

## August 1974 – A Watershed Month in the History of Risen Savior

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2014 seems to be a year where that has an inordinate number of historical events, big and small, being recognized around this nation: in June 1944, twelve allied nations crossed the English Channel to land on the Normandy beaches, the D-day Invasion; in September 1774, the 1st Continental Congress meet in Philadelphia and brought 12 of 13 separate English colonies into common cause to protest of the loss of liberty in North America to the English Parliament; in 1914 the world went to war, resulting in the death of over 65,000,000 people; in 1814 the British captured and burned Washington D.C.; and in 1964 the U.S. Civil Rights Act went into effect, finally giving all races equal rights, 99 years after the war that ended slavery in this nation concluded. The list goes on.

2014 is a very significant year in the history of this congregation. 40 years ago this month, the voter's assembly met twice resulting in a splintering of the congregation. It is not an event of celebration, but it is the most significant event other than the congregation's founding in 1908. Without it, Risen Savior would not exist as we know it today.

In 1974, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod tore itself apart over theology. The cause is much debated, but by the early 1960's liberalism, unionism and allegations of false teachings were becoming common throughout the Synod. It had been a festering sore in the Synod for a number of decades and much more complex than can be related here. The opinion of many ministers and laymen by 1970 was that the historical-critical method (HCM) to study the bible that was being taught and used at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, was the root cause. This methodology allows the reader/interpreter to make a choice on what facts were relevant to the text based on when it was written. In very simple terms portions of the the bible were becoming a work of man (human) rather than the inerrant word of God (divine). (HCM was first taught at Concordia in 1951/2 by Rev. Martin Scharlemann. By 1962 he was asked to resign for the good of the Synod because of his teaching. At the 1962 Synod Convention he read a statement to the body stating "I deeply regret and am heartily sorry over the part I played in contributing to the present unrest within Synod", and rejected the use of HCM for studying the bible.)

In 1969, with the election of Dr. Jacob A. O. Preus as President, the Synod began to take action to look into the alleged departure from Lutheran theology at Concordia. On April 9, 1970, Rev. Scharlemann, still a member of the Concordia Seminary's faculty, wrote to Dr. Preus identifying 10 aberrations "prevalent" at the seminary and recommended the creation of a fact-finding committee. In 1971 the president established the committee to investigate the allegations. The committee identified a number of heresies at the seminary, the primary being "subversion of the authority of the bible" was being taught. These heresies were brought before the July 1973 Synod convention and resolution #3-09 was approved declaring the faculty at Concordia to be in violation of Article II of the Synod's constitution for teaching "a false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures...".

A month later the seminary's president, John Tietjen was temporarily suspended, and 800 ordained Lutheran ministers and laymen formed ELIM, Evangelical Lutherans in Mission, and pledged support to the seminary professors. By January 19, 1974, when Tietjen was permanently suspended and charged with false teaching, all but five of Concordia's professor's teachings were in question. On January 21 the majority of the faculty and students at Concordia declared a moratorium on attending classes and began talks with Eden and St. Louis College seminaries to continue their education using their facilities. On February 17 the non-teaching faculty was told to resume classes or face disciplinary action. They did nothing, and the next day were removed from office and told to vacate their offices and faculty homes within 7 days. On February 19, 43 of Concordia's 48 professors and over 300 students walked off the campus and formed a Seminary in Exile "SEMINEX", and on 20 February began resuming classes at Eden and St. Louis College. Arrangements were made with the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago to provide diplomas; the first SEMINEX graduation took place on May 24, 1974.

Barely a week prior to the February 19 walkout, St. Martin's pastor, Rev. Lee Clark, was given a peaceful release to serve as a Navy Chaplain. He departed on March 3, causing a vacancy, and on March 12 at a combined Voter's Assembly of St. Martin and St. John's Lutheran Church in Easton (Rev. Clark was serving both congregations), the decision was made to call a seminarian. Rev. Richard Jeske, who was completing his doctorate at KUs school of Theology, filled the vacancy.

The timing of Rev. Clark's departure could not have been worse for the congregation.

On May 21, Rev. Jeske notified the congregations that a SEMINEX graduate, Ronald Roschke, was selected to serve the two congregations. As the graduates were being rostered against vacancies, Dr. Preus warned the District Presidents not to place SEMINEX graduates in congregations. By then many, like Roschke, had been placed, and in some cases already installed.

This appointment of a SEMINEX graduate concerned enough members that both church councils requested he visit the congregations before they voted to accept him. The impression he made on the July 14 visit when he refused to state he believed the bible was the inerrant word of God caused a number of members to contact the District President concerning his appointment. Rev. Jeske spent the next 2 to 3 weeks meeting with members individually and in small groups informing them there was really no concern with calling a SEMINEX graduate.

On August 6, 1974, the voters of St. Martin approved the calling of Ronald Roschke by a vote of 53 to 21, well above the 2/3rds majority needed to call a pastor. It should have ended the issue; instead it created more division within the congregation. Members feared the congregation would be removed from the Missouri Synod if they called a minister who was not approved and an appeal was made to the Kansas District President, Arlen Bruns, for help and guidance.

President Bruns met with the congregation on August 18. He informed the congregation that it was highly improbable it would be disciplined for accepting a SEMINEX graduate and that he had placed three other graduates so far in the district. Rev. Jeske reminded the congregation they had already voted to accept Roschke. After a lengthy and sometimes heated

discussion, President Bruns asked if the congregation would install Roschke or place him on contract.

In an unprecedented event in the history of the church, a second vote was taken to call the same man as the congregation's pastor. This time the vote was 42 to 20. So close that if only one voter had voted 'no' rather than 'yes', the 2/3rds majority to render a call would not have been met. The assembled voters set the date of September 22 to have Ronald Roschke installed.

The minority group who stayed doctrinally correct with the Missouri Synod asked a previous pastor, Rev. Edwin Berner, to minister to them. They formed a separate council and began meeting in the church in the evening. On November 17, they found the doors locked, and barred as a group from using the church building. Over the next seven years they would worship in their homes, local schools, the Lansing 4-H building, and even in a restaurant. In 1981 they would build the church on Fairmont Road, thanks to the family of Ed and Teresa Eberth who provided just over two acres of land, and an \$18,000 loan from Rev. Berner and his wife Agnes. Agnes Berner would periodically visit the congregation for worship until the age of 101. It would not be until 1995 before the congregation was financially able to call an ordained minister as pastor; up to then it was served by local active and retired LCMS ministers, contracted LCMS Lay Ministers, and when no minister was available one of the Elders conducted worship services. In 2008 St. Martin and Emmaus Lutheran Church joined together to form Risen Savior.

Today there are only five members of the 1974 St. Martin congregation still in the congregation; Robert and Eleanor Lenahan, Vicky Eberth, Randy Weihe, and April Ruzsa.

It's estimated that by 1980 approximately 40% of the ministers and members left the Missouri Synod, and over 250 congregations departed to become independent congregations or members of other Synods. The St. Martin Church that locked the doors left the LCMS in 1976 and now belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Ronald Roschke and Richard Jeske are both serving ministers in the ELCA; Dr. Jeske is considered to be a foremost New Testament scholar in the ELCA. The 1975 Synod convention allowed the Synod President to take disciplinary action against the Missouri Synod District Presidents who ordained SEMINEX graduates. Four were ultimately dismissed from their positions. In 1978 Kansas District President Bruns was admonished by the Synod President for installing SEMINEX graduates; he left office that year.