

WELS Historical Institute

Journal

Volume 27, Number 1
April 2009

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JUL 07 2009



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Editor: Arnold O. Lehmann

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The Cover
Rev. John W.O. Brenner

**Proceedings
of the
Twenty-fifth Convention
of the German
Evangelical-Lutheran Synod
Of
Wisconsin and Other States
held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin April 15 to 20, 1875**

At the close of last year's convention the synod resolved also to meet this year at the usual time, the Thursday after Trinity, for the purpose of celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. Mean while, man proposes but God disposes. In the past winter the second building of our institution in Watertown burned down and a new building was needed. Since the Board of Control did not want to undertake this project on its own without the approval of the synod, and yet the immediate construction was necessary, it asked the president of synod for an earlier convention. As a result the president in a proclamation on February 6 called for the synod to meet on April 15 and it met on the appointed date in the synodical affiliated St. Peter's Church in Milwaukee, served by Pastor R. Adelberg. This worthy congregation, which cordially received the synodical guests, and also aware of the synod's celebration of a jubilee festival for its twenty-fifth anniversary, decorated God's house in an appropriate pleasing manner. Fresh marsh garlands with colorful flowers framed the large altar and covered the pulpit, lectern and baptismal font; in the middle of the altar arch was embossed in greenery the gold figures 1850-1875, the length of time of the synod's existence; above that was placed a crown and the sign by which we conquer - the cross. Unfortunately our convention was not blessed with good weather, in that extreme cold for this time of the year reigned, and the weather prediction of our honorable synodical host of howling storms, swirling snow flakes and ice figures on the window panes was accurate.

The convention was opened with a festival service, in which the local pastor, R. Adelberg, conducted the altar service and the Hon. president, Pastor Bading, gave the sermon which by resolution of the synod was to be recorded in this report. The word of God was richly proclaimed during the convention: with sermons on Friday evening by Pastor Siegler based on John 8: 46 ff; on Sunday morning by Pastor Brockmann based on the Sunday's Gospel; on Sunday evening by Pastor Hoelzel based on Mark 14: 43-52; and on Tuesday evening by Pastor Kilian based on I Peter 1: 3-9. In the confessional service prior to the main service Pastor Waldt gave the confessional sermon based on Luke 18:13. For the celebration of the Lord's Supper, in addition to a very large number of members of St. Peter's Congregation, the majority of pastors present, as well as many delegates took part. The sessions of the convention, of which there were nine, were opened with a short service led by the appointed chaplain, Pastor Brenner, and closed with the Lord's Prayer led by the president. The morning sessions, from 8:30 to 12:00 were designated for doctrinal discussions, while in the afternoon sessions, 2:30-5:30, business matters were handled. In addition, two pastoral conferences were held. Following is the organization of the Convention.

A. Pastors and Professors.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Post-Office</i>
1. C. F. Goldammer	Green Bay	Green Bay.
2. J. Conrad	Theresa, Mayville	Dodge Co.

3. J. Bading	Milwaukee St. John Cong.	114 Prairie St., Milwaukee.
4. Ph. Koehler	Hustisford, Hustisford	Dodge Co.
5. J. J. E. Sauer	Leeds, Leeds	Columbia Co.
6. Ph. Sprengling	Center	Appleton
7. C. F. Waldt	Racine	Racine
8. C. Gausewitz	Herman, Dodge Co.	Iron Ridge, Dodge Co.
9. Dr. Th. Meumann	Fond du Lac	Fond du Lac
10. C. Strube	Newton	Newton, Manitowoc Co.
11. C. Wagner	Herman	Dodge Co., Hartford, Washington Co.
12. A. Denninger	Farmington, Jefferson Co.	Johnson's Creek, Jefferson Co.
13. C. G. Reim	La Crosse	La Crosse
14. J. Kilian	Lomira	Theresa, Dodge Co
15. Ph. Brenner	Oshkosh	Oshkosh
16. A. Hoenecke	Milwaukee, St. Matt. Cong.	Milwaukee
17. J. H. Brockmann	Watertown	Watertown
18. F. Hilpert	Kohlsville	Washington Co.
19. A. Opitz	Schleisingerville	Schleisingerville
20. G. Thiele	Manitowoc	Manitowoc
21. Tr. Gensike	Hortonville	Hortonville, Outagamie Co.
22. Th. Jaekel	Milwaukee, Grace Cong.	Milwaukee
23. H. Hoffmann	Granville	West-Granville, Milw. Co.
24. J. A. Hoyer	Princeton	Princeton, Green Lake Co.
25. P. Lukas	Beaver Dam	Beaver Dam
26. A. Liefeld	Caledonia	Caledonia Center, Racine Co.
27. R. Baarts	Hamburg	La Crosse
28. B. Ungrodt	Jefferson	Jefferson
29. A. Kluge	Reedsville	Reedsville, Manitowoc Co.
30. F. Schug	Wrightstown	Wrightstown, Brown Co.
31. A. Siegler	Ridgeville	Tomah, Monroe Co.
32. Chr. Dowidat	Fort Atkinson	Fort Atkinson, Jefferson Co.
33. K. Oppen	Columbus	Columbus
34. L. Junker	Morrison	Morrison, Brown Co.
35. R. Adelberg	Milwaukee, St. Peter Cong.	483 Scott St., Milwaukee.
36. Prof. A. Ernst	Watertown	Watertown
37. A. Dagefoerde	Bostvik Valley	Barre Mills, La Crosse Co.
38. A. Kleinhans	Herman, Sheboygan Co.	Howards Grove, Sheboygan Co.
39. C. Jaeger	Two Rivers	Two Rivers
40. G. Denninger	Paynesville	Milwaukee Co.
41. Chr. Reichenbecher	Platteville	Platteville
42. F. Guenther	Burr Oak	Burr Oak, La Crosse Co.
43. W. Schimpf	Hubbard	Woodland, Dodge Co.
44. Joh. Meyer	Winchester	Winchester, Winnebago Co.
45. W. Hagedorn	Forest	Dotyville, Fond du Lac Co.
46. Prof. Th. Brohm	Watertown	Watertown
47. H. Hoops	Nekime	Vandine Station, Fond du Lac Co.
48. J. Haase	Freedom	Appleton.

49. E. Jonas	Ahnepee	Ahnepee.
50. Chr. Popp	Kenosha	Kenosha
51. Prof. Dr. W. Notz	Watertown	Watertown
52. J. Hodtwalker	Bay View	Bay View, Milwaukee Co.
53. G. Hoelzel	Ripon	Ripon
54. P. Lange	Lowell	Dodge Co.
55. C. Althoff	Menomonee	Menomonee, Dunn Co.
56. J. E. Wuebben	Town Mosel	Mosel, Sheboygan Co.
57. Thurow	Greenfield	Root Creek, Milwaukee Co.
58. J. J. Meier	Wheatland	Burlington, Racine Co.
59. C. Lieb	Oconto	Oconto
60. W. Bergholz	Clifton	Monroe Co.
61. H. Eckelmann	Burlington	Burlington

Accepted during the Convention:

62. A. Toepel	Peshtigo	Peshtigo
63. M. Denninger	Waterloo	Waterloo
64. W. Hinnenthal	Franklin	

Absent Pastors:

65. E. Mayerhoff	West Bend	West Bend
66. W. Hass	La Crosse	
67. J. Koehler	Buffalo City	Buffalo City
68. C. Diehlmann, care of Mr. Louis Lange		St. Louis, Mo.

B. Teachers.

1. J. Voss	Watertown
2. A. Warnecke	Milwaukee
3. Richter	Watertown
4. J. Grotheer	Manitowoc
5. H. Pautz	Manitowoc
6. R. Fritzke	Fond du Lac
7. C. Brenner	Hustisford
8. J. Denninger	Milwaukee
9. H. Behrens	Milwaukee
10. E. Nitschke	Milwaukee
11. A. Rissmann	Milwaukee

Accepted during the Convention:

12. Schwarzrock	Milwaukee
13. Schwarz	Milwaukee
14. H. Meyer	Milwaukee
15. Wardien	Green Bay
16. Lewke	Theresa
17. W. Meyer	Platteville
18. Gaedke	

19. Gruber Oshkosh
 20. Pieritz,*

*Mr. Pieritz will be recognized as accepted as soon as he hands to the president his release from the Hon. Synod of Missouri

C. Congregational Delegates.

(all have Mr. in front of their names, and "from the" after each name)

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|--------------------|--|
| 1. H. Kringel | St. Matthew Congregation in Milwaukee. |
| 2. G. Geiger | St. John Congregation in Milwaukee. |
| 3. Joh. Ruehl | St. Peter's Congregation in Milwaukee. |
| 4. C. Boetting | Grace Congregation in Milwaukee. |
| 5. G. Schmidt | Trinity Congregation in Caledonia Center. |
| 6. Ph. Lemke | Zion Congregation in Morrison. |
| 7. L. Hess | St. John Congregation in Burlington |
| 8. K. Eggers | Congregations in New London and Hortonville. |
| 9. S. Goetz | Congregation in Racine. |
| 10. Schwaebke | St. Paul Congregation in Eldorado. |
| 11. W. Kurth | Congregation in Peshtigo. |
| 12. W. Kirchmann | Congregation in Beaver Dam. |
| 13. D. Bohn | Trinity Congregation in Neenah. |
| 14. M. Borchardt | Salem Congregation in West Granville. |
| 15. G. Meyer | Congregation in Manitowoc. |
| 16. Th. Kemnitz | Congregation in Green Bay. |
| 17. J. Wege | St. John Congregation in Bostvick Valley. |
| 18. F. Hartung | St. John Congregation in Two Rivers. |
| 19. H. Brehmer | Grace Congregation in Ripon. |
| 20. W. Roeper | St. John Congregation in West Bend. |
| 21. W. Roecker | St. Peter's Congregation in Addison, Wash. Co. |
| 22. G. Gerning | St. Peter's and Immanuel Congregations, Mosel. |
| 23. M. Schmidt | St. Luke Congregation in Bay View. |
| 24. H. Luehring | St. John Congregation in Greenfield. |
| 25. C. Teske | Congregation in Princeton. |
| 26. E. Carstens | St. John Congregation in Newton. |
| 27. G. Kirst | St. John Congregation in Ridgeville. |
| 28. F. Baebenroth | Congregation in Watertown. |
| 29. C. Reinemann | Congregation in Centerville. |
| 30. J. Kinkel | Bethany Congregation in Hustisford. |
| 31. Heidenreich | Friedens Congregation in Oshkosh. |
| 32. A. Hacker | Friedens Congregation in Hartford. |
| 33. E. von Briesen | Zion Congregation in Columbus. |
| 34. K. Hackbarth | Congregation in Fort Atkinson. |
| 35. H. Pieritz | Friedens Congregation in La Crosse. |
| 36. A. Habermann | St. Peter's Congregation in Fond du Lac. |
| 37. J. Bauermann | Friedens Congregation in Elkhorn. |
| 38. J. Bau* | St. Paul Congregation in Schleisingerville. |

39. F. Grunke* Congregation in Waterloo.

*) Received voting privilege after the 5th session when their congregations were accepted into synod membership.

As guests, namely as advisory delegates the following attended the convention: Pastors Loeber, Werfelmann, Schumann, Kuechle, Rosenwinkel, Schuetz, Lochner, Keller, Kraus and Engelbert of the Missouri Synod; Gelmuyden of the Norwegian Synod; also Teachers; Gross, W. Meyer, Schulz, Wagner, Steuber, Baerlin, Weigler, Hartmann, Kneysel, Graefe and Domarus, and Mr. A. Theilig from Mosel and Mr. Haas from Helenville.

(Here follows the festival sermon preached by Pres. Bading).

Annual Report.

In the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Honorable in Christ dear Brothers in Service and Congregational Delegates.

After we have now heard the festival sermon which should be published in our present report in connection with reference to our last year's synodical convention, I will take it upon myself, to refrain from giving this year's synodical talk, having presented in its place the sermon, and to go to my required report on the transactions and changes in the synod. As already announced in the *Gemeindeblatt*, the synod had to be called into session earlier than the accustomed time. Would to God that reason for this step would have been a happy one, such as the jubilee celebration, but that is not the case. What the reason is, can be seen from a look into Our Institutions. If we recall the story of our institutions, we will find that they caused grief and joy in our eleven years' existence. Grief, in that more than once fear caused us, because of a lack of means and funds in the early years, to think that the work was too great for us in our case, in that we could not complete it at the time. Joy, in that the Lord, through the abundance of his grace showed us as we sought help with prayers and supplications the means and ways for continuing what we started, ways and means which we did not see, namely not only to maintain and advance our institutions, but also to establish a sure basis and foundation because of the love and participation of our congregations. This leads us today to a loud praise to God, and to the trustworthy passage: The Lord, who has begun the work, will also continue its progress. The rich experiences of the past should lead us to a joyful hope for the future. There lies before us a large task, which should be undertaken, yes, must be undertaken, which made it necessary for this early convention.

You know that we experienced a definite loss at the end of December through the unfortunate fire in Watertown; it is because of the Lord, who was testing our faith and trust, and our self-sacrificing love to the task. We have come together to discuss how to remedy this loss, whether a larger unit can replace the loss and thus to satisfy the greater demands now before for us. Let us then, my Brothers, not approach the task unconcerned, nor fear the weightiness of this undertaking, but let us with confidence begin this new episode of our synodical existence with a new start and conclusion of the erection of our institution's building. May our catch-phrase be: The Lord has helped us up till now, he will continue to help us. Since the Lord does not grant his aid directly, but on shared ways, we thus turn our attention to those bound with us and to the respective Congregations.

When our work in Watertown was begun, we searched far and wide, with sacrifice of time and resources, for the means to establish the above. Our synod was still too small, our congregations too weak, to have us be in the position to start such a big project, as it turned out to be. The partial sources available at that time are closed for us today. But we dare now declare with the Lord's goodness and faithfulness: We no longer need these sources, we will not approach them anymore. What occurred in the past we leave

to the past. During our 25 years we have with God's help increased to 130 congregations. Outwardly and inwardly a comfortable feeling and financial stability has crept in, which for decades past could not be said. This condition can be seen in the construction of new churches to replace the old, in the establishment of parochial schools, in the placement of teachers for the education of the youth, in the improvements of parsonages and teacherages, in the free will offerings for missions, for the care of the sick and the care of orphans, and in the support of our institutions and purposes of our synod. Also in spiritual matters great advancement can be noticed. Not are all things evident which the Holy Spirit effected among us through our sermons, since the full revelation of the works of the Spirit of God is retained until the time of eternity, yet there appears before our eyes enough to know and see, that our work is not done in vain in the Lord. Worship services for the most part were well attended, and participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper has become more constant year by year. In many of our congregations a positive Christian discipline is maintained, and a not small group exists, which in accordance with the rule of God's word in greater weakness of the flesh or with all arbitrariness of the spirit come and go, while on the other hand there are few congregations where attendance in God's House is lamentable. Indeed examples are not lacking where namely through conflicts and disagreements between pastor and congregations and separate parties within congregations among which the devil attempts to devastate the kingdom of God, in that the souls are kept away from eternal life. For this reason more cases to be admonished and settled took place in the past year than for which time could be found to answer the call for help. We will not experience the day in this world when the church discontinues to be a kingdom of the cross and becomes a night-hut in a pumpkin patch. Constantly however so much of the fruit of the Gospel will be attainable that we will have great reason to celebrate a true thank and jubilee festival to the Lord. Is it then asking too much if we, as matters in general stand, then await something in regard to self-sacrifice? Should not also once under such circumstances be aroused in our congregations a special declaration of heartfelt thankfulness? Oh, how nice it would be, if in this special synodical year our dear congregations would place upon the altar of thanksgiving a very special jubilee gift, to finish off the jubilee year with a debt-free construction of the needed institutional building. With this deed this should be called a year of thanks to the Lord and along with all that he has given us in the past that we should offer praise to his great name and build up his church.

After we have looked at church and congregations, we now turn to Position Changes and Acceptances which took place during the course of the past year. Soon after last year's convention Pastor Genske was called by the parish of Hortonville and New London. After he accepted the call with the consent of his congregation, he was installed into his office on the 4th Sunday after Trinity by Pastor Brenner. The congregation in Helenville last spring called the recently arrived from Germany candidate H. Eckelmann to be its pastor. After he showed his agreement with us in faith and convictions by means of a colloquy, he was at my authorization ordained and installed on the 6th Sunday after Trinity by Pastor Brockmann, assisted by Pastors A. Denninger, B. Ungrodt and F. Schneider. Likewise on the 10th Sunday after Trinity Candidate Toepel, after he completed his written examinations in St. Louis and had received a call from the congregation in Peshtigo was ordained and installed by Pastor Schug. At the same time W. Hinnen-thal, another of our theologically trained students in St. Louis, received a call from the congregation in Town Franklin. Pastor G. Denninger with the assistance of Pastor A. Liefeld and with my authorization ordained and installed him At the time of the last convention Pastor C. Wagner was called by the parish in Town Herman, Washington Co., and was installed by Pastor Opitz on the 7th Sunday after Trinity. The congregation in Manitowoc, made vacant with the resignation of Pastor Huebner sent a call to Pastor G. Thiele. After his congregation agreed to his move, he was installed by Pastor E. Strube in early November. Pastor E. Strube received a call from the congregation in Newton and moved there and was installed into his office on the 17th Sunday after Trinity by Pastor Jaeger. Candidate Martin Denninger, who fin-

ished his work at the theological seminary in St. Louis and passed his examinations there, was, after receiving his call to the congregation in Waterloo, ordained by Pastor A. Denninger, assisted by Pastors Brockmann, and Ungrodt on December 27 before the entire congregation. After the congregation in Wattertown became vacant because of the removal from office of Pastor Heinrich, it called Pastor H [J] Brockmann to be its soul caretaker. Prof. Ernst installed him on *Septuagesima* Sunday at my authorization. Pastor Chr. Dowidat was called by the congregation in Fort Atkinson and was installed by Pastor Ungrodt on *Oculi* Sunday. It gives me great concern to again have to report so many position changes. Each pastor, each congregation should with all diligence have in mind to avoid if possible parish exchanges, it can only be a blessing if by God's grace the work in a congregation can proceed undisturbed and unhindered; it is evident that a great number of pastoral changes bring damages also to the congregations.

In regard to Departures from the Synod the following is to be presented. Pastor Kleinert in Germany sought his release, since he has taken over the pastoral duties in the state church in the Grand Duchy of Odenburg. His request was granted. In accordance with the urgent counseling at last year's pastoral conference, Pastor Huebner, giving in to the pressure which was caused by his punishable conduct, resigned his position with his congregation and left both the synod and the state. Pastor Heinrichs, whom the synod hesitated to accept at last year's convention, because he was not in the position to present valid recommendations, has since then been relieved of his call by the congregation associated with our synod in Wattertown because of his conduct. The congregation at Fountain City along with its affiliated daughters has, after the departure of their pastor, and after many attempts to get a pastor from our synod, turned to a pastor of the Iowa Synod. The response to my letter both to the pastor and to the congregation was a written statement of departure of the congregation from the synod. The investigation by the Visitor of the particular district of the situation of both congregations in Coon Valley, Vernon Co., which released their pastor and turned to Teacher Kussmann, had the result that the membership with the synod was *de facto* dropped and should therefore also be formally taken up and discussed. Really not belonging in the category "Departure from the Synod" I still want to report that Pastor Diehlmann accepted the call from the editorial staff of the *Abendschule* and has left the synod and state in order to take up his residence in St. Louis. He took this step with the expressed wish that his departure from here and the giving up of his pastoral position not be looked upon as a departure from the synod. Recently I received a letter from Pastor Hagedorn in which he stated that he deemed it necessary because of chronic headaches to leave the preaching vocation for a longer period of time so that with complete rest, God willing, he may regain his health. In August of last year I saw myself compelled to suspend from synod membership Teacher Oberdorsten because of deplorable situations. As far as I know, there have been no indications of sincere betterment.

Visitations, Investigations and Visits have been made in part by the Visitors, and in part by myself. Among these were chiefly the congregations in Manitowoc. Wattertown, Fond du Lac, the congregations in Coon Valley, Vernon Co., Wrightstown, Ahnapee, Town Herman, Sheboygan Co., Reedsville and Town Morrison. Although the visitations and investigations of the conflicts found many sins, weaknesses and transgressions in our congregations and the truth of the Scriptural passage: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" was confirmed in many lamentable cases and situations, yet however in many examples, in a very joyful manner, it was brought to light that God crowned the work of our Brothers with rich blessings.

Support of Pastors' Widows was actively shown in our congregations in the past year. The resolutions of last year could be implemented, except for one case which should find a solution after this convention. Active love must be shown in the future, in that our pastoral widows for the most part rely on synodical support.

In Conclusion I still want to inform the Hon. synod that our relationship with the Hon. Synod of Mis-

souri in regard to the use of our institutions has resulted in a new regulation. This important matter was settled in such a manner that our students in St. Louis will continue to be accepted and educated under the same previous favorable conditions on the part of the Hon. Synod of Missouri, and likewise their students while they are accepted and educated by us under the prevailing conditions, as far as means and room allow. Our delegates to the joint convention of the Hon. Missouri Synod must express it here, that they on the part of the Brothers of that synod in the handling of the matter experienced the best courtesy and friendship. At the same time I am making it known that the English Concordia Synod of Virginia has sent us its constitution and proceedings for the purpose of our examining its confessional position, so that their acceptance into the Synodical Conference be made possible. And now may the Lord, our God, bless us in the present convention in accordance with the richness of his grace and favor, and also aid us in our future work, which is His work, as he has done so richly in the past, until we are assembled before his countenance in heaven to praise and rejoice with "The Lord has done mighty things, let us rejoice, Amen."

Johannes Bading, president.

[The next 20 pages record the theological discussions under the leadership of Pastor Hoenecke].

Business Proceedings.

1. Presidential Report.

The official actions of the Hon. president were ratified by the synod and the president was sincerely thanked by the synod for carrying out his duties faithfully. It was resolved that His opening festival sermon be published in the *Synodical Proceedings*. After the reading of his annual report the president read the letter of well wishes from the president of the Hon. Synod of Minnesota, which our president was authorized to answer in the proper manner.

2. Acceptance of New Pastors and Teachers.

On the basis of completing their colloquies satisfactorily, the following were accepted into synod membership - Pastors M. Denninger from Waterloo, A. Toepel from Peshtigo, and Hinnenthal from Franklin, also Teachers Schwarzrock from St. Peter's Congregation in Milwaukee, Schwarz and Meyer from St. Matthew Congregation in Milwaukee, Wardien from Green Bay, Lewke from Theresa, W. Meyer from Platteville and Goedke. Likewise Teacher Grube from Oshkosh after receiving his release papers from the Hon. Synod of Missouri. In regard to Teacher Pyritz from La Crosse it was resolved to recognize his acceptance into the synod as soon as he hands in his release papers from the Hon. Synod of Missouri to the president. Teacher Eisberner from Woodland could not be accepted into the synod because he did not satisfactorily pass his colloquium.

3. Educational Institutions in Watertown.

a) Annual Report from the Board of Control.

In the attachment to the report of the Board of Control lying before us it was resolved 1. to totally agree with what will be attributed to our faithful God for all of the gifts, which he let flow to our institutions, for all the blessings which he fused with the instruction in our institutions and for the blessed protection which he let revealed at the disaster caused by the unfortunate fire; 2. to say well done to the Board of Control for its action in the above mentioned and to express due thanks for its tedious and faithful governing of the institution; 3. to call upon all synodical congregations for continuous support for the institution and especially the country congregations for generous donations of food supplies. At this occasion may it also be noted that the treasurer of the Board of Control informed us that an anonymous friend of the synod donated \$100 as a jubilee gift to be used for the reconstruction of the institutional building destroyed by the fire.

b) Construction Information.

The discussion to be the first considered under business matters at this year's convention, concerning the new construction of an institutional building to replace the one burned down took up an entire afternoon session. After the president of the Board of Control gave his report on how the Board of Control had resolved to bring the plan for erecting a new institute building before the synod and had also taken the proper preparation steps of having a building plan made and received bids, of which the lowest was \$11,900, the necessity of a building larger than the burned-down building was presented. It was said that it was necessary to include a living area for the Inspector of the Institution; furthermore, at least two larger classrooms were needed, thirdly more living area for the students, and fourth, a roomy basement for storage. The burned down building had sixteen rooms, of which four were used by the instructor, so that only twelve were left for the students. These were not satisfactory in regard to the number nor to the size, for which reason thought was given to make room in the new building for 50 to 60 students, in case one might soon find himself in the position to have to reject students because of the lack of space and thus to leave the command unfulfilled which the Lord called out to our synod: not only to prepare future pastors, but also to offer an excellent and expanded Christian educational program for our up and coming youth. The present barns do not suffice to preserve the fruit of the gospel sown in our congregations, which should allow the development of Christian thought, and namely in the training of young people for the pastoral ministry. May Christ lead for us such youths and young men, who are willing to break the bread of life for our people, as the fruit of his bitter suffering and death. To bring home such blessings is both a duty of love for the church and of thankfulness to God, who has not bestowed the same upon us, so that we should let it be deteriorated and perish. We do not want to build in order to make a big name for ourselves, but in all humility to demonstrate our obedience and thankfulness to the Lord. We would sin greatly if we would despise the grace of our Lord in the gathering of a large number of young people, if we would cast out his blessings, and if we would not help in the urgent need of a new satisfactory building.

The prepared plan was now presented and thoroughly explained. In further discussion it was brought up that that it would not be an unbearably great cost to let the size be increased, so that one would not have to again fear a lack of room in a few years, and after more discussion a resolution was presented that the projected plan be adopted with the addition that the rear building, instead of being one story, be two stories, the finishing up of the second story be delayed since it was not necessary now, and that the Board of Control be authorized to have the resolved construction of the new building be carried out in line with good judgment. The Lord give his blessing and approval thereto.

4. Departure and Release of Pastors and Congregations.

Pastor Kleinert has returned to his homeland to do church work, and thus has departed from our synod. As reported, the president gave him an honorable certificate of release, which was ratified by the convention. - The name Pastor Diehlmann, who has received temporary leave from his congregation in order to recuperate his health, should remain on our membership list according to his wish. The names of Pastor Huebner and Teacher Oberdorsten were stricken from the synodical list; likewise the congregation at Fountain City and its daughter congregation in Glencon who declared their departure from the synod. In regard to the congregations at Coon Valley and Chipman's Cooley the Visitor of the respective district was authorized to make another attempt to have them stay with the synod.

5. Absent Pastors and Congregations not Represented by a Delegate.

Pastor C. Mayerhoff, being hindered from attending the synodical convention because of illness, was excused; likewise Pastor J. Koehler, on the basis of satisfactory reasons of another kind. Concerning the

absent Pastor Hass, the Visitor of the Western District was authorized to go to him and to let him know that he either dedicate himself completely to the pastoral ministry, or to fully resign. That unfortunately a large number of congregations quite often, and also this time, were not represented by a delegate, it was resolved to urge such congregations to send in viable excuses if they cannot send a delegate to the synodical convention.

6. Acceptance of New Congregations.

After the regular examination of the congregational constitutions, the following congregations were accepted into synod membership: 1. St. Peters Congregation in Mishicott, Manitowoc Co. 2. The Friedens Congregation at Elkhorn, Walworth Co. 3. The St. Paul Congregation at Schleisingerville, Washington Co. 4. The congregation at Waterloo, the latter with the request to remove §13 of its Constitution, which establishes that the pastor's salary be set each year. The delegate of the congregation believed that he could give assurance that the request for the removal of the objectionable paragraph be taken care of without any problem. Since at this time the necessity for preparatory discussions concerning a new congregational constitution was renewed, it was resolved that the synod appoint a committee consisting of Pastors Brockmann, Ungrodt and Dowidat to prepare a preliminary copy of a congregational constitution and to present it to the synod at the next convention.

7. Ev.-luth. Concordiasynod of Virginia.

The named synod handed in a request for acceptance into the Synodical Conference and sent in its constitution for review and also synodical proceedings. Since the committee authorized to review these documents declared that the doctrine and practice of the named synod were in full agreement with the doctrine of the Synodical Conference, the delegates of our synod were authorized to vote in favor of the acceptance of the evang.-luth. Concordiasynod from Virginia into the Synodical Conference at the next Synodical Conference convention.

8. Auditing of the Books of the Various Treasurers.

It was reported by the assigned committee that an exact audit of the books of the treasurers of the various treasuries, Pastors Bading, Adelberg and Conrad, were found to be correct, after which the named men were expressed the thanks of the synod for their faithful and unselfish work.

9. Widow and Orphan Support.

The synod resolved to grant the present widows in need of support the same support as previous, also in the coming synodical year. The resolution adopted at last year's convention, that all pastors and present members of the synod be required to donate at least \$5 for the current year for the purpose of establishing a support treasury was rejected and it was resolved that the \$5.00 be listed as voluntary. In regard to future teacher widows and orphans. it was resolved to support them from the widows' treasury according to need and according to the means at hand.

10. The Matter of the Complaint between Pastor Hoffmann and his Daughter Congregation at Good-Hope.

The named congregation had a complaint against its pastor, because he protested against the acceptance of a member from a neighboring sister congregation without a release from that congregation. The congregation argued, supported by its congregational constitution, that the pastor had a right to raise the protest, and indicated that the pastor had handled this according to the opinion of his synod, but an exception could have been made because it was not a synodical congregation. The matter was discussed for a

long time, in which it was pointed out that the conduct of the Good Hope Congregation was entirely against the Word of God and the protest of the pastor was justified.

11. Editorship of the *Gemeindeblatt*.

Pastor Adelberg, who for many years did the major work in the editing of the *Gemeindeblatt*, and also took care of the publishing and other matters tied to the position, has asked for his release from the editorial committee because of the heavy work with his other duties. Since the synod believed that it could not do without the service of Pastor Adelberg in connection with the *Gemeindeblatt*, he let himself be moved to remain as chief editor, while the synod enlarged the committee with the addition of two new members, Pastors Brenner and Jaekel, the last named to take over the business management.

12. The Agenda Matter.

The committee which was to have worked out an Agenda formula, namely an Order of Worship Service unfortunately reported that it did not do its job and it was resolved that the committee under the leadership of Prof. Ernst meet in Watertown, and should present an Order of Worship Service at the next synodical convention.

13. The Turner Society and Congregational Members.

Concerning the question asked prior to the convention, if members of the Turner Society could be members of the congregation as well, the synod responded that the Turner Society, from all information we have about it, is a product of the spirit of the time [*Zeitgeist*] and should be considered as being of the church-inimical and antichristian societies, to which membership is incompatible with Christianity. Should members of one or the other of our congregations still be a member of the Turner Society, they should be made aware of the danger which can result from such membership.

14. Change in Mode of Election.

Concerning the proposed change of the present mode of election in the acquiring of professors it was resolved after sufficient explanation of the situation that the matter be tabled with the remark that if a change is wished for on the part of pastors or congregations, such requests be brought up at next year's synod.

15. Hymnal.

Mr. G. Brumder informed the synod that the contractual sum from sold hymnals during the 1874-1875 synodical year amounted to \$143.50, to which sum he doubled the amount, so that the synod would have for disposal \$287. The synod accepted the doubled amount of the contractual sum with thanks and resolved to devote it to the institution's treasury.

16. Election of Trustees.

As members of the Board of Trustees for the institutions in Watertown the following were elected, Pastors Hoenecke and Brockmann, as also Messrs. Geiger and Heidenreich. Since Mr. Heidenreich was no longer present and could not thus declare his acceptance as being elected, it was, in case Mr. Heidenreich declined, resolved that the Board be authorized to declare Mr. Theilig from Mosel, the second highest vote getter as being elected to the sessions.

17. Delegates to the Synodical Conference.

As delegates to the this year's Synodical Conference in Cleveland were elected: Pastors Bading,

Adelberg, Prof. Ernst and Messrs. Theilig, Lühring and Voss; as alternates: Prof. Brohm, Pastors Meumann and Schug, and Messrs. Kusel, Hess and Geiger.

18. Theses for Future Doctrinal Presentations.

Pastors Reichenbecher and Schug were requested to draught theses on church discipline for the doctrinal presentation for next year's convention and to send the material to the president four weeks before the convention.

19. Synodical Proceedings.

Resolved to print 1,200 copies of this year's *Proceedings* and sell them for 15 cents each.

20. Vote of Thanks.

Resolved that the synod sincerely thank the Hon. St. Peters Congregation and its pastor for their kind hospitality.

21. The Next Synodical Convention.

Pastor Jaekel presented an invitation to the synod from his congregation that it hold its next year's convention in their midst, which invitation was accepted by the synod with thanks. Next year's convention, God willing, will be held in the church of Grace Congregation in Milwaukee and will begin on the Thursday after the Trinity Festival, at 10 a.m. The Convention was closed on Tuesday, April 20, 6. p.m. with prayer.

“He was a man and a Christian”: The Life and Work of John W.O. Brenner (Part One)

by Mark E. Braun

Two brief appreciations of Pastor John W.O. Brenner appeared in Wisconsin Synod publications shortly after his death on September 30, 1962. His classmate, colleague, and lifelong friend John P. Meyer, professor at the Theological Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, called Brenner “a special gift of God to our Wisconsin Synod,” noting that Brenner possessed a “special way of confessing the truth and contending for the faith.”¹ Erwin E. Kowalke, longtime professor and president of Northwestern College, the Wisconsin Synod's preministerial liberal arts college in Watertown, Wisconsin, said Brenner was “a man and a Christian and a dedicated pastor of the flock of Christ.”²

This article will review the events of Brenner's life and the significant role he played in reflecting and shaping the teaching, church practice and culture of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. Pastor Brenner will also be allowed to speak for himself through the articles he wrote for the Synod's periodicals and the correspondence he conducted, primarily as Synod President for two decades of his ministry.

School days

Grandfather John G. Brenner was a wheelwright in Beiernal in the Grand Duchy of Baden, Germany. One son, G. Philip Brenner, attended the Basel Mission House, immigrated to America in 1862 and served as a pastor at congregations in Wisconsin and Michigan's upper peninsula. G. Philip Brenner's son Theophil became a pastor and son Frederick a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1929-40. Shortly after G. Philip's arrival, John G. immigrated to the United States with another son, Karl G.; this son attended Northwestern College in Watertown and the Missouri Synod's Teachers' Seminary in Addison, Illinois. In 1870, Karl G. was the first school teacher called by Bethany Lutheran Church in Hustisford, Wisconsin, and later taught at schools in Fond du Lac and Neenah. His oldest son Charles G.F. Brenner also taught in Wisconsin Synod schools. Karl G.'s second son John William Otto Brenner was born in Hustisford on July 11, 1874. The family also included four daughters.³

John W.O. attended St. Peter's Lutheran School in Fond du Lac and, prior to his confirmation at age 12, entered the ninth grade at what was then called Northwestern University in Watertown. Legend has it that he had to return home from school for his confirmation.⁴ Brenner remained at Northwestern for 7 years, graduating in 1893 in the spring before his 19th birthday.

Kowalke and Meyer both described the Northwestern atmosphere during Brenner's student days. Prof. Joh. P. Koehler arrived as professor and inspector in 1888, and thus was begun a relationship



*Seminary graduation picture
1896
(WELS Archives)*

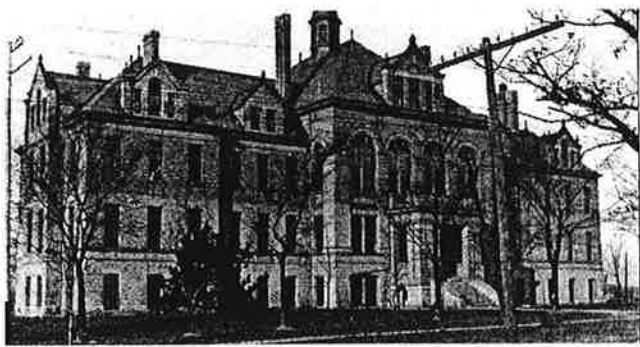
between Koehler and Brenner that was to last more than 60 years. Koehler brought firm convictions regarding dormitory supervision and almost immediately created conflict with students. Brenner and others recalled Koehler's ideal as "a kind of military discipline and strict order in the study rooms and on campus." After some adjustment, students seemed to accept this discipline "without too much objection."⁵

Meyer, sixteen months older than Brenner and his classmate throughout their Northwestern and Seminary years, recalled that German was both the instructional medium and informal language of Northwestern, with emphasis on German literature and history. Northwestern's president at the time, Dr. August F. Ernst, instilled the principle that pre-seminary studies be undertaken "on a broad cultural basis" with stress on the humanities and on Greek and Latin grammar and literature. Students "were able to recite lengthy passages from Latin authors" and "knew more than just the opening sentence of the first book of Caesar's commentaries on his Gallic campaigns."⁶

Yet there was also recognition of the need for clear communication in English. Commencement Day under Dr. Ernst included three graduation orations, one each in English, German and Latin. While there was "considerable question in that year as to whom the German and the Latin orations were to be assigned, there was no question about the English oration." Brenner "had the best command of the English language," and although "not marked by polished oratory, his speech was easily the most impressive of the day." Later colleagues have described Brenner as not being a scholarly writer or thinker in the usually understood sense of those terms, and though that may have been true, Brenner's ability in English did not deter his interest in or aptitude for other languages. When his college class became proficient enough to read Greek poetry, he devoted his summer leisure time to reading sections of Homer in the original.⁷

Following graduation from college in 1893, Brenner entered the Synod's Theological Seminary, then in the first year at its new location in Wauwatosa. Although classroom lectures were given entirely in German—indeed, at least some lectures were given in German at Wisconsin's Seminary even after its move to Mequon in 1929 and into the 1940s⁸—Brenner and fellow students organized an English theological debating society. At its monthly meetings, one student would read an original English essay on a theological subject of his choosing, followed by general discussion.⁹

Brenner's educational experience in Watertown and Wauwatosa took place only a few years after the synods of the Lutheran Synodical Conference had gone through the Election Controversy, which made Wisconsin Synod members "much aware of the importance of true doctrine." According to Meyer, Wisconsin's fathers "had become aware that doctrinal formulations may be convenient to express some truth to a certain extent, but must always be used with care, and must be discarded if they open the door for



Wauwatosa Seminary
WELS Archives

error and are used to express error." Meyer was no doubt referring to the use of *intuitu fidei*, a formulation which had served as a satisfactory expression of the doctrine that God elects sinners to salvation "in view of their faith," but which in the American Lutheran context proved imprecise for the defense of the teaching of election to salvation by grace alone, without at least some cooperation being ascribed to the will of man. Scripture is "the only legitimate source and the final judge of all doctrine," and all theological formulations employed by the church must submit to it. When Brenner was a student, "the awareness of the necessity of pure doctrine" was "very active" in the Synod—although it was frowned upon when the term *pure doctrine* was reduced to "a slogan or catchword."¹⁰

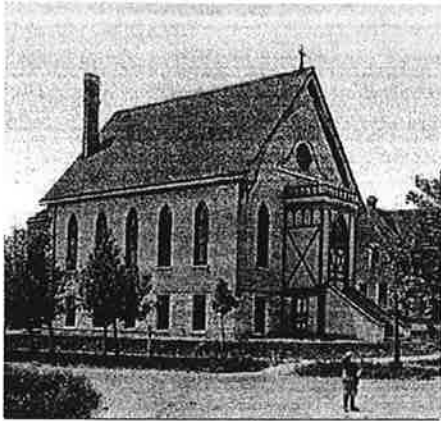
Brenner interrupted his Seminary studies for several weeks to serve as an instructor at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota but still graduated with his class from Wauwatosa in 1896, receiving his diploma as a candidate for the pastoral ministry.

The particular emphases that mark John Brenner's experience and personality during his student years—military-type discipline, scholarly yet practical intelligence, a high regard for doctrinal precision, and an awareness of the need for the use of English in a still highly German Lutheran church body—were to distinguish his work and contributions to the Synod all his life.

First pastorate in Cudahy

Delaware native John Plankinton had arrived in Milwaukee in 1844 and by the next year owned the largest butcher shop in Milwaukee County, in addition to beginning curing and meat packing operations. In the mid 1850s, Plankinton and partner Frederick Layton moved their packing house from what is now Plankinton Avenue to the Menomonee River Valley. During the next three decades, Plankinton, new partner Philip Armour and general manager Patrick Cudahy grew their enterprise to become one of the nation's largest meat packing businesses.¹¹ Cudahy bought out his partner Plankinton in 1888 and remained at the Menomonee Valley plant until 1893. Pressed for space and tired of complaints, Cudahy looked to move. "I got a county map," he recalled, "looked it over, and selected a site located about two miles south of the south limits of Milwaukee on the Chicago and North Western Railroad." Cudahy bought a 700-acre tract of land at Buckhorn station,¹² built his new slaughter house just west of the Chicago-Northwestern rail line, and drew up plans for a company town to the east, with streets laid out in a north-south and east-west grid.¹³ By 1895 population in the Buckhorn area had so increased that residents voted 153 to 7 to incorporate as the village of Cudahy.¹⁴ Cudahy advertised for "1,000 Poles" to work at his new packing plant, and the population of his company town grew to 1,366 in 1900, then nearly tripled to 3,691 during the first decade of the new century. Cudahy's suburb, known unofficially as "Porkopolis," gave the meat industry a new center in the region.¹⁵

In the master plan for his company town, Cudahy reserved several parcels for various church bodies to establish congregations. Pastor B.P. Nommensen of St. Lucas congregation on Kinnickinnic Avenue in Bay View reported in 1892 that, "if our dear Lord grants His grace and we should live so long," there could soon be the dedication of another German Lutheran church nearby. "Mr. Cudahy permitted me to select a place to build (71' x 120')" and "reserved it for a Lutheran church and will give it to us as a gift if at that time we are in a position to build a church on it."¹⁶ By the next summer, Nommensen reported that his hope had "now gone into fulfillment." In July 1893 a group of St. Lucas members joined other Lutherans who had recently moved to Cudahy's company town and organized and incorporated themselves as "Ev. Lutheran St. Paul's Gemeinde zu Cudahy, Wis." (St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cudahy, Wisconsin).¹⁷ After more than 1200 signatures were gathered, an initial meeting was held on January 28, 1894.¹⁸ The church building was dedicated on May 6, 1894, and services were conducted on Sunday afternoons by Pastor J. Herman Koch of Zion church, South Milwaukee, and later by Seminary Prof. Eugene Notz.¹⁹



St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Cudahy
picture from Cudahy Public Library

By early 1896 the congregation was ready for its own pastor, and on either April 20 or 21 Notz proposed three candidates, one of whom was John Brenner, then completing his final year of seminary studies.²⁰ Although Brenner was considered young for the task, and although some people at the meeting may have been drawn to John P. Meyer who had taught school and preached occasionally at St. Lucas,²¹ the congregation called Brenner and also resolved to open its own Christian Day School.²² Only 10 days after his graduation from Seminary and a month before his 22nd birthday, Brenner was ordained and installed by Professor Notz as St. Paul's first pastor.²³

Brenner was also installed later that summer as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church of New Coeln.²⁴ St. John's, the original location of which is today near a runway at Mitchell International Airport, was one of the earliest congregations of the Wisconsin Synod, first served by William Wrede, a founding pastor of the Synod, from nearby Oakwood, and later by the pastors of

St. Paul's in Franklin and St. Lucas. Brenner served St. John's throughout the dozen years he was in Cudahy. During his pastorate, the congregation erected its second church building on Howell Avenue near Grange Avenue, dedicated on September 1, 1901.²⁵ New Coeln received its own pastor upon Brenner's departure in 1908. When Mitchell Field was expanded, St. John's built a new church building two miles south of its present location on Howell Avenue in Oak Creek.²⁶

Brenner served as both pastor and school teacher at St. Paul's, as the school opened with 12 children and grew during its first year to an enrollment of 19. In 1903, the church basement classroom was divided into two rooms and a single female teacher was added to teach the lower grades.²⁷ Following his departure, the school apparently fell on hard times and rumors circulated that the school might close, but Brenner raised \$325 and offered a plan to keep the school open.²⁸

In his first year at St. Paul's, Brenner also formed a mixed choir, serving as its first director, and for a time also offered Bible studies "twice a month for the young Christians."²⁹ Both congregations observed mission festivals beginning in his first year; the *Gemeinde Blatt* noted that "even the English service drew a large amount of hearers."³⁰ Brenner preached at many neighboring congregations for their mission festivals that fall. In fall 1902, Pastor Brenner was given permission to hold regular services in English on Sunday evenings.³¹

Probably the most oft-repeated story about Brenner's time in Cudahy was that "he learned Slovak and could preach sermons in that language."³² Preceding Brenner's arrival in Cudahy, Slovak settlers began the Slovak Evangelical Union, a fraternal insurance society. When the Rev. Ladislav Boor of Chicago visited Cudahy on August 11, 1902, the group requested the use of St. Paul's church building for worship services and communion in Slovak. St. Paul's was willing to help; Brenner obtained a Slovak Bible,



St. Paul's Lutheran School, 1909
picture from Cudahy Public Library

hymnal and agenda and "showed himself an adept student of languages and endeared himself to the Slovaks by learning to read and write their language well enough to perform baptisms, weddings, and funerals in Slovak."³³ Early church records of St. Paul's show many Slovak names among those baptized. The Slovaks completed their own church building only a few blocks from St. Paul's in 1908 but did not have their own full time resident pastor until 1910, and so Brenner continued to serve them as he could throughout his time in Cudahy.³⁴ St. John's belonged to the Slovak Synod, a member body of the Synodical Conference, and is now an LCMS congregation.

Long after Brenner had left Cudahy, and despite financial tensions between the Slovak and Cudahy congregations during the 1920s, Brenner's work among the Slovaks was not forgotten. In June 1937, the Slovak Synod held its synodical convention at St. John's and sent representatives to Milwaukee to pick Brenner up to address the convention. By then president of the Wisconsin Synod, Brenner addressed the assembly with a few words in Slovak—to an enthusiastic response from the assembly.³⁵ In 1944, when the Slovak Synod began publication of the *Lutheran Beacon*, Brenner wrote a letter of welcome to the editor.³⁶

Brenner's reputation as an avid reader was established already during his Cudahy years. According to a local anecdote, at a banquet at St. Paul's the priest from the neighboring Catholic Church rose to speak. [?!] "When I pass your parsonage," he remarked, "I see Pastor Brenner studying for his sermon. I leave mine go till Sunday morning. That way the devil can't try to ruin it."³⁷

Move to Milwaukee

During his dozen years in Cudahy, Brenner received calls to serve the Apache Indian mission in

Arizona, to become director and first instructor at the new Lutheran high school in Milwaukee, to be pastor of Jerusalem congregation in Milwaukee and of a Racine congregation. In each case St. Paul's prevailed upon him to remain in Cudahy.³⁸ But on July 12, 1908—twelve years to the day from his installation at New Coeln—Pastor Brenner accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, and he preached his last sermon there on August 30.³⁹

St. John's on 8th and Vliet was one of the oldest congregations in the Wisconsin Synod—even predating the Synod's founding. In 1848, a year before the initial meeting called by Pastor Johannes Muehlhaeuser at Grace church east of the Milwaukee River, a dozen men had already been gathering in the west side home of a Mr. Zuehlsdorf on Sunday evenings to read sermons from Luther's *Hauspostill*. A Pastor Dulitz from the Langenberg Mission Society accepted the invitation of these men to preach for them, first temporarily and then on a permanent basis. With its own pastor, the group organized as the *Evangelische Lutherische St. Johannesgemeinde* (Evangelical Lutheran St. John Congregation). Dulitz and St. John's applied for membership in the Missouri Synod, but various factors prevented them from joining. In 1856 the congregation called William Streissguth, a Wisconsin Synod pastor, and in 1858 St. John's became a member congregation of the Wisconsin Synod.⁴⁰

A decade later Johannes Bading became the third pastor in St. John's history, and his arrival began a storied era in the congregation's history. Bading had already been elected as the Synod's second president in 1860 and, except for a four year interim in the mid 1860s remained president



Above—The graceful exterior of the church. The taller east steeple is about the height of a 17-story building.

St. John Lutheran Church

until 1889. At St. John's the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America was formally organized on July 10-16, 1872, initiating one of the largest and longest associations of confessional Lutherans in American religious history.⁴¹

By the end of the 19th century, St. John's had grown to become one of the largest congregations in the Synod. Its voting membership grew from 28 in 1856 to 350 in 1868, and by 1890 the congregation listed 2403 members, although it is unclear whether this number refers to communicant members or baptized souls.⁴²

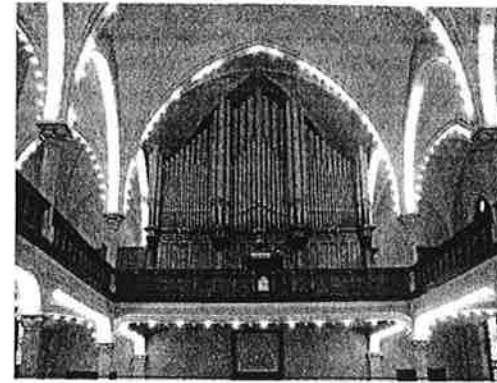
The sanctuary of St. John's was described by the Missouri Synod's *Lutheran Witness* as "externally and internally the finest German Lutheran Church" the author had ever seen. Measuring 65 by 140 feet and seating 1100, marked by two lofty steeples—the taller of which was 195 feet high—and featuring Gothic styling throughout, the exterior was graced with "the pure cream color of the celebrated Milwaukee brick." Worshipers were in danger of being "driven distracted" by the artistic busyness throughout the sanctuary—an enormous altar, numerous pictures, statuary, crucifix, statues of Peter and Paul, a painting of Jesus in the manger and a large figure of Christ on the cross. The pulpit, "likewise gorgeous in gilt," was surrounded by a sounding-board on which was depicted Jesus the preacher. An elaborate brass lectern cast in the shape of an eagle with wings spread was reported to have been purchased from Tiffany's in New York. A solid marble baptismal font and a fine organ completed the worship. The property, including sanctuary, school building, and large parsonage, was valued in 1890 at \$150,000. In summary, it was "about the strongest Lutheran church in the Northwest."⁴³

St. John's opened a parochial grade school early in its history and built its first school building in 1862. Peak enrollment topped 200 students. St. John's school also served as a mission arm to neighborhood families.⁴⁴ In 1873, a "branch school" of St. John's was begun in the city's fifth ward at Palmer and Garfield Streets, which by 1875 was established as St. Marcus Church and School. Another congregation, Apostles, was started at 38th and St. Paul Streets on Milwaukee's west side, later relocated to 112th and Wisconsin Avenue.⁴⁵

Brenner was a bachelor for the first two decades of his ministry, including his first eight years at St. John's. On August 19, 1916, at age 42, he married Miss Anna Raether, seventeen years younger than he, daughter of the church custodian—which, according to his son, occurred "much to the chagrin of some St. John's Vliet members."⁴⁶ Son John F. was born to them the next year, followed by a daughter, Dorothy. John F. attended synodical schools, graduated from the Thiensville Seminary in 1943, and served the bulk of his pastoral ministry at St. John's Lutheran Church in Bay City, Michigan. Dorothy never married, but lived with her parents and later close to her brother.⁴⁷ The parsonage at 816 W. Vliet was quickly transformed from bachelor quarters to active social hub. Among its frequent guests were Seminary professors Koehler and Otto Henckel; former Michigan Synod Pastors J. Gauss, E. Wenk, Bodamer, Binhammer, and the senior Karl Krauss; and the Missouri Synod's President Frederick Pfothenhauer, and Professors Ludwig Fuerbringer and Theodore Graebner.⁴⁸

A half century of ministry on 8th and Vliet

The neighborhood surrounding St. John's in 1908 was composed of middle- and upper-middle class homes, and the 1100-seat sanctuary was typically filled for German language services. Recollections re-



Balcony of St. John's Lutheran Church
picture from Timothy Kriewell



John W.O. and Anna Brenner
picture from John M. Brenner

garding the financial standing of the congregation vary. Some recalled that the congregation did not have a reputation for having wealthy members as did its nearby Missouri Synod neighbor Trinity congregation, although numerous members gave generous gifts to the church and left endowments at their deaths.⁴⁹ Others remembered St. John's as "a wealthy congregation," and stories were still retold in the early 1980s "of how limousines used to arrive at the front door of the church on Sunday mornings to drop off the wealthy members," then wait at the bottom of the hill to pick them up when worship was concluded.⁵⁰

But by the 1920s, the congregation and its neighborhood were in decline, and St. John's descent mirrored that of other immigrant congregations. Milwaukee remained "a proud citadel of Germanism," wrote city historian John

Gerda, yet by the beginning of the twentieth century Milwaukeeans were beginning "to shed their German associations" as pockets of varied ethnic populations appeared in the city. Croats moved in on the near north side and in 1917 formed Sacred Heart Catholic Church at 7th and Galena Streets. By 1910 most of the city's 10,000 Jews were settled in a community bordered roughly by 3rd and 13th Streets between Juneau and North Avenues. Hungarians and Italians also moved in to the area, and by 1910 the city's African American population approached 1,000.⁵¹

Milwaukee grew 83 percent between 1890 and 1910, to a population of 373,857, and in 1902 was the third most densely populated city the United States. "Every peril is here intensified," lamented the preacher at Calvary Presbyterian Church in 1891—"the perils of wealth, the perils of poverty, the perils of socialism, the perils of intemperance, the perils growing out of foreign immigration, the perils of ignorance and the perils of Romanism." No city furnished "a richer soil for all the evils of our modern civilization" than Milwaukee.⁵²

The melding of Milwaukee's many German citizens into the city's larger population was forcibly accelerated by anti-German hysteria during and after World War I.⁵³ In the 1920s, many residents moved from near-downtown houses to palatial residences then being built along Lake Drive. St. John's neighborhood declined further during the Depression, and in the 1950s the city tore down many homes adjacent to the church in order to build the Hillside Housing Development just east of St. John's.⁵⁴ Freeways constructed in the 1960s encircled the church neighborhood, cutting it off from the downtown area, which had also long been in decline.

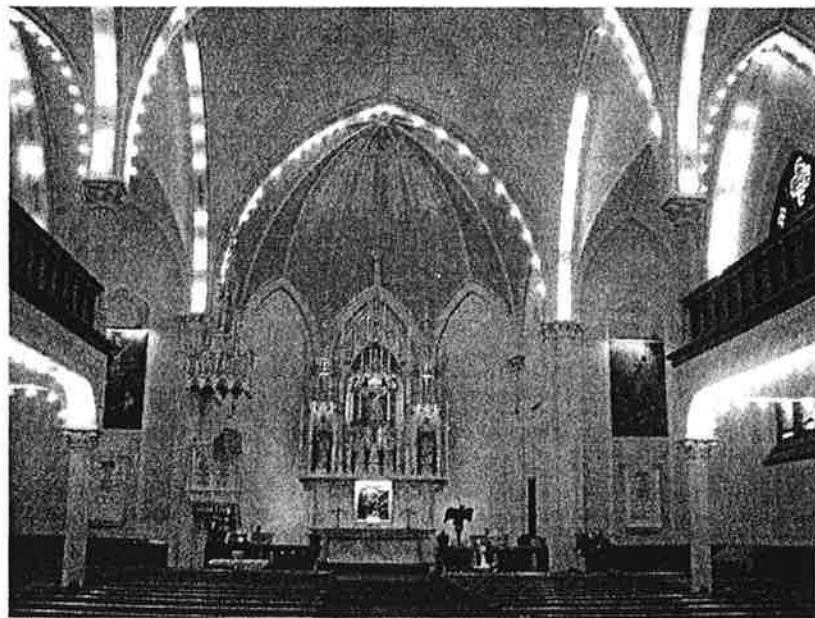
Yet St. John's maintained a vital presence in the neighborhood despite its decline. Through the early 1930s, it funded "a complete welfare system all its own," maintaining an "almoner fund" to give people food or money; recipients did not need to be members of the church.⁵⁵ Its grade school enrollment declined to 175 students by the early 1920s, with more than half of its children came from non-member families. In the 1930s and 1940s the school accepted Slavic, Yugoslavian, Greek, Swiss, Italian, and German-Russian students, along with African-American, Native American, and Mexican children. But church records reveal few confirmations during the 1940s and 1950s. Although some children completed Lutheran instruction courses, few of them became church members. Brenner was remembered as having said at confirmation time, "What I'm confirming is more of a liability than an asset." The membership base moved to other neighborhoods and congregations, and safety concerns curtailed evening meetings and special services among the dwindling number that remained.⁵⁶

When asked in the late 1970s what had been the best features of St. John's, one member answered

without hesitation, "Pastor Brenner." This opinion was believed to be shared by many others. He was respected as a forceful leader in an era when forcefulness was an expected and appreciated pastoral virtue. He was admired for his sharp intellect, unwavering orthodoxy, interesting and edifying Bible classes, and firmness in making decisions. He was "in control." Despite his growing service to the Synod, he was rarely absent from the congregation and seldom took a vacation. He remained the congregation's only pastor for 50 years, until age 84, and by some accounts retired reluctantly and with some resistance.⁵⁷

Yet the loyalty and affection many St. John's members felt for him, together with what some took to be a strong, even foreboding personality, also made it difficult for members to confront shortcomings in his ministry. The same 1970s member who considered Brenner the congregation's best feature also said that one of St. John's worst features was its lack of organizations. There were no youth organizations, he recalled, and even the grade school was not allowed to have sports teams. Brenner "would not have liked the Lutheran Pioneers." The congregation never had a men's club—popular in other churches of the time. The Ladies Aid was referred to as the "Ladies Afternoon Bible Class." The occasional criticism that St. John's was an "unfriendly church" could also have been attributed to the lack of organizations. Members had few opportunities outside of worship to meet one another.⁵⁸

Brenner gained an early reputation as a critic of organizations in the church. In a 1923 article for the Synod's *Quartalschrift*, Brenner wrote, "We are not ready to admit that such a condition is so general among us that church members have to organize themselves to do what the churches properly should do." Though acknowledging that "organizations have frequently rendered a cause valuable services, we would, generally speaking, say that an organization cannot really serve" because "the tendency is to stress unduly the particular activity [of the organization] over against the general work [of the church] as a whole." Congregations themselves "are well able to do their work without any outside help." Brenner saw "the constant appeal to take part in organized recreation and amusements" as something attractive to people's



*Interior of St. John's Lutheran Church
picture from Timothy Kriewell*

sinful natures. "A theatrical performance is naturally more interesting to us than a Bible hour."⁵⁹ Brenner repeated that viewpoint a quarter century later: "It is my personal considered conviction that organizations within a church, particularly inter-congregational, or even inter-synodical, organizations, are not needed by the Church, do not really add to its strength, and may even prove detrimental to its well-being."⁶⁰

Among his files was a letter from a Missouri Synod layman, acknowledging that he—the layman—had once been convinced that organizations would improve conditions in the church, "while you," he told Brenner, "were more or less [against] everything in the line of organization." But he admitted that since then his views had "undergone a change." The correspondent complained that the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods were both "beset by a multitude of movements for 'organization,'" even believing that synodical authorities were "fearful of hurting feelings by thoroughly analyzing the thing and publishing the analysis in church papers."⁶¹

A frequent explanation for the decline of St. John's—often made after Brenner's departure—was that the congregation had deserted its neighborhood, did little evangelistic outreach to area residents, and was even racist in its attitude toward the growing African-American population around it. But the evidence reveals the charge to be untrue and unfair. As the neighborhood declined, some members favored relocating to an outlying area of the city, as other congregations were doing. St. John's apparently had an opportunity to acquire property at Sherman Boulevard and Center Streets which became the site of Sherman Park Lutheran Church. Brenner never supported such proposals, but felt strongly identified with St. John's historic location.

Views held and comments made in the 1950s must be understood in the context of their times and not judged by attitudes popular now. The question was often put to the pastor—Brenner and his successors—by the Ladies' Afternoon Bible Class, "How many *Negroes* are in the school now?" A researcher in the 1970s found "no evidence that Brenner himself felt prejudiced toward the Negroes as such," but Brenner was thought to be hesitant to conduct active recruitment of African Americans for church membership because he feared it would increase the exodus of white members "whom he knew were leaving at least partly because of the blacks" but "would not have dared to tell him that."⁶² Yet the school "had black children before most of the synod's other congregations," and Brenner "canvassed the surrounding ghetto area again and again even in his old age." In addition, he continued to live in the neighborhood, reasoning that "if his people were to come to church, Bible class and choir, then the pastor should also live in the area."⁶³

Kowalke, writing in the year that St. John's closed its school, believed the school "had no future because it was completely surrounded by a rapidly deteriorating neighborhood." Yet Kowalke commended Brenner because he "clung to it and would not give it up." Brenner's "sincerity and his deep conviction [was] that Christian education of the young was a part of the church's mission."⁶⁴

Nearby Trinity Church, the Missouri congregation at 9th Street and Highland Avenue, conducted



*Parsonage of St. John's Lutheran Church
at 816 W. Vliet Street
picture from Matthew Braun*

more aggressive outreach in the early 1960s but gained few new members from its immediate neighborhood. The Missouri Synod also began a neighborhood mission church in the 1950s, directing its efforts toward local residents, again with little success. The growing consciousness of racism, civil rights and racial integration which came in the 1960s—often with stiff resistance and even violent opposition—came only after the membership of St. John's had been drastically reduced and Brenner was gone.⁶⁵

In 1950, Brenner received a letter and questionnaire from Andrew Schulze, a pioneer civil rights champion in the Missouri Synod.⁶⁶ Among Schulze's questions were: "Is your church in a racial transition area?" "Have any steps been taken to establish for your congregation a policy of racial integration?" If such a policy were to be proposed, "Are there members in your congregation who [would] welcome such a policy?" "Are there members who [would] oppose such a policy?" "If there is opposition to [such a] policy, do you believe this to be a justifying reason for abandoning [such a] policy and the plan for establishing it?" Do you believe that the time will come when Protestant churches generally will accept people into membership without regard for any racial grouping?"⁶⁷ Brenner responded brusquely: "To answer some of your questions would have to be based to a greater or lesser degree on conjecture; some would demand the power to read the minds of men, or the gift of prophecy; and some would, to be of value, necessitate a full discussion of the entire question, for which I have not the time; hence I prefer to leave your questionnaire unanswered."⁶⁸



Upstairs office of St. John's, 816 W. Vliet Street, with current Pastor Kevin Hastings

Service to the Synod

St. John's was proud of the service Pastor Bading had rendered to the Wisconsin Synod, and so, "far from complaining about [Pastor Brenner's] synodical work in their midst," it was for the most part also proud of his service to extra-congregational church work, culminating in two decades as Synod President. There was at St. John's "quite naturally a heightened awareness and appreciation of synodical affairs," and the congregation was "never delinquent in its support of its own activities or those of the Synod that had to do with Christian education and missions."⁶⁹ The congregation considered itself "privileged to stand in the front ranks of our Synod's congregations which have generously supported mission work, Lutheran charities, and the Lutheran high school." Its financial contributions to the Synod consistently surpassed those of the average congregation.⁷⁰

Brenner used sermons, Bible classes, and comments at congregational meetings to keep members informed of synodical matters. Brenner's interests in the kingdom of God "always went beyond the confines of the local congregation."⁷¹ In the first article he contributed for the new English magazine, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, in 1914, Brenner addressed congregational elders, "Do not forget that your congregation stands in close relation to others in our Synod body."⁷²

While still serving in Cudahy, Brenner was a co-founder of the Lutheran High School in 1903, established at 13th and Vliet Streets, five blocks west of St. John's Church.⁷³ Kowalke remembered how he had worked to keep the newly founded high school "from collapsing from lack of support."⁷⁴ He even "paid the salary of one of the teachers for a time from his own pocket" when congregational offerings fell below expected levels.⁷⁵

At the 1917 Synod convention, Brenner was appointed to a 12-member Committee on Education to study the Synod's entire educational system—a crucial time for the formation of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States from what had been since 1892 the federated synods of Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Nebraska. The committee met fifteen times between March 1918 and the summer of 1919. It then delivered a report to the 1919 convention containing a listing of ideals and aims for the schools, followed by 27 recommendations for the realization of those ideals and aims. The Synod's preparatory schools at Watertown, New Ulm and Saginaw were to implement a four-year high school curriculum and were only to accept boys who had completed the eighth grade. Parallel classes in English were also to be taught at the three preparatory schools. The curriculum of Northwestern College was to be expanded to a full eight years (four years of high school and four of college, following the American model), and the curriculum for Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm to six years (four high school, two college). A Modern Classics Course was proposed for Northwestern students who did not intend to enter the ministry. Science laboratories were recommended for both colleges. The campus of the preparatory high school at Saginaw was to be expanded. A curriculum of summer courses was to be offered at synodical schools for pastors and teachers. Textbooks were to be published for all the Synod's ministerial education schools. Professors' salaries were to be raised, and professors not living in synodically owned homes were to receive an adequate housing compensation. A committee was recommended to investigate possibilities for advanced study.⁷⁶

The committee even recommended that D.M.L.C. and Northwestern be joined into a single college at Watertown. Brenner himself stated that if "our future teachers and pastors receive their education in the same school," there will be "a better understanding between them. Imbued with the same spirit, they will be better able to work with each other in the service of the church."⁷⁷ Although some recommendations were not accepted, and although it took decades for others to be implemented, these proposals "actually put [Wisconsin] ahead of the Missouri Synod educationally."⁷⁸

The 1919 convention also took up the question of expanding the Synod's seminary, first broached by Prof. J.P. Koehler's son Karl in connection with the 25th anniversary of the seminary's move to Wauwatosa.⁷⁹ The initial proposal called for the purchase of additional land adjoining the Wauwatosa campus. While Professors August Pieper and John Schaller favored the plan, Brenner, then a member of the Seminary board, opposed it. Synod President G.E. Bergemann then formed a "Committee of Seven," which Brenner chaired and on which Koehler served, to investigate and report.⁸⁰ The Committee ultimately settled on the Edgar Wille farm near the village of Thiensville.⁸¹

Keeping synodical readers updated on the changing plans for the new seminary also fell to Brenner and the board.⁸² Beginning on July 1, 1923, after only \$19,000 of an anticipated \$750,000 had been raised, *The Northwestern Lutheran* provided regular contribution updates, featuring lists of individual and congregational contributors, with admonitions to pastors and congregations to complete the offering. "If every member of our Synod would show the interest some have shown," Brenner urged, "and a little consideration also for the brethren who have worked, our task could be speedily accomplished."⁸³ Brenner was direct: "Get to work and gather your full quota, and more, if the Lord has so blessed you. Do it now!"⁸⁴

As the seminary building project progressed, Brenner and Wisconsin kept an eye on the parallel building project of the larger—and presumably more richly blessed—Missouri Synod at its new seminary in suburban Clayton, just west of St. Louis. "It will be readily seen," he remarked, "that our cash collections can bear comparison with our sister synod."⁸⁵ At another point, however, Brenner expressed disappointment with Wisconsin's contributions. Calculating that there were at least a thousand more Wisconsin Synod communicant members in Milwaukee than Missouri members in St. Louis, Brenner reported that St. Louis Missourians had paid all the building costs of their seminary without requesting help from other

Missouri congregations. "Has the Lord blessed those St. Louis Christians more abundantly with material wealth?" Brenner asked. "We have no reason to assume that this is the case." Why then had Milwaukee congregations raised a smaller amount than St. Louis congregations? "Careful and prayerful self-scrutiny" were in order. "As earnest Christians we will want to know the cause in order to remove from our hearts the obstacles that hinder us for serving our God with joy."⁸⁶

The cornerstone for Wisconsin's seminary was laid on July 22, 1928, and the completed seminary campus was dedicated on August 18, 1929. This seminary would know nothing and teach nothing "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," Brenner wrote. "There is no room for human merit, nor for the effusiveness of sin-corrupted reason. It does not join the world in glorifying man, but gives all praise and honor to God."⁸⁷

Brenner also served for 24 years on the Northwestern College Board of Control, during which time the Protest'ant Controversy arose. Some who knew Brenner and Northwestern President Kowalke did not recall relations between the two of them becoming strained over the student thievery case—one of the precipitating events of the Protest'ant movement—nor over the Board's decision to overrule the faculty's expulsion of student perpetrators. Brenner's son John F. remembered parents of expelled Northwestern students coming to his father's parsonage with tears in their eyes.⁸⁸ As the controversy unfolded, however, Protest'ants and their sympathizers had little love for Brenner. They credited him with coining the phrase, "The past does not concern us,"⁸⁹ and associated him with synodical *Beamtentum* (officialdom). "Long ago," wrote Edward Fredrich, the Protest'ants "were incensed when there was unwillingness to enter into every aspect of every grievance over every past incident in the origins of the conflict."⁹⁰ Leigh Jordahl, drawing undoubtedly on Protest'ant sources, characterized Brenner as "aggressively anti-Protestant."⁹¹

The 1929 Synod convention approved the appointment of a special five-member committee to address Prof. Koehler's "further activity at the Seminary," and an eight-member *Gesamtkomitee* (Peace Committee) to attempt to resolve the larger Protest'ant issues.⁹² The five-member committee soon announced that "due to the nervous condition of Prof. Koehler" it was "of the conviction that under the circumstances he should be suspended from office temporarily for one year, and we hereby suspend him from office for one year."⁹³ To this, Pastor E. Arnold Sitz of Tucson, a Koehler and Protest'ant defender, charged that their characterization of Koehler's "nervous condition" was "a bland lie" and accused Brenner of knowing the charge was not true.⁹⁴ Brenner refused further discussion with Sitz until Sitz withdrew his accusation.⁹⁵

Still, according to Meyer, the Protest'ant movement "grieved Brenner deeply." He "appreciated highly the special gift" Koehler was to the Synod and the Seminary, Meyer insisted, and was even heard to defend Koehler from ridicule, saying, "We have very much yet to learn from that man." Yet Brenner "saw that a one-sided stress on a certain procedure coupled with an unwillingness to bear with certain weaknesses and shortcomings and to work patiently for a correction of faults, could lead only to distortions and confusions."⁹⁶

Beyond the Protest'ant matter, Sitz continued an abrasive correspondence with Brenner well into the next decade. "It used to be said, 'Synod cannot be run without John Brenner,'" Sitz wrote in 1929. "Is it changed to, 'Synod cannot be ruined without John Brenner?'"⁹⁷ Sitz granted that Brenner was "blessed with a sober conception of the Gospel" along with "common sense and good judgment. Many [were] the [times] he has



J.P. Koehler
WELS Archives

forced Synod lone-handed by his sober good judgment to alter its course." But Sitz predicted that Brenner's virtue of resoluteness would "become his worst vice. I fear he is not capable of retracting an error."⁹⁸

Amid a pointed exchange over synodical decisions concerning mission expansion in Arizona, Brenner admonished Sitz, "True *Bruederlichkeit* (brotherliness) 'puts the best construction on everything' and is not ready to use expressions like 'arrogates to itself' and 'forces upon others.' You are rather quick to sense wrong in the actions and words of others and to condemn in strong words. If you could master this disposition, you would thereby make it a far more comfortable task to carry on correspondence with you."⁹⁹ Sounding every bit like a Protest'ant condemnation of Wisconsin Synod "officialdom," Sitz wrote in 1943:

In general it seems that we are advancing along a Romanizing trend when we find it necessary to reduce procedure to a set of minute regulations governing almost every relationship among brethren. It argues that faith is no longer the living power it once was in our circles. A living faith takes sure steps without recourse to sets of directives.¹⁰⁰

"That intangible, elusive something"

Brenner was "among the first of our pastors to urge the necessity of doing mission work among English-speaking people, of instructing the young in English in preparation for confirmation, and of holding regular English services besides the German."¹⁰¹ Although he spoke "an excellent, highly professional German," English words were "intriguing to him" and he "wore out several dictionaries because of his desire to continue increasing his vocabulary."¹⁰² Already as a young pastor he tutored some older pastors in English.¹⁰³

Together with Milwaukee pastors John Jenny and Fred Graeber, and with editorial assistance from Pastor Hans Koller Moussa, Brenner founded *The Northwestern Lutheran* in 1914 in the upstairs study of the parsonage at 816 Vliet Street and served as an editorial writer and board member of the magazine for more than four decades. Jenny wrote in the magazine's inaugural issue, "For years the desire has been expressed—not alone by young and inexperienced men, but by those of years and of wide experience—to offer a large number of our parishioners a church paper written in a tongue more familiar to them." The children of the Synod "are daily growing less familiar with the German language, and many of our young people use the English almost exclusively." They were "often reading un-Lutheran literature at the danger of becoming imbued with views incompatible with Lutheran principles."¹⁰⁴

Brenner was an especially keen observer and commentator on the American religious scene. As a regular editorialist, he received an "exchange" of publications from other major religious bodies and eagerly kept track of religious trends as they were unfolding.¹⁰⁵ His editorials reveal reading habits stretching well beyond theological literature. In addition to local newspapers—*The Milwaukee Journal*, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, *Milwaukee Free Press*, *Milwaukee Leader*, *Chicago Tribune*, and other daily and local newspapers both well-known and obscure, Brenner read the Missouri Synod's *Der Lutheraner* and *The Lutheran Witness*, the Ohio Synod's *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* and *Lutheran Standard*, the Buffalo Synod's *Die Wachende Kirche*, the General Council's *Lutheran*; the U.L.C.A.'s *Lutheran*, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's *Lutheran Herald*, the Augustana Synod's *Lutheran Companion*, the General Synod's *Lutheran Quarterly*, and the Norwegian Synod's *Lutheran Sentinel*, plus *The American Lutheran Survey*, *The Lutheran Church Work and Observer*, and *The Lutheran Church Herald*. He also made reference to *The Living Church*, *The Baptist*, *The Pacific Baptist*, *The Baptist Standard*, *The Presbyterian Advocate*, *The Presbyterian Advance*, the magazine of *The Church of England Men's Society*, the Roman Catholic *Our Sunday Visitor*, the Methodist *Western Christian Advocate*, *The Biblical*

World, The Christian Century, The Christian Standard, The Christian Cynosure, Die Kirchenbote, The Literary Journal, The Literary Digest, The Journal of American History, The Continent, Zeuge und Anzeiger—and, for good measure, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*.

The Synod's English prose was typically more formal and flowery than it is today, and early authors in *The Northwestern Lutheran* betrayed their Germanic background and Latin training. Jenny, reviewing Missouri's revised *Kirchenagenda fuer die Ev.-Luth. Gemeinden (Orders of Service for the Evangelical Lutheran Church)* observed that one of its festival prayers contained a sentence that was 109 words long—"all to be spoken in one breath," Jenny gibed—and he urged that prayers be recast in modern expression with shorter sentences. "Do you expect the present generation to pray such long-winded sentences intelligently?" he asked.¹⁰⁶ Yet Jenny himself, in the very next issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, in an article marking the 75th anniversary of the Missouri Synod, produced one sentence that was 157 words long!¹⁰⁷

In contrast, Brenner's writing was sharp and clear, giving little evidence that English was his second language. And his words were direct: readers always knew where he stood. From 1914 to 1933, as the magazine was published every other week, he contributed as many as a half dozen editorials per issue. During what were probably the peak years of his energy and productivity—ages 39 to 59—Brenner's writing not only reflected the Synod's theology and practice but may be credited with shaping its language and culture as well.

From the first, Brenner took aim at issues which would later become points of disagreement with other Lutheran bodies. "Membership in lodges and other worldly societies as well as intimate association with those who are without Christ" are "entangling alliances" and "should, therefore, be studiously avoided." Lodges maintained their own prayers and religious exercises. "You are not permitted to confess your faith, while others contradict it in your presence."¹⁰⁸ Referring to the participation of a "Most Worshipful Grand Master" at the cornerstone-laying ceremony of an Ohio Synod church—reported by *The Lutheran Standard* as "one of those splendid events which make for the good of all concerned"—Brenner responded, "There are some things about [the Masons and other fraternal orders] where Lutherans ought to see eye to eye." Why would a Lutheran church "truckle to a human organization which is not even Christian to do this for her? Or is the congregation in question itself more lodge than church?"¹⁰⁹

The involvement of Christian clergy in the United States military chaplaincy program, widely practiced and highly popular, was viewed by Brenner in a dimmer light: "The spiritual interests of a Lutheran soldier or sailor are not served by the ministrations of a Catholic or sectarian chaplain, and we, on the other hand, do not desire to foist the services of a Lutheran pastor on those who do not desire them. Least of all do we want someone else to pay for the work we are doing for the members of our church."¹¹⁰

Scouting, he wrote, "is founded on the religion of natural man and attempts to develop him in that religion. It fosters the spirit of self-righteousness. With its uniform and insignias of all kinds, with its constant appeals to the pride in the boy, it makes him feel superior to all other boys."¹¹¹ The Scouts instilled reverence, "but not reverence for the Triune God, for that would be too sectarian."¹¹² Scoutism "becomes the big thing in the life of the boy. It offers him everything that pleases him and so captivates his interest almost entirely, leaving the church very little room in his heart."¹¹³

Brenner saw the growing Scout movement as but one example of organizations attempting to take on responsibilities God had reserved for the Christian home and school. "Christian parents should not entrust their sons and daughters to strangers for their training," regardless how appealing their programs may be.¹¹⁴ "By nature and divine right the child belongs first not to the state, nor to any group of men within the state, but to the parent."¹¹⁵ The public school "has no call at all to entertain the young and to attempt to direct the social life of the pupils. That means encroaching on the prerogatives of the home." The only remedy was to "send your child to the parochial schools and to the higher schools of your church, where it

not only escapes these influences, but also receives a thorough instruction in the Word of God."¹¹⁶ Pastors "can find no better way of serving our church than by making every effort to educate their members to see the need of the Christian school and by founding and lovingly fostering such schools everywhere."¹¹⁷ "The fight between the 'freethinking' and the religious element [in public schools] will continue, and it will ever remain a question of the force [which] will be on top."¹¹⁸

The logical progression after a Lutheran parochial school education is that parents continue that education in a Lutheran high school and college. "A teacher who is really working as a Christian teacher can, to our mind, not look on with equanimity when he sees the work the grace of God has permitted him to do in the eight years of the primary school endangered or perhaps even undone by the school his pupil enters after confirmation." Parochial school teachers are usually the "most earnest advocate" for the Lutheran high school.¹¹⁹ Pointing to the many dangers to faith presented by secular and even some religiously-based colleges, Brenner called Lutheran colleges our "priceless treasure" and asked: "Do we appreciate the blessing the Lord confers on us through them; do we value them accordingly and foster them as diligently as we should?"¹²⁰ Citing an incident involving four Protestant ministers, graduates of Chicago Theological Seminary, who confessed they did not believe in creation, mankind's fall into sin, or the virgin birth of Christ, and who took Christ's resurrection to be only a "spiritual" resurrection, Brenner asked, "How would we feel if we had to entrust the education of our children to such men? We truly have reason enough to be thankful, that we are saved from this. Then let us show our gratitude; let us pray, work, and give for our seminary."¹²¹

Brenner encouraged the efforts of Christians united in faith working together beyond the local congregation. "What if we did not have our church papers?" he asked. "In dreary isolation the individual congregation would grow self-centered and, in consequence, cramped in its spiritual life. Faith and love are mighty impulses insisting on expression." Men and women of faith "will not only be active in the congregation according to [their] gifts, but will also take a deep interest in the larger affairs of the church."¹²² Administering the Synod's work was "of very great importance to us, and [those] who are charged with the administration of these affairs should at all times remain conscious of the sacred responsibility resting on them." There would never have been a Synod "if there had not first been Christians who have found life in the Savior and who in gratitude and love dedicate themselves to the work of the Savior."¹²³

As America's most German city, Milwaukee was a center of support for Kaiser Wilhelm II. In March 1916, a "Charity War Bazaar" held at the Milwaukee Auditorium to benefit German and Austrian war sufferers attracted 175,000 attendees and netted \$150,000. Volunteers built elaborate re-creations of various Germanic scenes, and thousands of donated items were offered for sale, including steamship tickets to Europe and a collection of handkerchiefs once used by German ruler Otto von Bismarck.¹²⁴ Some Wisconsin Synod leaders also displayed Germanic loyalties. Seminary Professors August Pieper and John Schaller participated in mass meetings and anti-war protests. Prof. Koehler wrote to President Woodrow Wilson and Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette regarding U.S. war policy.¹²⁵ Dr. Martin Luther College President Adolf Ackermann appeared at public rallies to oppose the military draft—ultimately provoking his forced resignation from D.M.L.C.¹²⁶

Brenner, however, opposed church involvement in political issues. Many Lutherans had acted "unwisely," he believed, by using the names of Lutheran congregations, conferences or synods in their letters and petitions to Washington regarding the war. By doing so, they were giving the impression that "the Lutheran church was now beginning to enter the field of politics," contradicting scriptural warnings that we are to "abstain from all appearance of evil." The Synod should not ally itself "with the German element in America, nor with the English, or Slavic, or Italian, or any other. We owe it to those who are one with us in Christ to avoid everything that might give them offense and thus tend to separate the hearts that are united in our common faith." When He said, "My kingdom is not of this world," Christ supported

the separation of church and state. "The Church cannot find a quicker method of self-destruction than [in] political activity, nor can anything else cause as much harm to the State."¹²⁷ The United States was not "a Protestant country, a Catholic country, or a Jewish country" but "a country in which, according to the principles of its founders, men can live together in harmony as citizens, while they worship God according to the dictates of their conscience."¹²⁸

Brenner also opposed the government's use of religion to make the state more "religious." Commenting on a report from the Augustana Synod favorable to Bible reading in public school classrooms, he wrote: "The committee has evidently forgotten that it is not within the sphere of the legitimate activities of the State to awaken and foster Christian life. The State represents all citizens, the un-Christian as well as the Christian." Even such an apparently inoffensive proposal could have a negative religious effect. "Christ must be taught," he explained, "Christ crucified for our sins, if the child is to become truly moral, as He alone can fill our hearts with love toward God. Simply reading texts that contain a moral truth can do nothing more than give depraved natural man an external polish and make him a smug pharisee."¹²⁹ Brenner warned that "the introduction of religion into our public schools would [in practice] mean the adoption of a national religion." Any religious teaching which would not conflict with the rights of atheists, Jews or other non-Christians "will never make a child truly religious."¹³⁰

Out of step with enthusiastic reformers of public morality, Brenner wrote: "The religious agitator for prohibition has so consistently made alcohol responsible for everything that is wrong in this world that men have almost forgotten what Scripture says: 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies.'" An alcohol-free world "will be just as wicked as a world that uses strong drink" because "sin comes from within and not from without." The Prohibition movement had created confusion "as to the real nature of sin. It makes sin what God does not declare to be wrong and considers very lightly what really is the sin that damns a man, namely, unbelief."¹³¹ The church "has nothing to do with the reform of the world." Using force through political agitation and the lining up of votes is not the business of the church. "The Church can only in the name of God witness against all wickedness in this world, calling the godless to repentance. It does not arrest, fine, and imprison them. That is the function of the civil government."¹³²

Responding to the growing popularity of entertainment and amusement in churches and for church members, Brenner acknowledged they were "lawful to us" but doubted they were beneficial either to individuals or the church. He cited with approval an article from *The Living Church* which noted "the danger to which the church exposes itself as soon as it leaves the sphere of legitimate church work." Activities mentioned by *The Living Church* included events in the "parish house," recreation in the gymnasium, sewing with the guild and dancing, all of which left members too tired to go to church.¹³³ Congregations may serve meals to guests attending a mission festival, but when such celebrations are announced to the general public "we must be particularly careful lest the character of our church as a witness of Christ in the world suffer in the eyes of the public." Better "fifty faithful Christians that come to hear the Word than a vast concourse attracted by a chicken dinner and a sauerkraut supper."¹³⁴

Any evangelistic program using periodic revivals to build the church "is not the product of sound teaching and sober Christianity. Religion is not hysterics. We cannot persuade, humor, cajole, or hypnotize a man into faith in Christ."¹³⁵ He urged, "Away with all 'secularism' in the church." Bring "the life giving and life sustaining Gospel" to the forefront, and "we will need no revivals, or rather, there will be daily revivals by His power."¹³⁶

Brenner drew a distinction between winning souls for the Savior and simply working to increase church membership. "There is much talk of doing big things and accomplishing great and tangible results not only in matters of church apparatus, but also in increasing the membership of the church." Such a spirit "may show itself in the work of the mission boards when they play strategically rather than according to the evident needs of souls." While statistically successful, it could result in "forced growth," and

then "high pressure methods become necessary. 'Go-getters,' 'live-wires'; movements planned on a large scale; more salaried executives; attempts to gain concerted action; inspirational meetings, perhaps with a 'sing'; the overruling of prospects; attractions and innovations of all sorts, a hectic activity; the over-stressing of publicity work; undue attention to the individual that flatters his vanity, and so forth."¹³⁷

Brenner agreed with a Missouri Synod editorial in *The Lutheran Witness* advising that the presentation of plays in church—"particularly the heavier type of drama"—be kept to a minimum due to "the enormous amount of time which is expended in their preparation and the dubious benefits which accrue to the Church and our many charitable institutions through such efforts."¹³⁸ The Lutheran Church "would be far better off if this form of amusement or recreation had never been introduced into it."¹³⁹ He disagreed with an opinion voiced in *The Western Christian Advocate* that radio was destined to "revolutionize church work and worship methods." While radio broadcasts could be useful for shut-ins, Brenner believed that other members would not choose to deny themselves "the joys and blessings" of going to church. "The radio has come to stay, but the church which depends on the radio will not last."¹⁴⁰

He was critical, even disparaging of publicity efforts undertaken by "the Lutheran Church," including agencies of the Missouri Synod—the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and its magazine *The American Lutheran*, the Walther League, the Lutheran Laymen's League and others. He disliked a widely publicized "Lutheran Day," featuring games, water sports and band concerts. "These gatherings are not primarily of our people, by our people, and for our people," nor was the church called "to set ourselves right with the general public." The gospel remains foolishness and a stumbling block to the unconverted. "No one can object when a congregation in a proper manner announces its services in the newspapers and calls attention to its Sunday school and day school. But it is a different thing when we practically force our invitation and our literature indiscriminately upon all the people of our community." How was one to distinguish between the "publicity work" done by Lutherans and "the propaganda of the sects of which we complain?"¹⁴¹

Missouri's Press Committee announced in 1927 the observance of "National Lutheran Publicity Week," with plans for neighborhood home visitations, personal evangelism, public lectures, distribution of Lutheran books and periodicals in local libraries, the arrangement of Lenten displays in store windows and other activities. Brenner detected in the Press Committee announcement "a note of impatience with, and disparagement of, the preachers and teachers who are slow to adopt new methods and who, therefore, refuse to take part in an organized movement of this kind." Though ready to acknowledge that the missionary spirit of the Wisconsin Synod could stand rekindling, "honest, serious-minded Christians may disagree" on the value of such methods.¹⁴²

In 1928, *The American Lutheran* announced a "slogan contest" for the Publicity Bureau and its magazine. Pastor Oscar Feucht argued, "Surely we ought to be as zealous to preach the Gospel and to save souls as the mercantile house is to sell goods." Many slogans were proposed—some sincere, others not—and the Bureau even offered a 47-day European tour free of charge to the Lutheran who submitted the winning slogan. Brenner suggested the winner receive a one-way trip instead: "We wonder if it would not be possible to send such a person to Europe before he invents a slogan for us, and to keep him there."¹⁴³ After the winning slogan was announced, "A Changeless Christ for a Changing World" (proposed by a Florida woman who was not Lutheran), Brenner concluded, "Whether we wanted it or not, we now have a Lutheran slogan. Our only worry is that some enthusiastic Lutheran, feeling that there is still something lacking, will appeal to the public to select a synodical 'yell' for the various Lutheran bodies."¹⁴⁴

Later correspondence confirms that he remained unconvinced of the value of such publicity methods. "Publicity and applause are like drugs," he wrote in 1934. While there may be circumstances in which they serve a good purpose, "they are habit-forming. Cumulative in their effect, they produce a craving that insists on being satisfied. Read some parish papers published also in our circles and the church announce-

ments in the public press, and you will see the results." Behind these publicity efforts lay the desire to make "easy" money for the church or to keep young people interested in going to church. He knew some agreed with him in principle but were more moderate in tone, and he supposed some even considered him "a narrow-minded, contentious fellow and a hopeless crank."¹⁴⁵

He reported regularly and meticulously on developments in other American Lutheran bodies. Widespread participation of Lutheran young men in the World War, together with observances of the 400th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, led many to consider the desirability of a more "united Lutheran action." Brenner saw such inclinations as menacing. Until "an early and frank discussion of the differences" dividing the Lutheran bodies were to take place, Brenner urged, "Let us unscrupulously avoid everything that could tend toward furthering the unionistic sentiment among us."¹⁴⁶

With the organization of The United Lutheran Church of America (U.L.C.A.) in 1918, one of its spokesmen warned that "those Lutheran Synods which hold out against unification and waste trained man power and money" by establishing competing congregations "will soon have a task in justifying their existence to thinking people." Brenner responded that the critic "entirely forgets to mention any differences in doctrine and in practice that might be the cause that these synods hold out against unification." The critic "either denies that there are any differences between Lutherans or declares that such differences should not stand in the way of a Lutheran union." Following that logic, "if doctrinal differences are not a barrier to union between two Lutheran bodies, why should they separate a Lutheran body from a Christian church bearing a different name?"¹⁴⁷

In 1919, Brenner reported that the U.L.C.A. did not demand in its constitution that its members refrain from practicing altar and pulpit fellowship with those who tolerated lodge membership. "Can it truly be said that there is unity between the true witnesses of Christ in the United Lutheran Church and the men who flaunt such practice?"¹⁴⁸ How, he asked, "can a Lutheran Church that is faithfully bearing witness against the soul-destroying error taught by the lodges" consider another Lutheran church that welcomes lodge members and even makes them leaders "as being in co-operation with it and of conserving those who otherwise would be lost to our Lutheran Church?" Such churches may gain new members by such actions, yet by their unscriptural practice they are "continuously hindering the testimony of the former and so opposing the Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁹

God's will is "to make all men of one mind in Christ. Whenever divisions occur through a variation in teaching, someone is departing from the truth of God and is refusing to be guided by the Spirit of Truth." Divisions in the church "are not of God" and surely "not a pleasure to Him," but are "caused by those who err from the Bible and are always to be deplored."¹⁵⁰ Doctrinal compromise never serves the best interests of the church, because "truth loses and error gains."¹⁵¹ Jesus' prayer that his disciples all become one was not achieved by "any external organization." Jesus was praying "for spiritual unity, for oneness in the faith." Even where such unity of faith exists, "it will always remain a question whether the welfare of the Church is served by a number of smaller organizations or by one larger one. A half dozen smaller synods working in the true harmony of faith and love may render more efficient services than one large body could."¹⁵²

Joh. P. Meyer noted that Brenner "carefully read the exchanges which came to his desk" and thus "gathered much information and acquired a good overview over events, conditions, trends in other church bodies, especially over developments within the Lutheran churches of this country." He "learned to feel what lay behind some movement and where it might lead," which served him well in his later service to the Synod. Brenner also "came as close as is humanly possible to that intangible, elusive something which we may call the 'spirit' of a church body."¹⁵³

(End of Part One)

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from the editor ...

Special thanks to Prof. Mark Braun for his well written and documented article on the former Pastor John Brenner, long time president of the Wisconsin Synod. We would like to note the excellent documentation as shown in the endnotes. Be sure to check them for information not contained in the article itself. Dr. Braun is a member of the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran College. The article will be concluded in the October edition of the JOURNAL.

Omitted in this issue from the *Proceedings* is a rather lengthy report by the Board of Control of the institutions of the synod. This report will also be printed in the October edition, if space permits. In the original *Proceedings* the education report is entered as an attachment to the general *Proceedings*. As one can see from the education report in the *Proceedings* that the synod had much difficulty in trying to maintain a financially sound education program, which, of course, is familiar to all of us today.

I do not want to seem to be repetitive, but would again ask that members and friends write the articles, fairly well documented, about historical matters of our synod, of your respective churches, of relatives and friends who contributed to the history of Lutheranism, especially of the Wisconsin Synod. Just as the article on Pastor Brenner is interesting and even instructive, so should the accomplishments of others bear the same interest for our readers. So, please, if you like to write, send us a copy to the address below.

A blessed summer to all.

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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 Siggelkow, 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.

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