when we frankly acknowledge these differences in doctrine and practice as actually existing and as being divisive of fellowship." The argument that Lutheran church bodies must present a "united front" before the world despite doctrinal disagreements failed to convince Brenner. "A united front that, after all, is only a front will not strike terror in the heart of the foes of the church, nor will it make for the vigorous wielding of the Sword of the Spirit by men rooted in the Truth and zealous for it." Could churches work together in efforts "external" to their doctrinal positions? "What in church work can truly be said to be purely external?" Brenner asked. "Cooperation in externals" may "hide our wounds, but it will not heal them." Joint endeavors not based on doctrinal agreement "will not remove the existing differences" but "may lead us to forget them and to grow indifferent to the authority of the Inspired Word."<sup>67</sup>

On another occasion, he granted that an invitation had been extended "in all sincerity" and assured that he would be happy to attend "if our bodies were truly one in the spirit," but acceptance of the invitation under present circumstances would not be "according to the truth and could only add to the confusion that now exists concerning the relation between the various synods in our country and in our lands."<sup>68</sup>

In 1950, the editor of *The Lutheran World* requested that Brenner ask the Wisconsin Synod's "public relations officer" to "place us on his mail list or regular news releases" and to provide history, pictures, and organizational information of the Synod. The request closed with, "We believe that 'an informed Lutheran is a better Lutheran.'"<sup>69</sup> Brenner responded, "You forget that such beneficial information includes also knowledge of the doctrinal issues that are keeping our Lutheran synods apart." Since neither he nor *The Lutheran World* editor would wish to use the magazine as a forum to discuss those issues, "you are not in a position to make 'better Lutherans' by the information you convey to your readers." Brenner closed, "We have no 'public relations officer,' as we have never felt the need of such work."<sup>70</sup>

In a different direction, a pastor with roots in the Norwegian Lutheran Church wrote originally to inquire about becoming a member of Wisconsin's ministerium, only to change his mind because of Wisconsin's stand against Scouting and the military chaplaincy, both of which he favored at least to some degree. But his "deepest disagreement" with Wisconsin lay in the fact that Wisconsin "does not approve of social dancing in any form." This pastor con-

sidered dancing "not contrary to God's Word" as such "if performed by Christians in a Christian atmosphere," citing "the wide use of folk dancing, particularly by the Norwegian and Italian ethnic groups."<sup>71</sup> Brenner replied, "I have no recollection that our Synod has ever discussed the subject of dancing specifically, though I am quite ready to admit that we would hardly recommend that this form of 'recreation' be admitted into the life of our congregations."<sup>72</sup> Brenner must have meant that the Synod had never addressed the subject in an official convention discussion or essay. Wisconsin publications contained numerous warnings against dancing, some of which Brenner himself had written.<sup>73</sup>

### Growing intersynodical tensions

Asked about the wisdom of inviting "an outspoken atheist and scoffer" to address a mixed Missouri-Wisconsin teachers' conference,<sup>74</sup> Brenner replied: "When you say, 'By inviting such people we make ourselves responsible for what they may choose to say, and for the possible harm and offense their statements may occasion,' you state the principle involved very clearly, and there is nothing to add. That should decide the issue for every Christian and particularly for every Christian educator."<sup>75</sup>

Asked about the Aid Association for Lutherans' practice of accepting members from non-Synodical Conference churches,<sup>76</sup> Brenner wrote: "The A.A.L. was founded for the purpose of rendering certain services to men who are already brothers in the highest sense of the word by the faith they confess." The A.A.L. "is by its very name, by its constitution, and by the appeals and promises of its founders, pledged to restrict its services to our fellow-Lutherans. As this, naturally, means to those who are united with us in doctrine and practice, the A.A.L. can carry on its work only within the church bodies that constitute the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America."<sup>77</sup>

Asked about the use of paid organists for funeral services, many of whom belonged to different Christian denominations,<sup>78</sup> Brenner agreed that "only singers who are members of Synodical Conference churches may take part in our services as soloists, etc." Yet this appears not to have been an absolute issue for him. "I can well imagine a case where it would be unionism pure and simple to have a non-Lutheran organist 'officiate' on such an occasion," he mused, but "in the instances which I have known, the organist, screened from the public and remaining entirely incognito, functioned merely as the '*causa movens externa*,' like the [player-piano roll], cut, perhaps, by an unbelieving organist, sets the organ a-going, furnishing music while the audience is assembling and dispersing. Is he actually taking part in our service, and are we fraternizing with him, or does our service begin when the minister enters the room?" The ideal, however, would be that "everyone taking part in the burial of a Christian, including the undertaker and the sexton, be a brother in the faith, but this ideal is unattainable."<sup>79</sup>

Behind these arcane-sounding questions of casuistry lay growing annoyance and mistrust between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, straining a once-cherished relationship and destined to ruin it beyond repair.



*Professor Theodore Graebner  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis  
(Source: Concordia Historical  
Institute)*

By the early 1940s, Concordia Seminary Professor Theodore Graebner was apparently maintaining a file folder filled with negative comments solicited about the Wisconsin Synod—soliciting such remarks from others and adding his own pessimistic evaluations. A report on Wisconsin's 1941 convention at Saginaw stated that "the philosophy of the entire body seems to be, 'Whatever Missouri does, says or thinks, we're 'agin' it.'"<sup>80</sup> In 1942, Graebner concluded that relations were "becoming steadily worse" between the synods, and "only very careful navigation will under divine Providence prevent an open breach." Graebner insisted to a Wisconsin Synod respondent that whatever hard feelings existed between the synods, "almost all of it is on your side and it is being fostered by your highest officials and theologians."<sup>81</sup> He considered Wisconsin positions on Scouting and the military

chaplaincy "to be in the bonds of extreme legalism, with sound Lutheran principles interpreted mechanically." Regarding questions of church and ministry, he could "only hope for some more level-headed leaders to arise and preserve fraternal relations between our bodies."<sup>82</sup>

Missouri's Nebraska District President, commenting on tensions between congregations of the two synods in that state, said it was "sometimes quite hard to figure out the Wisconsin Synod." Though refusing to speculate "whether or not their doctrinal peculiarities [had] any bearing on the way in which they [conducted] mission work and [broke] into Missouri parishes," he charged that Wisconsin's actions did "nothing to preserve the fraternal relationship existing between the Synods."<sup>83</sup> Missouri's Oregon and Washington District President lamented that "the fraternal spirit that ought to exist between our two organizations is entirely lacking." With but few exceptions, Wisconsin Synod men "look upon us with suspicion; they always have a chip on their shoulder; they accuse us of trying to lord it over them." He was "sure that [his] Missouri brethren [were] not to blame" but believed that an "inferiority complex" among Wisconsin pastors lay at the root of the tensions. He reported having attempted to cultivate a relationship with Wisconsin's district president but lamented that he had "utterly failed. Even official correspondence is not answered for six weeks, three months, sometimes not at all."<sup>84</sup>

After a meeting between faculties of the two synods' seminaries in 1944, Graebner accused Brenner and other Wisconsin spokesmen of representing "the attitude concerning [doctrine of] the church and the ministry which has been characteristic of that faculty for the past thirty years." In addition to dis-

agreements over Scouting and the military chaplaincy, "the attempt is being made to picture the faculty of Concordia Seminary as weakening in its doctrinal position."<sup>85</sup> Graebner reported to Missouri President Behnken on another meeting between representatives of the synods in Milwaukee, also in 1944, at which the program "became evident—shoot at the Missouri Synod with guns of every caliber." Wisconsin "berated" Missouri "for everything" and "through the whole discussion ran a note of conscientious concern for the Missouri Synod," which in Wisconsin's view was "gradually being dragged down to the level of the more liberal bodies." Graebner maintained that Missouri was being true to the tradition of Missouri founder C.F.W. Walther by trying to help the cause of conservatism, which Graebner believed was on the increase in the U.L.C.A. and among other American Lutheran synods. "The body which has changed since 1923 or 1925," Graebner insisted, was the Wisconsin Synod, "whose representatives then not only labored faithfully on the Union Committee but were always the conciliatory element and showed an irenic spirit." That attitude, said Graebner, "has been replaced in the Wisconsin Synod by what looks to some of us as a legalistic, mechanical way of handling doctrine."<sup>86</sup>

Graebner's "Wisconsin Synod" file contained this evaluation of the Synod's 1945 convention at New Ulm: "Some prominent men, among them Schaller of South St. Paul, Minn., wanted an immediate and final showdown with Missouri, also on the Scout issue, but cooler heads prevailed." This observer conceded "some truth" in the complaint that Missouri ignored the Wisconsin Synod, especially on the chaplaincy issue. "We do ignore the Wisconsin brethren and they certainly feel it. Often it is said, 'We do as we please, and the Wisconsin Synod can take it or leave it.' That attitude is bearing fruit." He heard Wisconsin men refer to how "our St. Louis faculty has fallen into discredit and disrepute in the Synodical Conference," which made him "hang his head in shame."<sup>87</sup>

A 1946 observer feared that the intersynodical "cleavage" was "definitely growing wider and wider," and believed that "the Wisconsinites are forcing the issue. If it comes to a break—they asked for it." He suggested that Missouri was making a mistake "by constantly taking it on the chin [from Wisconsin], merely to retain peace in the Lutheran camp."<sup>88</sup> Graebner feared Milwaukee would "go down in history as a city where Lutheran orthodoxy was so straight that it fell over backwards, and by refusing to acknowledge civic decency, became Pharisaic and lost its own soul."<sup>89</sup> He found especially offensive "the censoriousness and sneering tone of the critics" and how such attacks were "officially justified when Christian love goes out the window."<sup>90</sup> He charged Wisconsin Seminary Professors Adalbert Schaller and Edmund Reim of having "taken up the stench pots of August Pieper and Brenner [to] support the most sectarian views of [the] Thiensville [faculty]." Yet, "with all their antagonisms, Brenner and the Thiensville men always stop this side of a break-up of fraternal relations."<sup>91</sup>

One also finds irritations on the Wisconsin side toward Missouri, though Brenner did not collect and catalogue them as Graebner did. An off-handed comment by Kowalke confirmed that at least some in Wisconsin sensed an air

of superiority within their sister Synod: "Missouri says 'Synod' and expects that everybody will recognize that there is only one that counts."<sup>92</sup> After reviewing the details of several instances of local intersynodical tensions in Michigan, District President Krauss concluded, "I do not believe that the two synods will ever be able to achieve a satisfactory working agreement. They have a different spirit, and it becomes more and more evident."<sup>93</sup>

Brenner's frustration with Missouri, in particular with President Behnken, was evident in a 1949 letter Brenner addressed to Behnken. Again, Brenner said, Wisconsin found itself "in the unenviable position of facing an accomplished fact which leaves us no choice but that of either following you unquestioningly into a situation which we consider precarious or of expressing our dissent by word and deed, and so bringing down on our Synod anew the condemnation of the fervid advocates of a Lutheran church union." Since 1939 the Wisconsin Synod had declared its willingness "to meet for a discussion of doctrine and practice" with "the representatives of any church body desiring such a conference, provided that [a church body] frankly admits that differences exist" and that "they must be removed before we can enter into fellowship with each other."

Brenner rejected proposals for a "general free conference" among the Lutheran bodies. "We do not believe that the present conditions can be compared to those of the late [1850s]" because current doctrinal differences between the Lutheran bodies "have been set forth very clearly, and congregations have rallied around the banner of the synod that stands for their convictions." Already at some local conferences, ill-informed attendees claim to speak for their churches, but "the activities of self-appointed men do not unite the Church." Such meetings "offer occasion for propaganda and for the formation of pressure groups" that did not serve truth. "There was a time when the line of demarcation between the Synodical Conference and the other Lutheran bodies was so sharp and clear." But Brenner charged, "It has been blurred and, in instances, almost obliterated by the statements and acts of individuals in your Synod, statements and actions against which we have been raising our voices all these years, and we have not been able to remove even one of the issues that have arisen between us."

He regarded Missouri as a house clearly divided. "Conservatives and 'progressives' [were] voicing their convictions publicly," and the "progressives" were "by their actions encouraging movements which we consider detrimental and dangerous to the Church." With such obvious divisions in their own midst, how could Synodical Conference members consider themselves in a position to "correct and direct other Lutheran bodies?" The first duty of Synodical Conference member bodies was to "set [their] own house in order," and "in doing this in the true spirit of the Gospel" they would be "making the most effective contribution toward the unity of the Lutheran Church in our land and in other countries."<sup>94</sup>

By August 1953, differences dividing the synods had grown so pronounced that action would soon be required. Missouri Synod Pastor A.T. Kretzmann wrote to Brenner and Seminary President Reim following the 1953

Wisconsin convention, expressing appreciation for "the manner in which the meetings were conducted and the spirit of loyalty to God's Word manifested in the discussions on the floor," something he said he had not experienced in Missouri since early in his ministry.

I have tried to analyze the difference between Wisconsin and the present Missouri Synod, and have come to the conclusion that it is a difference in attitude toward God's Word on the one hand and toward false doctrine on the other. . . . The reason why all the repeated efforts of Wisconsin, [the] Norwegians, and the conservatives in Missouri have run up against a stone wall is because New Missouri has a different attitude toward the Word and toward false teachings than it formerly had.

Kretzmann believed that on the synodical level, Missouri changed following the death of Franz Pieper, and later Missouri representatives, in their support for church fellowship with the A.L.C, failed to "stick to the Brief Statement." But this changed attitude toward God's Word and toward false doctrine

has long been evident at our pastoral conferences. Very few of them are even willing to discuss matters in controversy, and those that do discuss them very seldom come to a conclusion. And yet the matter is dropped. It is common practice for dissenters to vote for the acceptance of doctrinal papers with which they disagree, and then to state that no one is bound by the doctrinal conclusions reached in those papers. It was evidence of a different attitude toward God's Word when our officials refused to insist upon a *rejection* of the false teachings of [The] *Statement* [of the 44].

Kretzmann believed Wisconsin's intention to declare a break in fellowship was inevitable and "the only Scriptural correct one." He would "try to get [his] congregation to take that step with Wisconsin," but even if his congregation chose "to stay with Missouri, I cannot stay."<sup>95</sup>

Like many of his contemporaries, Brenner had been well-acquainted with Missouri men for many years and was convinced that some of them had become "experts in double-talk." Particularly frustrating were congregations which left the Wisconsin Synod or were "stolen" by Missouri to avoid submitting to Wisconsin admonition.<sup>96</sup> Son John F., who as a seminary student helped in his father's office, remembered that for Missourians, "when Behnken walked into the room, it was like God walked into the room." After his retirement, Behnken paid a visit to Brenner, at which Brenner bluntly scolded Behnken that if Behnken had "stayed in his office and attended to business, Missouri wouldn't have [had] such problems."<sup>97</sup>

But in his final years, Brenner also expressed concerns about his own synod. He detected "an approaching combat fatigue" among some Wisconsin pastors, fearing there were men within his own ministerium "who did not have the fortitude to leave Wisconsin but still had strong inclinations in Missouri's

direction." Brenner feared the cry, "We have contended for the gospel for so very long. Let us be extending it!" Never fond of programs or organizations as vehicles for doing the church's work, he feared that the adoption of methods common in the Missouri Synod, such as stewardship programs and evangelism efforts like *Preaching-Teaching-Reaching*, would "soon lead to a neglect of pure doctrine and practice."<sup>98</sup>

### Into all the world

In what Edgar Hoenecke has called "the 'happy' convention of the Synod" at New Ulm in 1945,<sup>99</sup> a report presented by the Committee on the Indian Mission concluded with the following resolution:

As your committee in charge of the only heathen mission, and that within our own borders [the Apache Indian Mission], which our synod conducts independently, we earnestly urge this session of our Wisconsin Synod to take thought and action in the matter of mission work among those who have no opportunity to hear the sound of the saving gospel. Because there are still vast stretches in Asia, Africa, South America, and in the islands of the seven seas where this sound has not been heard in our day, and because communication and transportation improvements will presumably bring them within our easier reach after the war, and because time is becoming short (Matthew 24:22), may we plead that consideration of a wider mission program be undertaken with dispatch.<sup>100</sup>

This resolution, Hoenecke recalled, "had been rumored several months earlier and should not have come as a surprise" to synodical leaders. He considered it long overdue for the Synod to "redeem the unspoken pledge" it had made a decade earlier to consider expanding its missionary efforts. But, as Hoenecke remembered things—in admittedly partisan fashion—Brenner dropped "another bomb" on delegates when he ruled the Committee's motion "out of order." Convention delegates, however, were "not willing to submit to [Brenner's] judgment." After "lengthy, heated debate" and by a large majority,<sup>101</sup> they took the following action: "Resolved, that the President appoint a committee to gather information regarding foreign fields that might offer opportunity for mission work by our synod. When ready, this committee shall report the results of its study, first to the General Board and then to the synod."<sup>102</sup>

A document among Pastor Arthur Wacker's mission files, entitled "Procrastination of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod in pursuing the course set by the Synod in Convention in August, 1945," provides further details of the tug-of-war that occurred regarding decisions to expand the Synod's mission work. For advocating the 1945 resolution, Hoenecke and the General Mission Board were "severely rebuked" by Brenner. "The Chair made it clear," according to Wacker, "that he did not want our Synod to be bitten by the 'Expansion Bug' that was infecting business and social ventures of the day" or to be

"carried away by the unsound, visionary 'Mission Fever' making itself felt in other churches, particularly [in] the Missouri Synod."<sup>103</sup> But Hoenecke believed that Brenner's "rebuke" actually "had the effect of calling forth much of the spontaneous support which our proposal then received from the delegates." He sensed "an eagerness" among the delegates "to put an end to the many years of negative reaction to every forward-looking proposal."<sup>104</sup> By 1945 the decade-long struggle to pay off the synodical debt of the 1930s had "ended with a huge success." In the final two years of that debt reduction effort, Synod members "voted with their checkbooks" by offering more than \$400,000, which had "paid off the last \$97,000 of debt, enabled the Trustees to pay raises to all WELS workers, and [put] \$360,000 into our bank!"<sup>105</sup>

In Wacker's view, Brenner "grudgingly" allotted convention time for the resolution to be read, only after announcing that it was not the report of the full committee. Two years later, when the committee brought its resolutions before Wisconsin's 1947 convention, "President Brenner still opposed them violently and used the advantage of the Chair to defeat them. During two subsequent sessions of the assembly he steadfastly refused to call for a vote." Later, Wacker recalls Brenner as having "actively engaged in debate" regarding the resolutions and having "carried the brunt for the opposition," but the resolution "passed resoundingly." At that, Brenner "made a public declaration that he had been disavowed and insisted emphatically that the convention had been stampeded into a foolish decision." Brenner's opposition was so strong, Wacker recalled, that some feared he might suffer "grave, physical consequences."<sup>106</sup>

Wacker and Hoenecke embarked on an exploratory mission expedition to Africa, leaving Brooklyn, New York, on April 30, 1949. But when they sent a letter back to the United States, informing the General Mission Board of their findings, "Brenner refused to let the convention hear it" on the grounds that it was meant only for the General Synodical Committee rather than the full convention. "President Brenner," Wacker contended, "does not believe it wise to expand the work of the Synod and thus far has been instrumental in blocking not only action, but even consideration of the project, the clear mandate of the Synod notwithstanding."<sup>108</sup>

In his 1947 report to the Synod, President Brenner maintained that "we try to help our missions and institutions solve their many problems and endeavor to reach as many souls as possible with the manpower and the means that are available to us." With new mission fields opening and many souls in need, "this is not the time to grow indifferent" and "we dare not relax our efforts."<sup>109</sup> But when synodical offerings showed little increase during the next two years, Brenner was forced to report in 1949: "The Church Extension Fund is depleted and commitments have been made that exceed the income by far." Permitting a budgetary deficit to grow from year to year "is nothing but poor stewardship which the Lord does not approve." Therefore, "wisdom demands that we do not spread our work so far that it necessarily grows thin and cracks in spots. We must concentrate on that which lies within our limitations and use our manpower and finances as effectively as possible."<sup>110</sup>

The General Synodical Committee, chaired by Brenner, considered the

report of the African Exploratory Commission on May 14, 1951. The majority of committee members, while recognizing favorable conditions for mission activity in Northern Rhodesia, nonetheless recommended "that we refrain from entering upon this type of mission work at this time" because (1) the "present, disturbed condition of the Church" seemed "not to warrant entering upon a new phase of church work instead of concentrating on the preservation of the Truth for which we stand," and (2) demands on Church Extension funding by existing missions "far exceed the monies on hand" and would "greatly increase the sums required in support of our current work."<sup>111</sup> The Synod's convention in 1951, however, approved the recommendation "that our Synod enter into foreign heathen mission work in the Northern Rhodesian field in Africa" and "that the General Mission Board be authorized to call and to send two missionaries to this field."<sup>112</sup>

Brenner apologists cite evidence already in his early *Northwestern Lutheran* editorials that he possessed a passion for missions.<sup>113</sup> Commenting in 1917 on a synodwide Reformation Jubilee offering, part of which was slated to go to the Synod's Church Extension Fund, he wrote: "To contribute to the Church Extension Fund means to bring to others the blessings of the Reformation and to keep them under its influence. We have what others have not." The Synod "must follow our members who move from the vicinity of their church to places in which Lutheran preaching is not yet heard. We must reach out for the unchurched."<sup>114</sup> In 1925, he wrote: "When we preach, we want to turn men from unbelief to faith, from error to the truth. In this sense we consider all our preaching evangelistic preaching." Thus "it might, rightly understood, be said that we preach to make all men Lutherans."<sup>115</sup>

Citing the apostle Peter's confession in Acts 4—"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard"—Brenner asked, "How long, do you think, could Peter live next door to a person or associate with him without telling him the wonders of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" Applying that attitude to the larger body of believers, Brenner continued, "How would Peter vote on the appropriations for our institutions and missions? Would he favor retrenching on account of lack of funds—he, a man who will not be silenced even by the threats of death?"<sup>116</sup> In 1928, Brenner asked, "Are we interested in missions? We should be," because we are the products of mission work done by others in the past. "Do our missions seem to cost too much, [or] do we complain of the 'burdens' we are compelled to bear? Are we afraid we might impoverish ourselves by too liberal giving?"<sup>117</sup> To the anticipated objection that "mission work begins at home," Brenner granted that "our first duty is toward those in our homes and in our surroundings." But moving beyond home becomes inevitable: "He who shows his own house how great things God has done unto him will not fail to persist in spreading the good tidings abroad."<sup>118</sup>

Yet Brenner warned that "there is a vast difference between a burning zeal for souls and the enthusiastic desire for church expansion." The church's work, including mission work, "is spiritual work that cannot be forced by enthusiasm. It is inward work whose growth can never be truly gauged by external evidences."<sup>119</sup> God has called us "not to be synod-builders, but builders of the

kingdom of God. Our work is saving souls and perfecting saints." First must come "inward growth and consecrated service in the 'little things' that are so frequently slighted."<sup>120</sup> When pastors faithfully perform their task of preaching and teaching the gospel, people do mission work as a fruit of faith. "As the individual member grows up into Christ, the head, the Church progresses and gains strength for her labors and her battles." The Synod "will be able to meet its call to preach the Gospel to all men and to overcome all opposition to its work according to the measure in which our members are being built up in Christ." Such an approach required "no additional manpower, no new scientific methods and means."<sup>121</sup>

Mission expansion must follow responsibly upon financial contributions. "We of the Wisconsin Synod know that our Board of Missions has been warned to proceed very slowly in the founding of new missions." Why? Not for lack of mission fields or fear of opposition, but "simply for the reason that we Christians do not contribute enough money to make the energetic prosecution of our work possible. Others die for the cause," he lamented, "and we hesitate even to make a real financial sacrifice for it."<sup>122</sup>

As Synod President, Brenner called redeemed sinners "the fruitage of [Christ's] bitter sufferings and death." The Savior wants every one of them to find life in Him, "and it is for this work of gathering the harvest in that the Lord sends His believers into the world."<sup>123</sup> He rejected pitting one sphere of mission work against another: "If we ourselves employ our time in hearing and teaching the word at home, we cannot be neglectful of the souls of others. This is still the time of grace for the entire world."<sup>124</sup>

Brenner supporters also note that home mission openings increased throughout his twenty-year presidency. Despite financial restrictions brought on by the Depression, new congregations were opened in Arizona and Colorado. By 1943, the Synod's Mission Board reported: "If we two years ago were able to say, 'Our Synod has expanded to an extent probably not equaled in our Synod within a like period of time: 27 new missions were begun,' we may use the same words again this year but replacing the 27 with 44."<sup>125</sup> When he came into office in 1933, 42% of the Synod's budget was devoted to missions; the figure never dropped below 42% throughout his presidency, averaging 48% and one year rising to a high of 56%.<sup>126</sup>

One of Brenner's theological arguments against the African mission initiative was that entering a new field of work required a call to do so, but this viewpoint was debated. Some remember Brenner not as having been opposed to sending missionaries to Africa but against sending individuals to any mission field by themselves, and that he would have preferred that a team of missionaries be sent to work together.<sup>127</sup> The Synodical Conference already had an established mission in Nigeria, for which Wisconsin provided 15% of its financial support. By 1950, amid growing fears that the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods would separate, or that a split was about to occur in Missouri, could Wisconsin afford to maintain or even increase its support to Nigeria, and to add obligations being contemplated for Northern Rhodesia?<sup>128</sup>

Brenner also questioned whether sufficient preliminary planning had been

conducted before a new foreign field was to be entered. A synodical resolution had called for the investigation not only of Africa but also of two locations in the Orient and another in the South Pacific. Brenner himself was remembered as preferring an opening in Japan. The Committee on Northern Rhodesia "has seen fit to carry out at least a part of its commission by the Synod," Brenner wrote in 1953, "notwithstanding the fact that I begged them to postpone calling [until] the [1953] convention would have the opportunity to decide between Rhodesia and Japan, where we are, that is my view, already committed."<sup>129</sup>

The kindest interpretation to be placed on Brenner's actions regarding world mission expansion following the 1945 convention is that, on the basis of proper parliamentary procedure, he regarded it as out of order for the Committee on the Indian Mission to present such a blockbuster resolution to Synod delegates.<sup>130</sup> His difficult experience with the synodical debt in the 1930s undoubtedly made him cautious about taking on financial responsibilities too quickly or without fully anticipating their long-range impact. Brenner frequently pictured missionaries as being left "out on the curb" when Synod offerings failed to pay their salaries, and he "felt terrible" about it.<sup>131</sup> He preferred to err on the side of caution.

#### Toward the break

Brenner typically relied on Seminary President Edmund Reim and other professors to keep abreast of intersynodical events. He shared their concerns regarding developments in the Missouri Synod, yet he also counseled patience both with grassroots Missouri elements and with Wisconsin members not yet well-informed on the controverted issues. He was even "instrumental in slowing down the move" to break with Missouri. During a last visit with Reim—while Reim was still Seminary president but after Brenner had retired from as Synod president—Brenner once more urged patience. But in Brenner's view, Reim "had set his timetable and that timetable which he had set dictated a break when he declared it." Reim even "chided" Brenner for not being "faithful to the Word." The entire exchange "saddened Brenner a great deal."<sup>132</sup>

When Pastor Oscar J. Naumann became Wisconsin's new president in 1953, he followed Brenner's policy of advocating patience. In an open letter to Wisconsin pastors that fall, he wrote: "We have not formally declared a separation. We are still admonishing the Missouri Synod as a brother. . . . No brother in our midst will, therefore, condemn those of us who feel we still can and want to pray with Missourians as long as these admonitions are being carried on." He noted the difficulties between the two church bodies: "I feel that our Synod by its protests, its resolutions, its pleadings and admonitions definitely calls attention to the fact that we are not in the same undisturbed fellowship relation with Missouri which we enjoyed in years past." Wisconsin was therefore doing what it believed to be its loving duty by "admonishing the Missouri Synod for having erred, and erred often." He concluded optimistically: "We still hope and pray that Missouri will not persist in its present course." Opportunities remained for further discussion and admonition, and only "when I find

they reject all admonition, then I will cease admonition and will at the same time cease praying with them."<sup>133</sup>

Naumann's plea for patience was not well received in all parts of the Synod. Some pastors not only noticed differences in style and personality between Naumann and Brenner; they also appear to have suspected that Naumann's leadership of the Synod represented a departure from Brenner's policies. Brenner's files contain the copy of a letter he sent to Wisconsin Pastor Gervasius Fischer in February 1954, in which he sought to defend Naumann's efforts. "Surely there will be a difference in his conduct of affairs," Brenner wrote, "as there is a difference between our characters." Since the new president was "in the service of the entire Synod, he could not avoid meeting with the President of the Missouri Synod." Although Brenner conceded that he had not agreed with some recently adopted synodical resolutions (he does not specify which they were), he was "not ready to refuse to make every effort to explain our position to the Missourians." He was being kept informed of correspondence between Naumann and Missouri President Behnken, and he concluded, "I am convinced that he [President Naumann] is holding his own in the controversy."<sup>134</sup>

By the summer of 1955, President Naumann found it necessary to announce that Wisconsin's leadership had "reached the conviction" that the Missouri Synod was guilty, in the wording of Romans 16:17, of causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine the two church bodies had long embraced. "For those of us who have been closest to these problems," Naumann said, it seemed "quite definite" that Wisconsin must obey the command of that passage, to "keep away from them."<sup>135</sup> Yet at that summer's Synod convention in Saginaw, Michigan, delegates ultimately approved a resolution that action on breaking fellowship with Missouri be deferred for one year, to enable the Wisconsin Synod to "heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention."<sup>136</sup>

In the months following the 1955 convention, Naumann repeated his previous counsel: "We will admonish longer, have greater patience, put forth more efforts of love to restore and re-establish through His Word a fellowship once given by God through which He has richly blessed us, than we will put forth in attempting to establish a new fellowship." In the Missouri Synod "we are dealing with those who have been our brethren for many years and whose keeper we must be as they have been ours." Certainly it would be easier to bring admonition to definite conclusion with a single individual than with an entire church body, "but even there Jesus admonishes us to put forth every effort of love and patience in order to win the brother who has trespassed."<sup>137</sup>

The Missouri Synod's 1956 convention took into account Wisconsin's 1955 memorial, and Wisconsin's Union Committee found "a ray of hope" in Missouri's response. Wisconsin's committee "was heartened by the frankness with which [Missouri] acknowledged that strained relations" existed between the two synods.<sup>138</sup> But, again, some pastors did not see this "ray of hope" nor were they "heartened" by developments in Missouri. In August 1956, Brenner

received a letter from Pacific Northwest District Pastor M.J. Witt, who charged that the Union Committee's favorable impressions of Missouri arose from their "feelings, emotions and sentiments" which they had allowed to "run away with them." Brenner's service as the Synod's president had ended more than three years before, and he was now 82 years old, yet Witt wrote: "It is my hope and prayer that you will attend the Watertown convention. Perhaps your testimony will bear some favorable fruit. I'm sure it will carry a great deal of weight."<sup>139</sup> Delegates to Wisconsin's special 1956 convention voted by a 5-1 margin to "hold the judgment of [the 1955 convention] in abeyance."<sup>140</sup> It was another five years before Wisconsin delegates voted to sever fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod, on August 17, 1961.<sup>141</sup>

Certainly, there were personality differences between John Brenner and Oscar Naumann, but they should not be overstated. Both believed that fellowship with the Missouri Synod should be dissolved only after every avenue for patient admonition had been exhausted. There was a sternness in the makeup of President Brenner which was not as obvious in the personality of President Naumann. The evangelical spirit and pastoral concern Naumann typified could be misconstrued by some as softness, while Brenner's sternness could be exaggerated by those with a legalistic bent.

### Retirement and evaluation

Prior to the Synod's 1953 convention, President Brenner announced that he would not seek re-election but would make way for the service of a younger man. According to *Milwaukee Sentinel* religion writer James Johnston, when Brenner repeated his intentions at the opening of the convention, "a sincere voice from the floor thundered 'No!' 'No!'" and Brenner received several votes for an eleventh term. "For a man about to retire," Johnson observed, "he presided over that Watertown convention with exceptional ginger, insisting that the delegates move along on schedule and cautioning them frequently to 'put on the brakes' in the time-consuming debate over what to do about the Missouri Synod." He "took none too seriously the parliamentary principle that a presiding officer ought to stay out of the debates," but "punctuated the sessions with his own comments on various reports."<sup>142</sup>

He remained pastor of St. John's on 8<sup>th</sup> and Vliet for another 5 years, completing a half-century of service to that congregation and a total of 62 years in the pastoral ministry. Congregational president Albert W. Dammann announced in a letter to the congregation on June 4, 1958, "You are undoubtedly aware, by this time, of the fact that our Pastor, Rev. John Brenner, is retiring from the ministry and that he will preach his farewell sermon on the last Sunday in June. Since both Pastor and Mrs. Brenner are opposed to any form of celebration, the Church Council feels that their wishes should be respected in this regard."<sup>143</sup> By some accounts, he agreed to retire only with great reluctance, even though he was fast approaching his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the privacy of his family, he confessed, "Nobody will ever know how it hurt to give up my ministry."<sup>144</sup>

The *Sentinel* writer praised Brenner as "a six-foot ramrod of Lutheran con-

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
816 WEST VLIEET STREET  
MILWAUKEE 5, WISCONSIN

JUNE 4, 1958

DEAR MEMBER OF ST. JOHN'S:

You are undoubtedly aware, by this time, of the fact that our Pastor, Rev. John Brenner is retiring from the ministry, and that he will preach his farewell sermon on the last Sunday in June.

Since both Pastor and Mrs. Brenner are opposed to any form of celebration, the Church Council feels that their wishes should be respected in this regard. On the other hand, the Church Council has provided for a monthly pension for Pastor and Mrs. Brenner to be paid to them as long as each shall live. The money for payment of this monthly pension will be paid out of the general treasury unless other money in the form of individual contributions is made available for such purpose.

I am certain that all members of our congregation will want to share and participate in making contributions to the aforementioned pension fund as a token and expression of gratitude to our dear Pastor for his many years of devoted and untiring service to our church as the servant of Our Lord. An envelope is enclosed herewith to enable you to make such contribution as may be within your means.

Yours in Christ,

ALBERT W. DAMMANN,  
PRESIDENT,

ST. JOHN'S EV. LUTH. CHURCH  
OF MILWAUKEE

---

*Letter to St. John's congregation announcing the retirement of Pastor John Brenner as their pastor. (Source: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary archives)*

---

servatism" and "one of the most influential clergymen" in the Midwest. "His long shadow steered pastors and laymen down the straight canyon of theological orthodoxy. All forms of 'modernism' or 'compromise of doctrine' were repugnant to him and those he influenced." Yet Johnston said Brenner was little known beyond his own synod. "In his later years [he] refrained from giving interviews or public statements, and rarely attended public church events other than synod conventions of special meetings." Though he was "renowned as a Bible student, with enough scholarship to be called a 'doctor' several times over," he refused to discuss his career or education, but preferred that he be called simply "Pastor J. Brenner."<sup>145</sup>

Following his retirement, he moved to Bay City, Michigan, where he became a member of another St. John's Lutheran Church, served by his son, Pastor John F. Brenner. He declared he was "now a layman" and refused to interfere in either in synodical affairs or his son's ministry. He died in Bay City on Sunday, September 30, 1962, at age 88, and was given Christian burial two days later, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>146</sup> Before his death, he "laid down the firm request" that he was to receive a "layman's funeral." He "wanted no string of 'synodical dignitaries' eulogizing him," preferring a simple committal service in Milwaukee.<sup>147</sup>

Still, numerous tributes were paid to Pastor and President John Brenner. Seminary professor Paul Peters wrote that the services he rendered to the Synod were "so manifold and extensive that we cannot do justice to them with



# 'Pastor J. Brenner,' Giant Among Lutherans, Retires

By JAMES M. JOHNSTON

The Rev. John Brenner, six-foot ramrod of Lutheran conservatism, has retired from the ministry, the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States (Wisconsin Synod) announced Friday.

Having left the pulpit of St. John's Lutheran Church, 804 W. Vliet St., two weeks ago, Pastor and Mrs. Brenner this week prepared to take a trip.

When he stepped down in 1953 as president of the Wisconsin Synod, after 20 years, Pastor Brenner was one of the most influential clergymen of the Middle West.



REV. JOHN BRENNER

Upon retirement as synod president

## REJECTED 'MODERNISM'

His long shadow steered pastors and laymen down the straight canyon of theological orthodoxy. All forms of "modernism," or "compromise of doctrine" were repugnant to him and those he influenced. The synod then had about 315,000 members, mostly in the Middle and Far West.

Outside his circle of fellow-Wisconsin Synod pastors and friends, little is known of the serious-minded, stern but polite church statesman who in his later years refrained from giving interviews or public statements, and rarely attended public church events other than synod conventions or special meetings.

He won't tell his age, but he's believed to be well past 80. He won't talk about his career or education, though he's renowned as a Bible student, with enough scholarship to be called "doctor" several times over. But he calls him-

self simply "Pastor J. Brenner."

But he will make some things clear:

- His thorough belief in Scripture—as it is written.

- His conviction that the church and state should stay apart, and that pastors have no business mixing in politics or "telling the state what to do," as he said in his last convention sermon in 1953 at Watertown. He believes, too, that pastors and churches should stay out of print.

- His belief that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is making a mistake in some of its church practices, like refusal to prohibit Scouting, negotiating with lodges, and co-operation in some fields with other church bodies. He was one of the leaders in the Wisconsin Synod movement to break with Missouri.

Close friends held him in near reverence. At the start of the Watertown convention in 1953, when he urged the synod to elect a younger man president, a sincere voice from the convention floor thundered "No!" "No!" The convention did elect a younger president, but Pastor Brenner received several votes.

At the end of the convention delegates gave him a vote of thanks and made him an ad-

visory delegate to all future conventions and a permanent advisory member of the Church Union Committee, which steered the synod in its doctrinal debate with the Missouri Synod.

Delegates also agreed with President Oscar J. Naumann when he called the retiring president "a man of God, a man of principles and a man of conviction."

Even those who disagreed with him acknowledged that forthrightness was as much of a part of Pastor Brenner as was orthodoxy.

## 'PUT ON BRAKES'

For a man about to retire, he presided over that Watertown convention with exceptional ginger, insisting that the delegates move along on schedule and cautioning them frequently to "put on their brakes" in the time-consuming debate over what to do about the Missouri Synod.

He took none too seriously the parliamentary principle that a presiding officer ought to stay out of the debates. He punctuated the sessions with his own comments on various reports:

**Audiovisual education:** "That's a craze today and I don't hold with it. We are dealing too much with visual aids. We've got to be careful lest films that show unorthodox material contrary to synod beliefs find their way to the congregation."

**The R S V Bible:** "Other church bodies have hurriedly adopted this new version. I would advise that our committee study it slowly."

This, however, showed more tolerance than some conservative non-Lutheran Protestants, who advocated that the R S V version "be burned."

No man can move him, either by flattery or threats. His only fear is the conscience of "J. Brenner."

If he dislikes this publicity about his retirement he must remember one thing. This reporter, too, is following his conscience in refusing to let a pastor as prominent as "J. Brenner" retire without some mention of it outside of his congregation.

this obituary."<sup>148</sup> President Naumann, who at the time of Brenner's retirement had called him "a man of God, a man of principles and a man of conviction,"<sup>149</sup> now described him as "an uncompromising foe of all that opposed the Word of God, eloquent in his struggle for the purity of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, suspicious—and rightly so—of all theological originality which proposed to know more than God has revealed in his holy Word."<sup>150</sup>

From the Church of the Lutheran Confession, Prof. Edmund Reim noted Brenner's "outstanding ministry at St. John's which was an inspiration for many a young pastor" and his work in Milwaukee's City Pastoral Conference, "where he was a major influence in the never-ending struggle for sound principles and practice." Because intersynodical difficulties remained a recent and painful memory, Reim predicted that that the Synodical Conference would remember Brenner "perhaps with mixed emotions." He praised Brenner's "tireless energy, his exceptional skill and quick repartee in debate, [and] his personal integrity." Reim expressed "keen personal sorrow" that Brenner had not joined the C.L.C. in withdrawing from the Wisconsin Synod. "We think we understand, though we shall attempt no explanation." Reim hoped that the principles for which Brenner contended would now be most faithfully upheld by the C.L.C.<sup>151</sup>

More extensive and thoughtful estimations came from Professors Joh. P. Meyer and Erwin E. Kowalke. The lives and careers of Brenner and Meyer had been intertwined for more than 70 years, beginning as classmates through college and seminary. While Brenner served his long pastorate at St. John's and held numerous positions of synodical leadership, Meyer taught at Watertown and New Ulm before coming to the Seminary in 1920. Meyer as theological teacher and Brenner as ecclesiastical leader guided the Synod through significant decades of its history. Meyer remained at the Seminary until his death in 1964 at age 90. Kowalke had graduated from Northwestern College in 1908 and the Seminary in 1911, but soon returned to the Watertown campus to serve as Northwestern's president for 40 years and as a professor into the late 1960s.

Kowalke noted that "the picture of him that remains with most people who knew him is that of a man who presided at meetings," and that he would be judged "in his capacity as an official of the Synod." Yet Brenner remained "primarily and essentially a pastor." When elected to office, "he accepted it as a duty" and performed his tasks "with energy" and "without neglecting his congregation. He simply put in more hours and never desired to be relieved" of his congregational work. He was not a scholar "in the sense of being bookish or of probing into obscure mysteries. He did not philosophize or speculate," and "mere learning did not at all impress him." But he knew the Scripture and Lutheran doctrine. His sermons "were full of original thought" and he "never failed to apply the truth of Scripture in a clear and practical way."<sup>152</sup>

Brenner's interests were focused on congregation and Synod. He read widely whatever "immediately concerned his ministry" and to stay "well-informed on what was going on his own city and country," but he read little for relaxation beyond an occasional short story in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He played no games and did not care for the sports others played. Much as he

loved Northwestern College, Kowalke could remember seeing Brenner at a football game once, and apparently he could not tell which team was which. When he occasionally fell victim to what he would describe as a "brain fag," he repainted the walls and ceilings of his parsonage, usually late at night.<sup>153</sup>

"There were people," Kowalke acknowledged, "who neither liked nor admired Pastor Brenner., but like him or not, people "all respected him." He "did step down hard on many toes, but those toes usually belonged to people who had their feet in places where they should not have been." To the complaint that he "criticized everything," Kowalke countered: "Not everything. But he certainly was critical of what pretended to be good but was contrary" to Scripture and harmful to the church. There was "a sharpness" to him, but it was "provoked by sham, insincerity, ostentation, or any pretended substitute for simple Christian truth."<sup>154</sup>

By the late 1970s, with Meyer, Kowalke and their peers gone, a new generation arose that did not remember him in a similar light. In an informal e-mail survey conducted in September 2006, 36 WELS pastors—almost all retired—shared their memories of John W.O. Brenner. Many admitted failing memories or conceded that much of what they knew of him was only second-hand and hearsay.

A handful had the chance to observe him presiding at Synod conventions or at meetings of the Conference of Presidents or the Synodical Council—meetings usually held in a classroom at St. John's school or upstairs at the old Northwestern Publishing House offices at 35<sup>th</sup> Street and North Avenue. "There was never any doubt about who was in charge." He was "a no-nonsense parliamentarian." When a half-baked or ill-conceived proposal reached the floor, Brenner would already have analyzed it before the speaker finished and would offer his evaluation. Speakers known for being long-winded would be reminded, "We are here to do business and not to preach." He once warned a speaker: "No long perorations. Get to the point." There was "no fooling around at a Brenner meeting." Yet Brenner "was not a stickler for Roberts' *Rules of Order*." When someone once called him on a point of order, he replied, "Here we are evangelical."

Several observers were impressed by "the forthright manner of the Wisconsin men led by Brenner" in contrast to "the 'politicians' of the Missouri group." Missouri's leaders were often thought to possess *schliff*—a kind of smoothness or polish. By contrast, Brenner and other Wisconsin men were known for being blunt, which sometimes came off as boorishness. Brenner was remembered as protesting once to Missouri President John Behnken, "You're going out with the wrong girl!" Brenner was certainly a man of his times, but in the end he may also have become a victim of his times. What was regarded in his prime as being faithful to Scripture, of sober judgment and proper in etiquette may have come to be taken by a later generation as harsh, stubborn or negative.

He "did not suffer fools gladly." For pastors "who should know better, he could be short, but for laymen he was often patient. The ones irritated by him were "the liberals." He could not stomach pastors whom he called

"*waschlappen*"—theological "dishrags" who to him "had no convictions and were not firm in their ministry."<sup>155</sup> He was not fond of visiting after church but "believed and taught his congregation that after worship the people were to go right home so they could take the message of the day with them." Thus one's initial impression could be that St. John's reflected the "cold and unfriendly" personality of its pastor, but as one came to know him better, it became apparent that "as a pastor, Brenner was warm and concerned about his people."

He was "not too social," frequently seen during a synod convention "off on the side by himself smoking his pipe." When he chaired a meeting "he was all business" and wanted others to be the same, but when the meeting adjourned "he would light up his pipe and visit. People would gather around him and these visits would last far into the night," and from these visits he was remembered as "an interesting conversationalist." Seminary students of the early 1950s carried on an "informal comparison" regarding who would live longer—Brenner, who smoked heavily, or Meyer, who "avoided such vices." Meyer outlasted Brenner, "but not by much."

One pastor recalled a particular memory of his harshness, probably at the 1953 Synod convention in Watertown. Because "the auditorium was hot and so was the debate," Brenner limited delegates to three minutes to speak, and he instructed the secretary to strike his gavel table when a speaker's three minutes had elapsed and the speaker was to stop, even if he was in mid-sentence. One speaker known for his "loquaciousness" soon came to the microphone, but in three minutes "he couldn't even get wound up." Despite the pounding of the gavel, the speaker dared to go one more sentence, protesting, "But I haven't even had a chance to tell you what my wife and I did on our honeymoon night." The convention broke into raucous laughter, but Brenner reportedly took the gavel, banged it several times and shouted, "Silence! We don't laugh at Synod Conventions."

This is balanced by a particular memory of his kindness—which occurred at about the same time in his life. A young pastor, helping a seriously ill neighboring pastor by teaching his confirmation class, discovered during the week before confirmation Sunday that one of the students was secretly a member of the Boy Scouts. "What do I do?" the young pastor wondered, "Should I blow the whistle? Do I call off the young man's confirmation?" He knew Pastor Brenner just well enough to call him to ask for an appointment. Brenner invited him to the Vliet Street parsonage, and met him at the front door wearing shirt sleeves and smoking his pipe. "He smiled a lot and immediately put me at ease," the young pastor recalled. When he told Brenner about the confirmand/ Scouting problem, Brenner smiled and replied: "Don't worry about it now. It's not important enough to spoil a beautiful day. You can deal with it later."

Brenner's era was one in which "the Wisconsin Synod was 'ruled' by sarcasm," and Brenner was not unique in his ability to "cut people down with a sarcastic tongue." Meyer once prefaced a remark at a meeting by saying he was "going to pretend to be a devil's advocate," to which Brenner immediately shot back, "What do you mean 'pretend'?" On another occasion, a joint meeting of

Missouri and Wisconsin representatives, the chairman referred to him as “Dr.” Brenner, to which Brenner replied, “Don’t get nasty.” This sarcastic response belied Brenner’s disturbance at Missouri men who had earned doctorates at liberal universities and seminaries and were feared to have been infected with dangerous theologies, which they were then introducing into their churches. Brenner’s response was regarded as his blunt way of saying, “Thanks, but no thanks!”

Meyer recalled that Brenner “had a well-developed sense of propriety, and violations of propriety displeased him.”<sup>156</sup> He wore a full dress suit even on the hottest days of a convention. He was “always a Christian gentleman in the way he interacted with others.” He was not given to emotional display. “There was no wheedling, no mawkish sentimentality, no sensationalism, no display, no resorting to stunts or novelties in his ministry.”<sup>157</sup> In 1914, Brenner cited an opinion quoted in *The Milwaukee Journal*, that Mother’s Day was “the worst bit of false sentiment ever devised.” There was something wrong, wrote the *Journal* editorialist, with any man “willing to parade his love for his mother. A few things in this world should be too sacred for grandstand exhibitions.” Agreeing completely, Brenner added: “Let us include as too sacred for grandstand exhibition other virtues like patriotism, charity, etc. Still we see them paraded before the public almost daily in nauseating laudation of self-advertisement.”<sup>158</sup> Two decades later, in what may have been a small self-disclosure, he wrote, “Some people find it simply impossible to parade their personal feelings before the public and to display them at a particular time fixed by some well-meaning enthusiast.”<sup>159</sup>

Yet he provoked strong feelings. “People either really liked him or they really didn’t.” His supporters remain convinced that “he came to office at a time when the Synod needed a man of his nature and ability.” Those who worked with him “recognized him as a real leader.” Said one, “I felt and still feel that President Brenner led the Synod, whereas the presidents we have had since then [have] represented the synod.” Said another, Brenner was “one of the great gifts of God to our church, a man who was absolutely the right man for that job and that time, but— if you understand me right— a man who would never make it [in the ministry] today. It’s a different time.” He “would never back down.” He was “a man’s man.”

Perhaps his longtime friend Joh. P. Meyer offered the most thoughtful evaluation of his classmate and lifelong co-worker:

Whether Brenner was aware of it or not, he always acted according to the principle which he together with his mates . . . had adopted as [their] class motto in 1893— Latin, of course— *Praesens imperfectum, futurum perfectum* (“The present is imperfect, but the future perfect”). We must remember that the present is always burdened with imperfections. Perfection is an ideal for which we must strive untiringly, but the attaining of which has been reserved for the future. In the words of Luther, as long as we are on earth, there is not a *Wesen* but a *Werden* (“not a being but a becoming”). Brenner was firm, but he would not force an issue, as long as there was hope for improvement.<sup>160</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Armin Engel, “The Bergemann Era—1908-1933,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 72 (October 1975): 294-308.
2. *Report of the Twenty-second Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 2<sup>nd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 1933* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1933), 14.
3. Edgar H.A. Hoenecke, “‘Reflections’ on the World Mission Development in the Wisconsin Synod,” <http://www.wlssays.net/authors/H/HoeneckeReflections/HoeneckeReflections.rtf>, 5.
4. Edward Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 187.
5. Engel, “The Bergemann Era,” 303.
6. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 188-89.
7. E.E. Kowalke, “Pastor John Brenner: A Man With a Strong and Wide Pastoral Interest,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 49 (November 4, 1962): 346.
8. *Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1934* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1934), 36-43.
9. Richard C. Schwerin, “A Biography of John William Otto Brenner,” (Senior church history paper; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., December 11, 1976), 4-5
10. See David M. Oshinsky, *Polio: An American Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46-47.
11. John Brenner to Rev. H.A. Kuether, Sheboygan Falls, Wis., February 15, 1934; Brenner papers, file 33.
12. John Brenner to Karl Schweppe, February 15, 1939; Brenner papers, file 42.
13. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 190.
14. Kowalke, “Pastor John Brenner,” 346.
15. Schwerin, “A Biography of John William Otto Brenner,” 3-4.
16. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 189.
17. John Brenner to “Dear Brother in the Ministry,” July 14, 1935; Brenner papers, file 119.
18. John Brenner, “From the Administration,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 22 (January 20, 1935): 28.
19. *Proceedings of the Twenty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, New Ulm, Minn., August 7<sup>th</sup> to August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1935* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1935), 8.
20. *Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Appleton, Wis., August 11 to August 17, 1937* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1937), 13-15.
21. John Brenner to Rev. N. Mielke, January 24, 1938; Brenner papers, file 36.
22. John Brenner to Albert Eberhart, Martin, S.D., April 10, 1935; Brenner papers, file 28.

23. John Brenner to Frederick G. Knoll, Douglas, Ariz., September 4, 1937; Brenner papers, file 33.
24. John Brenner to R[euben] Marti, Stambaugh, Mich., September 17, 1934; Brenner papers, file 36.
25. John Brenner to William Roepke, Chairman of the Board for Home and Foreign Missions, December 18, 1938; Brenner papers, file 5.
26. John Brenner to Frederick G. Knoll, Douglas, Ariz., October 31, 1934; Brenner papers, file 33.
27. John Brenner "To the Pastors of our Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States," September 20, 1939 (bold print in the original); Brenner papers, file 5.
28. John Brenner to Pastor Frederick Knoll, Warren, Ariz., February 4, 1941; Brenner papers, file 6.
29. Milton Weishahn, "Preachers' Sons," *The Black and Red* 41 (November 1937): 150-53.
30. W.P.S., "The Son of a Clergyman . . .," *The Black and Red* 41 (December 1937): 187-88; E.A.B., "Iustitia! Iustitia!" *The Black and Red* 41 (December 1937): 189-90; "Obituary," *The Black and Red* 41 (December 1937): 190-91.
31. John Brenner to E.E. Kowalke, December 20, 1937; Brenner papers, file 33.
32. E.E. Kowalke to John Brenner, December 24, 1937; Brenner papers, file 33.
33. J[ohn] B[renner], "Our New Hymnal," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 4 (September 21, 1917): 162-63.
34. J[ohn] B[renner], "The Vested Choir," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 15 (April 1, 1928): 99-100.
35. Karl F. Krauss to John Brenner, March 8, 1935; Brenner papers, file 33.
36. John Brenner to Karl F. Krauss, March 16, 1935; Brenner papers, file 33.
37. G[ervasius] W. Fischer, Peshtigo, Wis., to John Brenner, March 17, 1936; Brenner papers, file 29.
38. John Brenner to Gervasius W. Fischer, March 28, 1936; Brenner papers, file 29.
39. Gervasius Fischer to John Brenner, April 6, 1937; Brenner papers, file 29.
40. W. Weisgerber, Minocqua, Wis. to John Brenner, February 8, 1935; Brenner papers, file 46.
41. John Brenner to W. Weisgerber, Minocqua, Wis., February 15, 1935; Brenner papers, file 46.
42. *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Cleveland, Ohio, June 19-29, 1935* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), 133-34.
43. *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, St. Louis, June 15-24, 1938*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), 161.
44. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1937*, 16.
45. *Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Watertown, Wis., August 2-9, 1939* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1939), 67-68.
46. *Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Saginaw, Mich., August 6-13, 1941* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1941), 43-44.
47. Pastor Harold E. Warnke, Princeton, Wis., to John Brenner, May 8, 1941; Brenner papers, file 118.
48. John Brenner to Pastor Harold Warnke, May 23, 1941; Brenner papers, file 118.
49. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1941*, 13.
50. John Brenner, "The Church and 'War Work,'" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 29 (November 29, 1942): 374-75.
51. Victor Brohm, pastor of Bethesda Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, to Theodore Graebner, May 8, 1942; Theodore Graebner papers, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, box 71.
52. Theodore Graebner to Rev. Adolph Ackermann, Mankato, Minn., October 5, 1942; Graebner papers, box 71.
53. Theodore Graebner to Rev. F. Waldo Boettcher, Big Falls, Wis., November 16, 1942; Graebner papers, box 71.
54. John Brenner to Rev. A.L. Mennicke, June 2, 1950; Brenner papers, file 36.
55. William H. Wiedenmeyer to John Brenner, February 26, 1946; Brenner papers, file 46.
56. John Brenner to William H. Wiedenmeyer, March 5, 1946; Brenner papers, file 46.
57. *Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, Savannah, Georgia, October 17-24, 1934* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1934), 415-17.
58. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1935*, 107-109.
59. *Missouri Proceedings, 1935*, 221.
60. *A.L.C. Minutes, 1938*, 7-11; in Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 394-98.
61. *Missouri Proceedings, 1938*, 228-33.
62. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1939*, 60.
63. Edmund Reim, "The Strength of Christian Unity," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 37 (October 1940): 267.
64. Arthur P. Black, "Lutheran Laymen's Dinner, Washington, D.C.," *The Lutheran* 24 (November 26, 1941): 20.
65. Fred H. Lindemann, "The Churchman's Digest," *The American Lutheran* 26 (December 1943): 12.
66. John Brenner to E.E. Ryden, President of the American Lutheran Conference, January 10, 1941; Brenner papers, file 79.
67. John Brenner to Eric Christiansen, June 18, 1945; Brenner papers, file 26.
68. John Brenner to P.O. Bersell, President of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod, April 15, 1948; Brenner papers, file 78.
69. Rosalie Joyce, editor of *The Lutheran World*, to John Brenner, December

- 18, 1950; Brenner papers, file 32.
70. John Brenner to Miss Rosalie Joyce, January 5, 1951; Brenner papers, file 32.
  71. Pastor C. Arnold Payne, Chicago, to John Brenner, October 24, 1951; Brenner papers, file 81.
  72. John Brenner to Pastor C. Arnold Payne, November 27, 1951; Brenner papers, file 81.
  73. See, for example, J[ohn] B[renner], "Waking Up?" (September 21, 1916): 137-38. [Fred] G[raeber], "Jazz and the Dance," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 8 (February 20, 1921): 51. H[ans] K. M[oussa], "At Last! An Argument For Dancing," (November 27, 1921): 374-75. [Joh. P.] M[eyer], "Parents' Duties," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 18 (July 1921): 193-94. O[tto] Hensel, "The Christian Mother and the Dance of Her Children," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 11 (January 13, 1924): 8-12; (January 27, 1924): 25-27; (February 10, 1924): 39-41.
  74. Herbert A. Sitz, St. Paul's Lutheran School, New Ulm, Minn., to John Brenner, February 4, 1936; Brenner papers, file 41.
  75. John Brenner to Herbert A Sitz, February 17, 1936; Brenner papers, file 41.
  76. Herbert Voecks, Appleton, Wis., to John Brenner, January 15, 1941; Brenner papers, file 45.
  77. John Brenner to Herbert Voecks, January 25, 1941; Brenner papers, file 45.
  78. Karl F. Krauss to John Brenner, January 3, 1944; Brenner papers, file 34.
  79. John Brenner to Karl F. Krauss, January 10, 1944; Brenner papers, file 34.
  80. Lorenz F. Weber, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Mich. to Theodore Graebner, no date; Graebner papers, box 71.
  81. Theodore Graebner to Rev. Adolph Ackermann, Mankato, Minn., October 5, 1942; Theodore Graebner papers, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, box 71.
  82. Theodore Graebner to Pastor R.F. Gussick, St. Martin Lutheran Church, Chilton, Wis., July 10, 1945; Graebner papers, box 71.
  83. I.C. Heinicke, Seward, Neb., to Theodore Graebner, December 21, 1942; Graebner papers, box 71.
  84. F.M.L. Nitz, President the Oregon and Washington District of the Missouri Synod, to Graebner, January 7, 1943; Graebner papers, box 71.
  85. Theodore Graebner to Louis Sieck, January 8, 1946; Graebner papers, box 71.
  86. Theodore Graebner to President J.W. Behnken, June 10, 1944; Graebner papers, box 71.
  87. "Sidelights and impressions" on the 1945 Wisconsin Synod convention, no author indicated [E.J.A. Marxhausen?]; Graebner papers, box 71.
  88. Rev. Philip Lange, Hope Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, to Paul Bretscher, February 28, 1946; Graebner papers, box 71.
  89. Victor Brohm to Theodore Graebner, March 9, 1947; Graebner papers, box 71.

90. Theodore Graebner to Rev. J.H. Baumgaertner, Capitol Drive Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, June 6, 1947; Graebner papers, box 71.
91. Theodore Graebner to John G. Kaiser, July 1, 1947; Graebner papers, box 71.
92. E.E. Kowalke to John Brenner, dated only "Wednesday the 13th," most likely 1933; Brenner papers, file 33.
93. Michigan District President Karl F. Krauss to John W.O. Brenner, February 25, 1949; Brenner papers, file 91.
94. John Brenner to John W. Behnken, June 10, 1949; Brenner papers, file 97.
95. A.T. Kretzmann, Crete, Ill. to John Brenner, August 19, 1953; Brenner papers, file 96.
96. Schwerin, "A Biography of John William Otto Brenner," 6.
97. Aaron L. Christie, "Herr Pastor and Papa John: John F. Brenner—A Michigan District Mainstay," (Senior church history paper; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., May 1, 1997), 10-11.
98. Schwerin, "A Biography of John William Otto Brenner," 6.
99. Hoenecke, "Reflections," 6.
100. Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, New Ulm, Minn., August 1-6, 1945 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1945), 31-32.
101. Hoenecke, "Reflections," 6.
102. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1945*, 34.
103. "Statement by Pastor Arthur Wacker at the Michigan Pastoral Conference, January 1951," <http://www.wlsessays.net/authors/W/WackerMission/WackerMission.rtf>.
104. Edgar H. Hoenecke, "The WELS Forty-niners," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 3 (Spring 1985): 3.
105. Edgar Hoenecke to Pastor Gary Baumler, September 14, 2000; copy in possession of the author.
106. Wacker, "Statement," 6.
107. Hoenecke, "The WELS Forty-niners," 3.
108. Wacker, "Statement," 6-8.
109. *Proceedings: Twenty-ninth Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Watertown, Wis., August 6-12, 1947* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1947), 10.
110. *Centennial Convention Proceedings, Thirtieth Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Milwaukee, August 3-9, 1949* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1949), 15-16.
111. General Synodical Committee Report, May 14, 1951; in Wacker's papers, 15.
112. *Proceedings: Thirty-first Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, New Ulm, Minn., August 8-15, 1951* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 54.
113. See Marc P. Frey, "The Mission Zeal of President John Brenner," (Senior Church History Paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary,

- March 22, 1980). His professor Edward Fredrich evaluated his work: "This is, I think, the first treatment of the mission subject that is fair to Brenner."
114. J[ohn] B[renner], "Our Jubilee Offering," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 4 (October 21, 1917): 153.
  115. J[ohn] B[renner], "Proselyting Propaganda—Publicity Work," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 12 (October 4, 1925): 309.
  116. J[ohn] B[renner], "We Cannot But Speak," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 14 (July 10, 1927): 213.
  117. J[ohn] B[renner], "Are We Interested?" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 15 (September 30, 1928): 309.
  118. J[ohn] B[renner], "Return To Thine Own House, And Show How Great Things God Hath Done Unto Thee," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 8 (October 16, 1921): 322.
  119. [ohn] B[renner], "Are We Overselling?" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 12 (February 8, 1925): 37.
  120. J[ohn] B[renner], "Our Future," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 12 (November 15, 1925): 357-58.
  121. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1947*, 10-11.
  122. J[ohn] B[renner], "Men Still Dying," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 17 (November 9, 1930): 355.
  123. *Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Watertown, Wis., August 4-11, 1943* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1943), 11.
  124. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1949*, 12.
  125. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1943*, 16.
  126. Frey, "The Mission Zeal of President John Brenner," 5.
  127. Christie, "Herr Pastor and Papa John," 10.
  128. Frey, "The Mission Zeal of President John Brenner," 15-16.
  129. John Brenner to Immanuel P. Frey, Denver Colorado, March 19, 1953; Synod archives, cited by Frey, "The Mission Zeal of President John Brenner," 16.
  130. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 220.
  131. Christie, "Herr Pastor and Papa John," 10.
  132. Schwerin, "A Biography of John William Otto Brenner," 6-7.
  133. Oscar Naumann "To All Who Inquired About Pages 9 and 10 of the Minutes of the General Synodical Committee," November 20, 1953; Brenner papers, file 96.
  134. John Brenner to Rev. G[ervasius] W. Fischer, February 12, 1954; Brenner papers, file 97.
  135. *Proceedings: Thirty-third Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Saginaw, Mich., August 10-17, 1955* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1955), 13-14.
  136. *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1955*, 79, 86.
  137. Oscar J. Naumann, "The Voice Of The C.U.C.: 1956—A Year Of Decision," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 43 (January 8, 1956): 8-9.
  138. Oscar J. Naumann and Oscar J. Siegler, "The Voice Of The C.U.C.: Report on the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to the Nine Districts of Wisconsin and Other States," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 43 (July 22, 1956): 234-35.
  139. M.J. Witt, President Pacific Northwest District to John Brenner, August 11, 1956; Brenner papers, file 96.
  140. *Proceedings: Thirty-third Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Recessed Session, Watertown, Wis., August 21-23, 1956* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1956), 52-61.
  141. *Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Milwaukee, Wis., August 8-17, 1961* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1961), 198.
  142. James M. Johnston, "'Pastor J. Brenner,' Giant Among Lutherans, Retires," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (July 12, 1958).
  143. Albert W. Damman to "Dear Member of St. John's," June 4, 1958; Pastoral file of John Brenner WELS Archives, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, Mequon, Wis.
  144. Kowalke, "Pastor John Brenner," 345.
  145. Johnston, "'Pastor J. Brenner.'"
  146. Jeremiah J. Gumm, Steven A. Hahn, Timothy R. Wegner, and Erich W. Westphal, Inventory of John W.O. Brenner Papers (WELS Archives, Mequon, Wis., February 2003), 3. Brenner's obituary, "Former President of Wisconsin Synod Dies," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 59 (October 21, 1962): 329, lists his death date as October 4.
  147. Schwerin, "A Biography of John William Otto Brenner," 8.
  148. P[aul] Peters, "Rev. John W.O. Brenner," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 59 (October 1962): 281.
  149. Johnston, "'Pastor J. Brenner.'"
  150. "Former President of Wisconsin Synod Dies," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 59 (October 21, 1962): 329.
  151. E[dmund] Reim, "John Brenner: In Memoriam," *Journal of Theology* 2 (October 1962): 46-47.
  152. Kowalke, "Pastor John Brenner," 345.
  153. Kowalke, "Pastor John Brenner," 346.
  154. Kowalke, "Pastor John Brenner," 346.
  155. Schwerin, "A Biography of John William Otto Brenner," 5.
  156. [John. P.] M[eyer], "President John Brenner," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 60 (January 1963): 11.
  157. Kowalke, "Pastor John Brenner," 345.
  158. J[ohn] B[renner], "We Second," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 1 (May 21, 1914): 74.
  159. J[ohn] B[renner], "'Do Mothers Want Mother's Day?'" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 19 (April 24, 1932): 134.
  160. Meyer, "President John Brenner," 11.

The WELS Historical Institute was given formal approval by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in convention in 1981 to organize for the purpose of collecting and preserving historical data and artifacts that are related to the various periods of Lutheranism in America, especially of the WELS. In recent years the synod took over the responsibility of maintaining the archives. The Institute maintains a museum and publishes a *JOURNAL* and *NEWSLETTER*. Membership is open. Fees are as follows, which include the subscription fees: Individual: \$20.00; Husband/Wife: \$25.00 (2 votes but only one publication issue); Congregation, School, Library, Corporation: \$40.00; and Student: \$15.00. Fees may be sent to the WELS Historical Institute, 2929 N. Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI 53222.

The board members are: Prof. Robert Bock, president; Prof. Alan Sigelkow, vice president; Naomi Plocher, secretary; Duane Kuehl, treasurer; Prof. Joel Pless, Steven Miller, Daniel Nommensen, Rev. Raymond Schumacher, Prof. Patrick Steele. Advisory members are: Prof. John Hartwig, Dr. Arnold Lehmann, and Charlotte Sampe, curator.

**For membership information contact:**

Pastor Ray Schumacher  
(414) 615-5708 • [schumacherr@nps.wels.net](mailto:schumacherr@nps.wels.net)

**Correspondence may be sent to the editor:**

Professor John M. Brenner  
11844 N. Luther Lane • Mequon, WI 53092  
(414) 242 - 8138 • Email: [brennerj@wls.wels.net](mailto:brennerj@wls.wels.net)