

Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken

PART FOUR: “Manager” for Mission

Wyneken had not been present when the Missouri Synod was founded in 1847. He and his congregation in Baltimore joined the new Synod the following year, at the 1848 convention. This convention received Wyneken as a member, then handed him his first synodical task: to compile into a book a set of Bible passages supplementing Luther’s Small Catechism. He completed his assignment, and the finished work rolled off the press in 1849.¹ But the Synod was by no means finished with Friedrich Wyneken.

In early October, 1850, not quite half a year after Wyneken started serving with Walther in St. Louis, he was elected President of the Synod. Ironically, Walther was the pastoral delegate of their congregation at that convention. Wyneken was “only” an advisory delegate. Still, he had evidently won the respect and confidence of those who were voting.

The president of the Synod had a number of things to do. All of them support the church’s mission. Wyneken was not doing what we might call a mission executive’s work today. No one really was. Still, it might not be too much of a stretch to characterize him broadly as a “manager” for mission in those days. Toward the end of his presidency, the Synod was coming to its water about how it was to approach the kind of work that Wyneken himself had once done, traveling around to scattered people. We will look at just a few aspects of Wyneken’s presidency from a mission standpoint, and include the Synod’s eventual dealing with itinerant ministry.

PRESIDENCY OF THE SYNOD

The Synod was growing. It had started with 14 churches in 1847. By the year after Wyneken assumed the presidency, 1851, it had 31 congregations as members, while another ten non-member churches were being served by Missouri Synod pastors.² In 1852 Wyneken told the Synod, in words partly informed by his own memory, that “just a few years ago, there were only few German Lutheran preachers here and there, fighting their way through forests and prairies. With great difficulty they visited the scattered members of their Church and sparingly ministered to them with the Bread of Life. Today a Synod is assembled that has more than a hundred workers – preachers, professors, and teachers – in the vineyard of the Lord.”³ Later in his presidency, while on a trip Wyneken struck up a conversation with a fellow traveler who inquired about what he did, and where-all he went for his work. Wyneken apparently told the man that he traveled all over the country in his presidential

¹ Phelps, LHC, 49.

² E-mail from Mark Bliese, CHI, January 27, 2026.

³ Harrison, 360.

visitations. The man jokingly said, “Well, then, you are the President of the United States.” “Yes,” Wyneken said, “and Canada too.”⁴ He had a big job.

Visitation formed a large part of that job. In 1850, the president was supposed to visit every parish in the Synod at least once a year. In addition, he was to ordain and install all pastors, as well as temporarily suspend members in cases of persistent false doctrine or immoral life.⁵ Regarding congregations, early in his presidency he acknowledged that “the state of general ignorance and lack of discipline renders our path of building the congregations a slow and difficult one.”⁶ Nonetheless, he and the Synod went at it.

The president also had to go around putting out fires. A man who as a child knew Wyneken later recalled that “Wisconsin was at that time known as the ‘Church Militant,’ and often [during his presidency] Wyneken was obliged to come and settle quarrels, especially in the congregations in the neighborhood of Milwaukee.” At one time Wyneken found himself in a meeting, seemingly at a congregation, where the chairman was being ignored. President Wyneken stood up, stamped his feet, and in Low German said: “Wait, you boys, I have the floor.” Order was restored.⁷

In effect, Lindemann wrote, “Wyneken had approximately become such a ‘superintendent’ as the one he had wished for in 1841 . . . only that the district was much larger than the one that he envisioned then.”

BREAK WITH LOEHE

Of course, Wyneken was not only a visitor to each of the Synod’s congregations; he was also a leader for them all. One of the sad developments through which he had to lead the Synod as President was the devolution of relations with erstwhile benefactor Pastor Wilhelm Loehe.

He had tried to prevent it. In 1851, the Synod sent both Wyneken and Walther to Germany to meet with Loehe in hopes of avoiding a break. President Wyneken had written to the entire Synod about the importance of averting a rift, if at all possible.⁸

But Loehe had a different teaching on Church and Ministry – or “Ministry and Church,” as Loehe put it⁹ – than the Missourians found in Scripture and the Confessions. When they quoted the Confessions to Loehe, Loehe held that the Confessions’ doctrine of the Ministry was not quite complete, not “*fertig*.” It turned out that the Missourians and Loehe each approached the Lutheran

⁴ Quoted in Saleska, 98

⁵ Suelflow, 2-3.

⁶ 1852; Harrison, 361.

⁷ Eissfeldt, 67.

⁸ Threinen, CTQ, 37.

⁹ Quoted in Wyneken, “An Explanation of Pastor Loehe,” 4.

Confessions differently too.

Wyneken wrote over a dozen articles for *Der Lutheraner* over the years.¹⁰ But he seems to have contributed only two articles to *Lehre und Wehre*.¹¹ One of these came from 1855, while he was President of the Synod, and it had to do with Loehe.¹² Wyneken quoted Loehe extensively, and in places where Loehe had for his part been quoting *Der Lutheraner*. Loehe said that the nub of the difference between what he generally called the “American Lutheran” tendency (referring in this case to the Missourians) and the “German Lutheran” (referring to himself and others of like mind) was this: “Over here the Symbols are read according to the Scriptures, over there the Scriptures are read according to the Symbols” – and the Missourians read the Confessions according to particular authorities.¹³ Trying to be fair, Loehe clarified that what the Missourians meant. They meant, as Loehe put it, that “there can be no other proper exposition of the Scriptures than that in the Symbols.”¹⁴ Loehe cited places where the Missourians made this statement. He noted that the same assertion had also come up when Walther and Wyneken were talking with him in person.¹⁵ Loehe said that the Missourians wanted *quia* confessional subscription, which is well and good. But they insisted on it with such force that they stretched it out of shape, to the point that as far as they were concerned, Loehe said, “the historical version of the *quia* becomes and must become an outright *quatenus*.”¹⁶

Wyneken responded vigorously. Among other things, he wrote of how Loehe was in effect saying that the Missourians *were* Lutherans, while he and others were hoping to *become* Lutherans through more extensive research. Wyneken did not concede that the Missourians read the Confessions through Luther and various writings from Lutheran orthodoxy. The Confessions themselves were clear. He did note that against false understandings the Missourians did indeed cite Luther and the orthodox theologians.¹⁷ Against Loehe’s premise that where the Symbols had not made a *ruling* or *decision*, it was necessary to turn to Scripture, Wyneken said there are no “decisions” as such in the Confessions, just statements of the Lutheran position.¹⁸ As for *quia* subscription, Wyneken wrote: “The church . . . will not be abrogated by holding the ‘*quia*’ firm with all of one’s strength, and to expand it to the entire doctrinal contents of the Confessional writings, but by giving everyone the freedom to decide for himself whatever he wants the ‘*quia*’ to refer to.” For if people could determine what the *quia* refers to, then they could designate doctrinal matters as “incidental” at will.¹⁹ In the end, Wyneken wondered whether Loehe’s approach to confessional subscription differed

¹⁰ Saleska, 99.

¹¹ Lindemann, 54. Saleska says he wrote many articles for *L.u.W.*, 98.

¹² Wyneken’s other *L.u.W.* article was “The Methodists,” published in 1866, after Wyneken left the Synod presidency.

¹³ Quoted in Wyneken, “Explanation,” 3.

¹⁴ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 4.

¹⁵ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 3.

¹⁶ Quoted in Wyneken, “Explanation,” 4.

¹⁷ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 5.

¹⁸ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 6.

¹⁹ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 7.

from that of the rationalists only by degree, but not in kind.²⁰ He concluded, addressing a word to Loehe and company: “Oh, you dear gentlemen, don’t always speak about the possibility that yet anything competent could and would be discovered, by which the Symbolical Books would get their proper brilliance. . . . Rather . . . bring your improvements and corrections to light at last. . . .”²¹

No less determinedly than Walther, Wyneken defended the position that the Missouri Synod had taken at its 1851 convention concerning Church and Ministry. On that subject you can read, for example, his 1852 convention address in Harrison’s *At Home in the House of My Fathers*. Yet Wyneken also knew, along with Walther, that the Missourians’ differences with Loehe went even further. For the sake of the mission, it was important to know what Church and Ministry were, and were not. It was also important to know what commitment to the Lutheran Confessions by pastors and congregations meant.

DISTRICT FORMATION

Of all the issues faced by the Synod during Wyneken’s presidency – including the break with Loehe and a wrenching discipline case over chiliasm involving Georg Schieferdecker (we will not be going into that here) – the one that may have caused the most consternation for the greatest number of people within the Synod was the formation of Districts in 1854. Wyneken was discussing this prospect already in his 1853 presidential address. The question on a lot of minds seems to have been: “Can we divide and remain united?”²² This subject had implications for confessional integrity and theological commitment, and also for the Synod’s ability to initiate and support mission work.

Wyneken began by acknowledging “a threatening sense that with the division of the Synod, an inward bond is unraveling, a bond that up to now has intertwined us in . . . love and unity, and in this foreign land has been doubly precious and priceless.”²³ Moreover, would the Synod’s strength, function, and drive also suffer? Freely did Wyneken acknowledge that the Synod had been resisting the prospect of division into Districts. Yet it was becoming impossible to continue with the work if no change was in the offing. Something had to give.

Entering into this uncharted territory, Wyneken urged the Synod, not just to agree to divide into Districts and hope for the best, but to reach for means to combat the prospective dangers. A “proper Constitution” would help, he said. Still more, everyone had to keep in mind that they were finally dealing not with human matters, but God’s.²⁴ Why had the Synod been formed in the first place? He answered: “The unity of the Spirit in which we stand through God’s Word and grace,” and

²⁰ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 8.

²¹ Wyneken, “Explanation,” 8.

²² This is that title that Harrison gives to Wyneken’s 1853 address, 368.

²³ Harrison, 368.

²⁴ Harrison, 370.

nothing else, that's why – with the purpose of bringing in “even more people through the knowledge of the truth.”²⁵ Wyneken said that the Lord wants to give us “the humility and self-denial of love” so that everyone would submit to the new arrangement willingly and joyfully.²⁶

Offering his own opinion about what might be done, the President said it would be splendid for the new Districts to have, in his words, “the greatest possible independence in developing all the gifts and powers they have been granted,” yet for there also to be “a solid . . . uniting of this one Synod into one organic whole.”²⁷ To that end, he suggested a “general visitor.” This visitor would also need to exercise oversight, and his oversight would be most effective if he were actually visiting.²⁸ The President of the Synod would do this. He would become “to a certain extent . . . the ‘living’ means of communication between the individual parts” of the Synod.²⁹ He would learn personally about conditions in each congregation.

Wyneken was recommending a modification in his visitation work, but by no means a cessation of visits by him as general president to every church in the Synod. And the Synod came to agree. In 1854 it charged him with visiting all congregations – now not every year, though, but instead every three – and if possible preaching in each. He was also to attend every District convention and preach there, plus go to pastoral conferences in the various Districts.

The next year, 1855, Wyneken preached at the first convention of the brand-new Western District. On that occasion, synodical unity again seemed uppermost in his mind, now within the new District arrangement. The text for his sermon was 1 Corinthians 1:10, in which St. Paul wrote that Christians should (first:) say the same thing, and (second:) be united in one mind and one understanding. Here was the basis for the two parts of the sermon.

First: Holding to the simple meaning of Scripture, the church speaks in a unified way, Wyneken said, with members feeling at home among their own. But the devil attempts to disrupt unity, first by disrupting common ways of speaking about the faith. So Wyneken's first point on maintaining unity was to retain the “churchly, established, general, acknowledged manner of speaking” found in the Confessions and “the acknowledged orthodox fathers.”³⁰ While those with the requisite gifts might well look into the more scholarly “scientific” theological writings of the time, then come back and tell the rest of the church what was being said there, in general Wyneken noted that the “arrogant spirits who will not allow themselves to descend to hear and to speak the language of the Holy Spirit and of

²⁵ Harrison, 371, 372.

²⁶ Harrison, 372.

²⁷ Harrison, 373.

²⁸ Harrison, 373-374.

²⁹ Harrison, 374.

³⁰ Harrison, 382.

the Church will not be won by becoming like them”³¹

Unity of speech arose from unity of understanding, which is based on faith. This was the second part of the sermon. The world looks at the apparently splintered church and laughs, Wyneken noticed. Yet unity is there, because Christ is there. “Because He lives in, works in, and governs all of you, because He is your very heart and your life’s life, how can you be anything other than of one mind according to Christ? How can you love something other than Him?”³² The world’s external fellowships are based on natural and self-serving love, but not the “deepest fellowship of life and love,” as in the church.³³ Christ Himself is that Love. Of course, the devil and the world are constantly around, stirring up the rudiments of division. “We must deny, crucify, and sacrifice all of this through the love of Christ.”³⁴ Finally, Wyneken said, “Why can’t we leave one another?” He did not have purely organizational reasons in view. No: “It is because we cannot let go of the one truth The Holy Spirit has revealed this truth to us in the midst of the burdens of troubled consciences // Therefore we hold fast to our Confession, as to our very life’s life.”³⁵ As Wyneken led the Synod through its early phases of District formation, he kept his eye on the ball theologically, and he encouraged everyone else to raise their sights likewise.

As the 1854 to 1857 triennium played out, Wyneken had trouble chewing what he bit off. By 1857, he had visited the ministries of only one-quarter of the pastors, 35 out of 140. This had been due in part to his illnesses. But he advised the Synod that this particular assignment to the President, to any man who might be President, was too big.³⁶ So the Synod backed off its requirement somewhat. It still told the president to visit all of its congregations, but now to do this once every six years.³⁷ The Synod also started paying the President.

Wyneken reported to the 1860 convention that he had been progressing on his visitation work, and he hoped to finish getting around to every church in the Synod on schedule, within the next three years.³⁸ Of course, by then he had taken a leave from Trinity, St. Louis and moved back to northeast Indiana, where he could pretty much devote himself completely to his presidential duties. In effect, he became the Synod’s first full-time president. And he had made that move to Indiana because he was exhausted. Wyneken had become an elderly man before his time, likely in part due to the rigors of his travels as a missionary and pastor in the 1830s and 1840s and his travels as Synod President during the 1850s.

³¹ Harrison, 383.

³² Harrison, 385.

³³ Harrison, 385.

³⁴ Harrison, 386.

³⁵ Harrison, 386-387.

³⁶ Harrison, 403.

³⁷ Saleska, 97.

³⁸ Harrison, 419.

Even over a period of six years, visiting every congregation in the Synod was too tall an order for one man. Wyneken had had a noble vision in 1853 about the President of the Synod serving as a living means of communication and coordination between the various congregations of the Synod. It just proved to be unworkable. By 1863, he was pleading with the Synod to be relieved of the presidential office. The next year, as he was departing it, the Synod decided no longer to require its President to make parish visitations, “except by special invitation in urgent cases.”³⁹ Such visitation now fell entirely into the laps of District Presidents and eventually Circuit Visitors.

For a while, though – while Wyneken was responsible for this work, and when his health allowed him actually to do it – the results were notable. In his biography of Wyneken, Lindemann saw it this way: “That our synod has pursued the Evangelical direction, which so advantageously distinguishes the synod now from the many other religious bodies, it owes to him in a very considerable measure.”⁴⁰ Wyneken personally put this stamp on the Synod, pretty much congregation by congregation.

ITINERANT MINISTRY

In late 1838 and early 1839, Wyneken had begun his work in America as a survey missionary of the Pennsylvania Synod. He made visits over a great distance to locate and try to minister to scattered German settlers on the frontier and in various places east of it. When the Missouri Synod started a few years later, such settlers were still out there. The new church body wanted to serve them.⁴¹

At first, it tried to do so through a position called “Visitor,” *Besucher*, which was even written into the Synod’s original Constitution. The first to hold it was Wyneken’s former student Carl Frincke. He was sent out by the Synod’s first convention, straight from the Fort Wayne seminary as a candidate, without ordination. Basically, he was an explorer. “His main duty was to locate the needs, and if possible, organize congregations, not try to meet the needs himself.”⁴² Frincke’s service as a *Besucher* ended later in 1847 when he accepted a call to be pastor of a congregation in southern Indiana. For a while in 1848, there were attempts to commission men who were already called as pastors somewhere to do this kind of work during leaves of absence from their congregations. But they only could serve in this capacity for limited periods of time. The office of *Besucher* never got very far in the Synod.

Next the Synod tried the colporteur, a position that could be held by a layman, “a traveling

³⁹ Suelflow, 3.

⁴⁰ Lindemann, 36, 37.

⁴¹ This section of my presentation depends heavily on the STM thesis by Karl Wyneken, particularly the summary on his pages 191-196.

⁴² K. Wyneken, 192.

distributor of literature.”⁴³ Like a *Besucher*, a colporteur also explored new places where congregations could be organized and pastors might be called. This office was utilized sporadically from 1852 up to at least 1870.

During the mid-to-late 1850s, interest in itinerant ministry picked up again. In 1857, C. A. T. Selle, at President Wyneken’s request, presented an essay to the Synod in convention.⁴⁴ In it, Selle proposed that the Synod temporarily instate the office of Evangelist, “to be attached to no particular congregation” but to “make regular circuits in a given area so as to serve as many people as possible, even if only occasionally.”⁴⁵ The Synod did not act on this proposal in 1857.

At the next convention, in 1860, Wyneken in his presidential address reminded the Synod of its responsibility toward scattered Germans, and, in his words, the need to “take care of them through itinerant pastors [*Reiseprediger*], evangelists, or whatever one wants to call them.” The nomenclature did not seem to concern the President very much. He went on: “But whether or not the matter requires further discussion, and particularly the unfortunate prevailing practice of giving a pastor to every individual small congregation that requests one, if only a pastor is to be had, I would leave to the judgment of the venerable Synod.”⁴⁶ At that convention, the Synod set up a fund to help congregations support their assistant pastors while making these men available for itinerant work.⁴⁷

All along, there had been an underlying discomfort shared by some within the Synod about the exact basis on which to send out a *Reiseprediger*. In sending such a man, would the sending body be in effect choosing someone else’s pastor for them? Should the *Reiseprediger* administer the sacraments as well as preach? The Synod discussed such questions at its 1863 convention without reaching a settled conclusion.

Clarity came a couple of years later from the Western District convention of 1865, the year after Wyneken left the general presidency. A set of twenty-eight theses presented to that convention opposed issuing a call to a *Reiseprediger* as such. That would risk tyrannizing the Christians to whom the man would be sent. It would foist a pastor on them without their consent (thesis 20). However, the theses held that the sending of *Reiseprediger* still did not violate the divine *Ordnung* of the Office of the Ministry. Even without a formal call, a *Reiseprediger* as a member of the priesthood of all believers could still preach the saving Gospel under the overriding necessity of love, which knows no law. Thesis 21 said: “If the Christian can request and authorize someone to do a work of love in general in his place, then Christians can also request and authorize someone in their place to search out Christians who lack a minister and to undertake the preaching of the Word of God among them as

⁴³ K. Wyneken, 80.

⁴⁴ K. Wyneken, 105.

⁴⁵ K. Wyneken characterization on page 193.

⁴⁶ Harrison, 417.

⁴⁷ K. Wyneken, 193.

a work of love in general.”⁴⁸

As to the administration of the Lord’s Supper by a *Reiseprediger*, the theses discouraged it. Thesis 23 said that since the “administration of Holy Communion presupposes the existence of a Christian congregation and personal care of souls,” therefore “it should not take place . . . where no Christian congregation exists and no personal care of souls can be maintained.”⁴⁹ A bit later, thesis 25 added that a “case of necessity in which the administering of Holy Communion without the divine *Ordnung* of the holy office of the ministry is perhaps conceivable but only in very unusual spiritual trial.”⁵⁰

Eventually a *Reiseprediger* “could perhaps see about a call from a specific congregation. Meanwhile, he could [and should] go on searching for Christ’s lost sheep. His was to be a preliminary work – one leading to the organization of self-sustaining congregations with resident pastors. . . . The twenty-eight theses stressed the temporary and provisional nature of such arrangements. Other Missouri Synod districts meeting that same year approved the Western District’s report.”⁵¹

Utilization of the *Reiseprediger* then took off within the Synod, from that time and for the rest of the nineteenth century. The 1884 convention heard from then-president Schwan that there were about 80 such itinerant ministers serving in the Synod.⁵² It had taken a while for a conclusion to be reached, but the Synod had come to an understanding within which work at least somewhat similar to Wyneken’s early efforts was widely being done.

1863 LETTER TO WALTHER

Finally, let me cite a few choice morsels from a personal letter that Wyneken wrote to the once and future Synod President, C. F. W. Walther. This was from late in Wyneken’s presidency, December 5, 1863.

- He said that he thought Missouri too often got stuck in “personal circumstances [and] frictions” with its theological opponents, and overall was too touchy in such matters. He thought it better to proceed a “loftier” way, “perhaps dealing more with the matter itself.”⁵³ In a similar vein, he advised a friendlier approach to people within the General Synod who were uncomfortable there and even wrote against their church body, yet remained in it. It might increase their courage, he said, “if we would acknowledge that the circumstances in which people have been educated in

⁴⁸ Quoted in K. Wyneken’s translation, 214. Also (in a slightly different translation) in *Moving Frontiers*, 207.

⁴⁹ Quoted in K. Wyneken’s translation, 214. Also (in a slightly different translation) in *Moving Frontiers*, 207.

⁵⁰ Quoted in K. Wyneken’s translation, 214, with the German word *Ordnung* from the original substituted in. Also (in a slightly different translation) in *Moving Frontiers*, 207-208.

⁵¹ K. Wyneken, 195.

⁵² K. Wyneken, 185.

⁵³ Harrison, 425.

their Christianity make it very difficult for them.”⁵⁴

- Wyneken further opined that “younger brothers” showed what he called a “rigor [that] does not have its proper basis in clear understanding and practical experience of pure doctrine, but rather in the conceit that ‘We are Missourian. We have the pure doctrine. Thus we are called to be masters of other people.’”⁵⁵
- Wyneken was bothered when additional burdens, presumably many of them financial, were being laid on the Synod’s congregations. Yet at the same time, he did not see it as very good when congregations thought quite narrowly about the Synod and its work. He wrote: “I really would like our congregations to have a great sense for all our general synodical affairs.”⁵⁶
- Wyneken also wrote that it made no difference to him “whether the buildings of our institutions are built simply or more splendidly.”⁵⁷ Later, he added: “I would be happy if all of us and all our institutions were still in log cabins.” (When was the last time you heard any synodical official say something like that?) Wyneken explained that “the appreciation for what is grand can come forth even out of log cabins, even if the body stays in log cabins.”⁵⁸ Spoken like a frontier preacher!

What I have reported here amounts to only a sample from this letter. It offers much more. Matt Harrison wrote that he thought this little letter was worth his entire big book.⁵⁹ I can see why.

Applications for Today

Synodical president as theological leader. The President of the Missouri Synod needs to be a theological leader. This should go without saying in any church body. The president needs to be interested in theology. He has to know what he is talking about when he makes theological assertions. He should be faithful as well as capable, to have theological integrity as well as administrative ability, to be orthodox much more than organized, to be reverent toward God more than being respected by people. There should be no shooting from the theological hip by the president and, at the same time, no skirting of important doctrinal issues. It will not do for a President to try and short-circuit matters and step out as a mission leader without being, first, a theological leader.

Now, a president does not have to be a theological *scholar* to serve as a theological *leader*. He need not have a fancy degree, nor is it necessary that he has ever held a theological professorship. What he needs is 1.) a biblically informed and finely honed theological gut instinct, 2.) a set of orthodox theological advisors to call upon for help if necessary, and 3.) the open-eyed realism and personal humility to solicit their advice. I began, talking about Al Barry. He is my “exhibit A” example of

⁵⁴ Harrison, 426.

⁵⁵ Harrison, 426.

⁵⁶ Harrison, 427.

⁵⁷ Harrison, 426.

⁵⁸ Harrison, 427.

⁵⁹ Harrison, 423.

a president who was in fact a theological leader without, by his own admission, being a theological scholar.

It amazes me how many presidents our Synod has had, over more than 175 years of history, who really have been theological scholars. It is at least arguable that Wyneken deserves a place among these scholars, as shown by his lengthy late-in-life essay on the free church in Harrison's *At Home in the House of my Fathers*. At the very least, Wyneken was a fine theological leader. In fact, in almost every case the presidents of the Missouri Synod have been theological leaders – and good to excellent ones, at that.

None of this is off the point of mission. As Al Barry would remind us, the message has to be kept straight while it is being gotten out. You cannot reach out if you don't know what to say. And you should not reach out by saying the wrong things. The church should be teaching all things that Jesus commanded, as part of its work of making disciples.

Utilize preachers wisely. When the Synod was relatively new and expanding, it made certain decisions – as well as it could corporately as an advisory body – about how to deploy its pastoral manpower. In general, and notwithstanding the increasing use of *Reiseprediger* after 1865, the Synod did not want pastors to spread their efforts too thin. Well before there was a Missouri Synod, as we have seen, Wyneken was already cautioning against an approach in which circuit riding pastors would range over massive tracts of land, seeing their people only occasionally and sporadically. He knew that he needed to concentrate his efforts more. He still covered an astounding lot of territory, but not as much as he had at first.

After the Synod was organized and started to grow, “Don't spread the preachers too thin” remained its basic wisdom. As Carl S. Meyer pointed out some sixty-five years ago, the Missouri Synod approach was generally that pastors “should reside, if possible, within their own congregations, where they might be able to serve two or three neighboring congregations, but not more. The future of the Lutheran church, it was held, was dependent upon thorough indoctrination and clear-cut confessionalism and that could be accomplished only by faithful pastoral activities.”⁶⁰ In those words Meyer was specifically describing the thinking within the Synod as of 1856. This general approach did not end there, though. Later, Meyer went on: “Circuit riders *were* used and *Reiseprediger* were sent out. The Lutheran tradition demanded, however, an emphasis on a resident ministry.”⁶¹ Missouri heeded the tradition. Once God's people were gathered into congregations, the Synod did not want them to be underserved by pastors who had too many of these congregations to juggle.

At the same time, as Wyneken pointed out to the Synod in 1860, it was already then a dubious

⁶⁰ Meyer, “Lutheran Immigrant Churches,” 446.

⁶¹ Meyer, “Lutheran Immigrant Churches,” 448, italics original.

– even though familiar – practice to give a pastor “to every small congregation that requests one, if only a pastor is to be had.”⁶² Now, I understand that these days, if a congregation is small yet somehow manages to keep one pastor all to itself, it may be quite unwise to characterize that congregation as being *overserved*. For one thing, the pastor may well be spending a lot of time working a second job just to put food on the table. That is, to one degree or another, he may be bi-vocational. Nonetheless, it is quite possible to ask whether that pastor has more to offer the wider church *as a pastor*, and whether at least a part of his time and effort could be made available for pastoral service elsewhere – with due compensation. For a long time, small churches located relatively close to one another have been forming two- or three- point parishes, a phenomenon that of course still occurs. It may be occurring at a greater rate of incidence today. Or perhaps the churches are merging into one congregation, or entering upon some other creative partnership arrangement. The more creative the arrangements become, the more we may need to heed the old synodical wisdom: be careful not to spread any one preacher too thin. That is not only for his sake, but also for the sake of the people he serves.

As we know, the Synod *is* contracting these days, at least in a lot of places. A couple of observations about this contraction:

First, contraction need not be a cause for sadness in and of itself. Over the entire history of the Christian church since Pentecost, except perhaps in the very earliest days, has there ever been a time when the church was not growing in some places while contracting in others?

Second, the merger of many congregations or the closing of some also may not *necessarily* be causes for sadness. Now, I myself grow very concerned if, in CID, a Missouri Synod church closes when it is our only church, say, in a given county. When it closes, we lose presence in that county, and mission infrastructure there. Trying to return to that area in the future may be difficult, so perhaps we do well to consider a re-start sooner than later. But in a county or some other locale where we have three or four churches, even the outright closure of one need not be a cause for excessive tears – IF we as a Synod are simultaneously making every effort to advance elsewhere, for example, with church planting efforts aimed where the population is growing or at least relatively stable. It would hardly be in the spirit of Wyneken just to sit back, tend our own flocks, and let things go at that.

The challenge remains these days to avoid spreading our pastors too thin. A way to avoid this pitfalls is for congregations not only to work well internally but also to work well together.

Coordination and cooperation within the Synod. The Missouri Synod today differs in many ways from the one Wyneken served. It has not only a lot more members, but also many more agencies and much additional bureaucracy. Already in Wyneken’s time, it was proving impossible for one general

⁶² Harrison, 417.

visitor to see every congregation or parish. When responsibility for visitation is spread out, as at present, among thirty-five District Presidents and hundreds of Circuit Visitors, it becomes difficult to assure that the visitation effort will be the most consistent and that its results will be the most helpful. The system we have is not perfect. Yet that alone is no reason to give up on it. It will certainly fail if we put only half-hearted effort into it.

Some things, however, do not change. Wyneken's point about remembering the reason for the Synod's formation remains valuable. Likewise pertinent are his admonition to retain established ways of speaking about the faith and his identification of Christ Himself as the ultimate reason to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

In addition to manifesting and practicing church fellowship based on a God-given unity of faith, the formation of the Synod enabled congregations to do things together better than they could do them otherwise. This has not changed over the years, either.

Conclusion

Friedrich Wyneken died on May 4, 1876 in San Francisco, where he had gone to recuperate from illness. In fact, May 4 was the date when he was supposed to begin his trip home to Cleveland. As it turned out, he went home that day in a much more profound sense. He went to be with the Lord.

As his body traveled back east by rail for burial in Cleveland, Wyneken had several funerals and several funeral sermons. One was preached by Pastor Wilhelm Sihler at St. Paul's in Fort Wayne. He said, in part, that remembering Wyneken "will be . . . a blessing to all the servants of the church and the teachers of the institutions of our synod . . . for there will hardly be a single one who cannot gratefully ascribe to him diligent encouragement, refreshment and advancement for his spiritual life and his undertakings in the office."⁶³

Shortly before, Synod President Walther had preached a funeral sermon for Wyneken at Trinity in St. Louis. Later, he wrote of Wyneken's death in *Der Lutheraner*. He said that Wyneken was a highly gifted person, a truly evangelical preacher; eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures; thoroughly experienced in the school of spiritual trials; a fearless witness to the pure and unadulterated truth and its valiant defender; a faithful watchman in his church; a man without guile, whose whole life bore the marks of uprightness and singleness of mind; a foe of all falsehood and hypocrisy, a true Nathaniel. In short, he was an upright Christian and faithful servant of the Lord, who, however, in true humility knew only his weakness and not his strength. To a host of pastors and laymen he was

⁶³ Sihler, 65.

an example, to thousands a spiritual father, an apostle to a large section of America, beloved and honored of all who knew him, one of the finest men who have graced our Lutheran Zion and one of her mightiest champions, whose name will never be forgotten, but will remain blessed as long as the Lutheran church in our country remains true to her name.⁶⁴

Following Sihler's and Walther's lead, let us remember Friedrich Wyneken, thank the Lord for him, and pray and strive to follow his example in Christ.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Saleska, 111.