The 1856-1859 and the 1964-1970 Free Conferences
Similarities and Differences

To Professor E. Fredrich
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
May 4th, 1979

by
John Strackbein
I have entitled my paper, 1856-59/1964-70 Free Conferences—Similarities and Differences. Naturally scores of similarities could be found. I decided however to narrow the scope to three main points: 1) Similarities in the objectives and purposes 2) Similarities in fellowship practices and, 3) Similarities involving the results.

SIMILARITIES IN OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

In general, one could say of both Free Conferences that they were similar to each other in that both were attempts to strengthen the faith of the seemingly faithful few. Both were attempts to seek unity and fellowship among Lutherans. In order to understand this one has to review the events leading up to the conferences. In the 1850's this is what happened. Many pastors in various synods who belonged to the General Council were unhappy. There was a large trend to tolerate practices which were inconsistent with the Lutheran Confessions. To solve this problem, Walther, only a few months after the definite platform had been circulated, issued an open invitation to 'Free Conferences'. Here is what he wrote, "So we venture openly to inquire: would not meetings held at intervals—by such members of churches as call themselves Lutheran and acknowledge and confess without reservation that the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 is the pure and true statement of the doctrine of sacred Scripture and is also their own belief—promote and advance the efforts towards the final establishment of one single
Lutheran Church of America? We for our part would be ready with all our heart to take part in such a conference of truly believing Lutherans whenever and wherever such a conference would be held.”

Walther saw a lot of people who were one in faith groping and fighting against what could be the liberalism of his day involving attacks on the UAC. He wanted to unify those who stood for truth, on the basis of Scripture and the confessions. Here is a difference in the 1850 conferences and the 1960 conferences: The 1960 conferences had no intention of trying to unify all the Lutheran Synods into one Lutheran Church of America. In the invitation sent to all in the Wisconsin Synod in 1963, some questions and answers were given about the purpose and objectives of these free conferences. "Question: 'Why is this conference being called?' Answer: 'Many pastors and laymen in various Lutheran synods are concerned with liberalism which marks much Lutheran thought today. Many of these are especially concerned about the dilution of the doctrine of inspiration by neo-orthodox influence and by accommodation to current scientific theories.' Question: 'What is the purpose of the conference?' Answer: 'The immediate purpose is to provide a forum for mutual strengthening of all those who are concerned about an uncompromising confession of doctrines currently being jeopardized in the Lutheran Church. The ultimate objective is to obtain full unity in the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions and in their application in practical church life.'”

Notice how both conferences strove for unity on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions. Walther's conferences went on to study the Augsburg Confession, article by article, since the confessions
as nothing else than a solemn oath-like promise to the church by the person who is entering its service, that he considers the doctrinal content itself of the confessions (but this without exception) as differing in no single instance (either in a primary or secondary point, and for that reason believes in it as in God's Word itself and thus intends to preach that doctrine without falsification. Therefore whatever position a teaching occupies in the doctrinal structure of the symbols and in whatever form it is presented, be it that of a matter specifically treated or that of an incidental statement, the unqualified subscription applies to all of them... clinging to the principle that the symbols are confessions of faith and doctrine, the church, on the other hand, must necessarily exclude all that which does not pertain to doctrine from the material by which the subscriber is bound."³

Walther appealed for a free Lutheran Conference hoping that a united Lutheran church might be formed. However this united church was not to be united in name only but also in doctrine and practice of that doctrine. When the pastors gathered for the free conference there was evidence that all of them were united in that doctrine. Listen to some of the statements Walther makes at the Free Conferences. "The more this strengthens the faith and the courage of all true Lutherans here, the more compelling is the challenge therein contained to nurture through these free conferences with supreme faithfulness and greatest diligence the Unity which God through His marvelous grace has already wrought among us."⁴ Here is another interesting quote: "We are convinced that after a time in which the various local churches lapsed into a deep and
general decay in matters of doctrine and practice (as occurred in the last century,) there is no way more fitting for awakened individuals within the various church bodies to strengthen and advance the church unity which has become apparent. (It became apparent when most synods rejected the Definite Platform put out by the Wittenberg Synod, which tried to aim a large union of synods by throwing out positions of the U.A.C.)⁵

As long as we are discussing the practice of prayer fellowship at Free Conferences, we should also answer this question, "How could orthodox pastors belong to unorthodox church bodies?" This question was answered in this way, "We acknowledge such as brethren as long as they testify with vigor against the prevailing errors and for the truth. If was also stated that we consider it their duty to continue membership in their respective church bodies as long as there still is a basis for hope of improvement." (Lutheraner, 1856 p.50). What can we conclude then about Walther's joint prayer at the 1850 conferences? The answer to this question is best stated in the pamphlet called, Fellowship Then and Now. "Since the Free Conferences consisted of men who confessed unreserved acceptance of the Unalter Augsburg Confession, there was present a fundamental unity. Whatever errors one or the other may have had, was a matter of weakness and not of persistence. To refuse joint prayer under such circumstances would have been a violation of the brotherhood."⁶

Now that we have seen why Walther could have joint prayers and hymns, let us see why those in the 1960 free conferences could not in good conscience begin the meeting with joint prayer. First of all the situation was entirely different. In the 1800's the following synods appeared at the conferences: LCMS, Ohio, New York, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, Norwegian, and Pennsylvania.⁷ Since the
Definite Platform had just caused a lot of controversy, there was much confusion in these synods. None of them however had closed their ears to admonition when they went astray. In contrast, many of the synods represented in the 1960 free conferences had totally rejected any further admonition in false doctrine. Here is a list of those who attended the 1964-70 free conferences: Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, ALC, Church of the Lutheran Conference, Concordia Lutheran Conference, ELs, LCA, LCMS, LCR and WELS.9 A second reason for not beginning the meeting with prayer even though the Arrangements Committee defined a Free Conference as, "A meeting of individuals who meet as free agents, not representing their church bodies as such," was because there was an apparent lack of unity in doctrine among those present at the conference.

In the 1850 Free Conferences Walther said this, "The spirit which permeated the Conference was the spirit of truth, love, of peace... It became apparent in the clearest possible way that no one present would not have been ready to conform to recognized truth... No free utterance which followed on a frank assertion produced a lasting false note. One surpassed the other in showing deference according to God's Word. The result of this was that the longer they dealt with one another... the more firmly the members of the Conference were united in the ever growing consciousness of standing in one faith, and in true brotherly love."9

Compare this with what Pastor Norman Berg, the moderator at each of the 1963-70 Free Conferences, had to say. "Gathered as laymen and pastors dedicated to the service of the Savior, we seek a unity worked solely by the Holy Spirit. His guiding dare not be ignored. His guidance however, is not to be found in mere human
desire for unity. It is to be found only in His means of grace through which He works. The Spirit inspired teachings of Scripture alone can be the judge as to whether unity exists and therefore should be recognized... As individuals committed publicly to confessional groupings which disagree in doctrine we will not by joint opening worship devotions proclaim a confessional fellowship which does not exist publicly. We therefore now as before each session offer time and opportunity during a time of silence for our personal petitions for an added measure of the Holy Spirit's gifts.  

Here it seems as if Pastor Berg is giving two reasons for not praying together. 1) Because of the various synods that people were dedicated to and 2) because of a lack of unity among themselves in certain doctrines. I see this implication when he says, "We seek a unity," and when he warns against seeing a unity when there is only, "a mere human desire for unity." To back up my point about a lack of unity in all doctrine at this conference, I would like to quote a layman who attended the Conference. "The unpleasant experience was the protracted debate over the seat of authority in the church, whether the congregation, or where two or three are gathered together." The one group insisted upon the congregation only, and departed the Free Conferences when unable to win its point." In reading the floor discussions on the 'doctrine of justification' there also seemed to be a lack of unity on the part of some.

To briefly conclude this section I will say that Walther could allow prayer fellowship because a unity of faith already existed. Those at the 1964-1970 Conferences could not pray jointly because a unity in doctrine was not there.
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE FREE CONFERENCE RESULTS

What were the results of the 1850 Free Conferences? Walther had this to say when the sessions broke up after the first conference. "Each conference member joyfully went his way convinced that our meeting had, by the grace of God, attained the desired goal, namely that a good foundation had been laid on which we could now continue to build...Many premature judgments had been laid aside, much misunderstanding had been removed; many a wall which formerly separated them had crumbled."¹¹

Previous to these conferences the various synods, "Instead of emphasizing their common relationship and serving one another with the special gifts which each possessed, they separated, step by step farther and farther from each other, and this fell into a divided state of jealousy...If one single Evangelical Lutheran Church, strong in unity, is to arise here, it can arise only through the unity of faith, through the awakening of the consciousness of the presence of such unity and through rallying around one Confession, as a treasure which must be mutually defended and preserved. The Geneeal Conference was to serve this purpose, and the result of that conference is that the first step in that direction has been taken...Unity in faith and their mutual relationship was in part aroused and in part enlivened and strengthened."¹²

As far as long term results, many historians feel that the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872 had its original germ in these four Conferences of 1856 – 59. Now let's compare these results with some of the results of the 1964-70 Free Conferences.

In order to do that I wrote six letters to pastors and two to laymen who attended the Free Conferences and have since that time joined our Synod. The letter I wrote and the answers I received are attached at the end of this paper. On the letter I wrote, I
ents one man's thoughts. Obviously the 1964 Free Conferences had some positive results. Even if these results were not apparent among the two hundred fifty or so people that came each time, they were apparent at least among those who answered my letter. Frankly, I feel it wouldn't be wrong to draw this conclusion. Namely that if some of those who answered my letter were benefited spiritually and also saw the WELS and ELS in a different light, than it is possible that many others also were helped in a similar way.

One other possible result might have been possible although I have no time to pursue it. I am wondering to what extent the Free Conferences influenced members who very shortly afterwards formed into the church body known as FAL.

Let us now in conclusion compare again the Free Conferences under discussion. Actually the purpose Walther had in mind, and the purpose the organizers of the 1960 Conferences had in mind, are very similar; namely to obtain full unity in the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions and in their application in practical church life.

The results of both these Conferences are also very similar. In Walther's case full unity was not achieved permanently. The Ohio Synod eventually refused to come because of a disagreement in fellowship practices with the LCMS. In the 1960's Free Conference, full unity wasn't established either. Most of the conservatives from liberal bodies went back to their synods to attend for the faith some more. The Conference did however draw some of the people attending closer together in many of the doctrines discussed. Evidence of that fact comes from the letters I received and which
at the back of this paper. Actually even though nine years have passed since the last Conference, the final results may not yet be fully obvious. Maybe history in future years will look back and point to the Free Conferences of 1964-1970 as deciding influences in events which are still far in the future. After all, today historians credit the beginning influence or the germ of the Synodical Conference to the 1856 Conferences. It took 18 years or so for that germ to grow and sprout into reality.
FOOTNOTES

1. Vorwort Zu Jahrgang 1856, Lehre und Wehre 2 (Jan. 1856): 4
   Translation by Ervin L. Lueker, "Walter and the Free Lutheran
   529


3. C.T.M. Vol. 15 Aug. 1944 p. 544,

4. Ibid. p. 534

5. Ibid.

6. Fellowship then and now p. 9 (a pamphlet put out by the WELS
   advisory committee on doctrinal matters)


8. Notes taken by my Dad who attended most of the Free Conferences.


10. Journal for the sixth Lutheran Free Conference written by
    Melvin Smith.


12. Ibid., pp. 552 and 553.

13. Ibid., p. 563.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Smith, Melvin Journal for the sixth Lutheran Free Conferences.

Strackbein, Rev. Lee. Free Conference Notes

Wisconsin Synod, Advisory committee on doctrinal matters; a pamphlet Fellowship then and Now.
March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackoven
914 East 60
Crafter, Wisconsin 53024

Dear,

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Waunakee, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 Free Conferences. At my request, President Schuetze gave me a list of people that attended the Free Conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the Free Conferences and he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences, he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and E.L.S. synods. Because of the Free Conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.M.S. when he could no longer remain in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

That is why I would like to know if any other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or E.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the Free Conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly I have such a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the Free Conferences influence you to leave the Synod you were in?

2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or a sister synod?

3. How did this happen?

4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's spiritual position before the conferences?

After the conferences?

5. What were your impressions about the canister of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the Conferences?

(One answer was not clear and one did not answer the question.)

6. Which conference that you attended impressed you the most? Why?

early ones | later ones | first | second | third | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | none or any more than one
Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?

6. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conference?

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter, I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

John Stracklein
March 30, 1979

Mr. John Stroechlein
1938 Ave. 60
Clifton, Wisconsin 53034

Dear Pastor Kaufeld

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in La Crosse, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1560-1570 Reformation. At my request, President Hurlbut gave me a list of people that attended the two conferences and later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the two conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through those conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and W.L.S. synods. Because of the two conferences, he gained unique opportunities to work closely with the W.L.S. when he could no longer compete with them in good craftsmanship. As a result of his service through these conferences, we have been there since 1939. There was a point in time...

What I would like to know is...every other people are these the people that you are either at the Wisconsin Synod in my opinion. We were helped by a similar session at the two conferences. I think, in view of that point, the answer to I have made is a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the two conferences influence you to move to Wisconsin Synod. How did you come there because of...the members we no longer.

2. To what extent (if any) did you participate in the Wisconsin Synod? To what extent (if any) did you participate in the Wisconsin Synod? I was well acquainted with both synods. They were not the cause of my opinion, W.L.S.

3. How did this happen? What led you to join the Wisconsin Synod? I have been...on the W.L.S. I have to see the program safely settled.

4. That was your impression of the two conferences. I felt that they had a careful religious position, one that was compatible with the old W.L.S. The same.

5. That was your impression of the two conferences. I felt that they had a careful religious position, one that was compatible with the old W.L.S. The same.

6. That was your impression of the two conferences. I felt that they had a careful religious position, one that was compatible with the old W.L.S. The same.
7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards? If learned more during
the lecture series, then please note that.

3. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences? The pleasant moments were those in which you found companionship in common faith. The unpleasant experiences were those in which disunity and disagreements between the Synod members and participants.

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If this does not permit an answer before Easter, I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours,

John Strackman

I hope this is of help to you.

Rev. E. R. Krieffeld
Mr. John Strackbein
4912 Hwy 60
Grafton, Wisconsin  53024

Dear Mr. Strackbein:

I hope my answers to your questions will help you in your research.

I was on the verge of leaving LCMS in 1965 but was prevailed upon by Pastor Ernest Kavasch of Westmont, Ill. to remain and join a group of nine laymen who organized as the "Concerned Lutheran Laymen" to expose the false teachings in Missouri. Three of this group are now in Wisconsin Synod and three are in ELS. Pastor Kavasch took about half of his congregation into Wisconsin Synod several years ago. Outside of myself none of these laymen and Pastor Kavasch attended a free conference. Several other laymen who are still in Missouri did attend one or two Free Conferences.

Following are the answers to your eight questions:

(1) The Free Conferences made me more aware of Wisconsin Synods strict doctrinal position so that when my wife and I decided to leave Missouri Synod our logical move was into WELS.

(2) We were not really influenced by the Free Conferences. We wanted a church that allowed no false teachings.

(3) One Sunday in July 1968 we attended Jerusalem Church, Morton Grove, Ill. We wanted to meet members of Jerusalem who had registered for the '68 Minneapolis Free Conference. We liked the Church and Pastor as well as members we met.

When we left LCMS the following year we started to attend Jerusalem Church regularly in October. We resigned from the LCMS church in January 1970 and joined Jerusalem Church.

(4) I always knew that WELS was doctrinally very sound. I was especially aware of this when WELS withdrew fellowship with LCMS in 1961 because the LCMS synodical officials did nothing about those who denied Biblical inerrancy, claimed the Bible contained contradictions, etc.

After the conferences we were more convinced that the Wisconsin Synod was truly Lutheran according to the Lutheran Confessions.

(5) We attended Wisconsin Synod churches occasionally before the Free Conferences. The friendliness always impressed us.

After we joined the Wisconsin Synod we were especially impressed with the friendliness at the Synod conventions even though we were known by very few individuals.
(6) My wife and I attended five of the seven Free Conferences. The last one at Rockford, Ill. in 1970 left some lasting impressions. It dealt with "Ways to Lutheran Unity".

The impossibility of ever having Lutheran Unity on the basis of doctrine was brought out during the discussions after the lectures.

(7) During informal discussions we learned more about WELS because we could speak directly with members of WELS.

(8) Among pleasant experiences were meeting individuals as Dr. Henry Koch and Mrs. Koch. Meeting like minded Lutherans of other synods and the friendly discussions with so many. I remember no unpleasant experiences while attending the conferences.

It will interest you to know that I was personally acquainted with the sainted Prof. August Pieper and the sainted Prof. Arthur Voss. The latter I knew when he was still Pastor of St. James Church at 60th & Lloyd Sts. in Milwaukee.

I sat in Pastor Voss' study one day in the 1930's. We were discussing trends in the church. In the course of our discussion he made this statement "Within 25 years the Lutheran Church as we know it now will not be recognizable". The changes he referred to were then only beginning in Missouri.

The high church movement, neo orthodoxy, etc. were just starting to show up.

In the late fifties and early sixties, however, the promoters of false doctrine in LCMS became more bold which resulted in Wisconsin Synod leaving the Synodical Conference and withdrawing fellowship with Missouri Synod.

Sincerely yours,

Gerhard L. Freundt

Gerhard L. Freundt
Dear Dad,

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Racine, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1956-1976 Free conferences. At my request, President Schaefer gave me a list of people who attended the free conferences and then later joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences, he became more involved with the Wisconsin and R.C.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the R.C.S. even though he could not longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

I would like to know if you know other people who are still members of the Missouri and Wisconsin synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly, I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the Missouri Synod and join the Wisconsin Synod? Was it because of the Free churches? Was it because of the Missouri Synod’s doctrinal position on some of its beliefs?
2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Missouri Synod or a sister synod? Was it because of the Missouri Synod’s doctrinal positions or the Missouri Synod’s political position or some other reason?
3. How did your impression of the Missouri Synod’s doctrinal position, or the conference, influence you to leave the Missouri Synod? What was your impression of the conference?

Many people have asked me why the Free churches became more acceptable to me, and what changes have occurred since then. If you could provide information on any of these points, it would be greatly appreciated.

With appreciation,
Bob

Mr. Bob Reinhard
1006 Main St
Racine, Wisconsin 53403
7. Did you learn more about the Saccos in Spain during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterward? Both were helpful.

2. Would you care to share some of your pleasant and unpleasant experiences?

I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you still will be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter, I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours,
[Signature]

[Name]
Mr. John Strackbein
4912 Hwy 60
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

April 23, 1979

Dear Mr. Strackbein,

Please pardon my tardy reply to your Free Conference letter of March 30. My answers to your questions are as follows, by your numbering sequence:

1. The Free Conferences gave me a theological basis for comparison with the Missouri Synod teaching and practice. At the least, it gave me a basis for witnessing in my own congregation, to others in LCMS, and to liberals in general. I had little or no thought of leaving LCMS until LCMS declared fellowship with TALC.

2. Once LCMS declared fellowship with TALC, I began to think about leaving the LCMS. Then, through the knowledge which I had obtained about WELS/ELS, at the Free Conferences, it became easy to decide in which direction to turn.

3. Because I was personally acquainted with WELS and ELS leaders and their theological doctrine and practice, I knew that either Synod would be spiritually satisfying.

4. My LCMS pastor spoke of them (WELS) as being ultra-conservative and rather standoffish (horns grew out of their heads). After the conferences, I knew that WELS people were quite friendly and had well thought-out, biblical, doctrinal positions.

5. As mentioned in 4, above, the "horns" soon disappeared and very human, friendly people appeared.

6. The conferences which impressed me the most was the Fifth, held in Minneapolis. The essays were generally outstanding. One, in particular, Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah, by Pastor Eugene F. Kauffeld, brought Christ alive in the Old Testament! I was so impressed with this essay that I refer to it to this day.

7. I learned most about WELS/ELS from informal gatherings afterwards. Here was the opportunity to meet the men and learn of their struggle to try to return LCMS to a sound doctrinal position.

8. The unpleasant experience was the protracted debate over the seat of authority in the church, whether the congregation, or "where two or three are gathered together." The one group insisted upon the congregation only, and departed the Free Conferences when unable to win its point.

A pleasant experience always was the Arrangements Committee meetings at the Mequon Sem. All of the men there had risked material security for sound doctrine, in separating from LCMS. The WELS/ELS people did not know if their synods would remain intact after the break. It was predicted by some that WELS and ELS would collapse, but just the opposite occurred - they grew. The men on the Arrangements Committee had that mien of seasoned Christian warriors.

I hope this fills your need. Please write if I can be of further assistance. The Lord's richest blessings in your studies.

Sincerely,

Ralph C. Schreiner
March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackheim
2312 Gay 60
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024

Dear Pastor Pfotenauer,

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1964-1970 free conferences. At my request, President Schwenk gave me a list of people that attended the free conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and A.L.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, it was easier for him to break fellowship with the A.L.S. since we could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

I would like to know if you are one of those people and if so, how many other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or A.L.S. synods, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences. To help me consider this point were thoroughly I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in?
2. Did you express confidence that was already known by me regarding liberalism of the 64-70 conferences?
3. How did this happen?
4. Did you have confidence in the orthodoxy and integrity of the WELS pastors?
5. That were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position before the conferences? After the conferences?
6. That were your impressions of the standlness of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences?
7. Which conferences did you attend that impressed you the most?

I don't recall that any one conference impressed me more others than any other.
7. Did you learn more about the W. Isconian Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards? Both were grand helpful.

3. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences? It was unpleasant to note that many of the liberal theologians shunned these meetings. I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If this does not permit an answer before Easter I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

John Smith
March 30, 1979

Mr. John Strackbein
6912 Hwy 60
Cottage Grove, Wisconsin 53527

Dear Pastor Zeck

As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, I am currently involved in a research project for my history class that deals with the 1861-1870 free conferences. At my request, President Schwartz gave me a list of people that attended these conferences and then later on joined our synod. That is how I obtained your name.

I requested this list because my father also attended the free conferences when he was in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Through these conferences he became personally acquainted with the Wisconsin and E.L.S. synods. Because of the free conferences, he was easier for him to break fellowship with the L.C.I.S. when he could no longer remain with them in good conscience. It was easier because through the conferences he knew there was a place to turn to.

That I would like to know is, how many other people are there who now are either in the Wisconsin or E.L.S. synod, and who were helped in a similar manner by the free conferences? To help me consider this point more thoroughly I have made a list of questions that I hope you will be willing to answer.

1. To what extent (if any) did the free conferences influence you to leave the synod you were in? They gave me a clearer picture of the issues, and the Wisconsin Synod position on those issues.

2. To what extent (if any) did they influence you to join the Wisconsin or E.L.S. synod? They improved the picture I had of the WELS.

3. How did this happen? Mainly through the men I met and listened to. They were not legalistic, as I had been led to believe, but evangelical and doctrinally knowledgeable and uncompromising.

4. What were your impressions of the Wisconsin Synod’s doctrinal position before the conferences? That they still held to the same doctrinal position which Missouri had forsaken.

5. After the conferences? All the more so. I was reassured that the WELS still had doctrinal discipline whereas Missouri’s had broken down.

6. What were your impressions about the soundness of the Wisconsin Synod before and after the conferences? I had a much better impression, because I was fortunate to meet some top-notch WELS pastors.

7. Which conferences did you attend? impressed you the most? They

The one in, I believe it was, Columbus, Ohio. That may be mainly because at the one I attended (in Chicago, I believe), too many retired and almost-retired ministers from various synods got up ‘ad nauseam’ during the discussion period and droned on about some pet word or phrase that was dear to their heart.
Dear John,

Perhaps you have noticed this is coming from Florida, where I am taking a 2 week vacation with my family—although you might wonder why I haven't written before.

Please give my regards to your folks,

As to your question in my letter, the suspension of the constitution of the Synod in 1961, I took a wait-and-see attitude. I did not return to its former position. Instead, I returned to the New Synod (I am member of that Synod, you remember).

The Letters Free Conference that started in 1964 only confirmed my conviction about the identity of the WELS position.

I declare that the free conference, in turn, had more influence than that of confirming resolution already had.

May corrects to your question of a different one.

The first one, because it was not for Luthertown, but for the Synod Conference.

That conference really taught me more about the identity of the Synod than any other place.

Thank you for your letter. We are all praying of the Synod of the Free Conference.

With love and blessing,

Yours truly,

April 19, 1979

[Signature]
7. Did you learn more about the Wisconsin Synod during the lectures or did you learn more about them at informal gatherings afterwards?
informal gatherings afterwards
8. Would you care to share some of the pleasant and unpleasant experiences you may have had while attending the conferences?
For the unpleasant, see point 6. For the pleasant, the down-to-earth friendly sincerity of the WELS men was pleasant.
I know that you are very busy, especially during this time of the year. However, I hope that you will still be able to answer the following questions sometime in the next two weeks. If time does not permit an answer before Easter, I would still be very grateful to you if you could reply sometime in the week following Easter.

Sincerely yours

[Signature]

John Strecken

P.S. I went to Springfield, and we had WELS students in class. When I graduated, one could get a call either to the WELS or Missouri, it didn't matter. That's how close the two synods were.

One summer before I graduated I served in a WELS congregation in which the pastor was sick. There I met the girl who became my wife.

One of my first pastorates was in Wisconsin, where I periodically played golf with 3 other WELS pastors, and we got along just fine. At Lent we exchanged pulpits. No problem whatsoever.

However, I have known, and still know, some WELS pastors who are legalistic. They have given, and still give, our synod a bad name. Too bad!

On the other hand, all the WELS men I have met who have come here to the East are the finest, personable, evangelical pastors one could want.

My son will be enrolling at Northwestern in August and he intends to enter the WELS ministry.