

# **“The District-Synod Relations of the LCMS in Historical Perspective”**

(A Report to the Synodical Survey Commission

by August R. Suelflow, 1960-1961

for the **Task Force on National/District Synod Relations**)

*Summary prepared by Dr. Ken Schurb (from CHI archive copy of full Report)*

## **1847-1872**

In the Synod’s earliest years there were no districts. Some strongly opposed the idea when it first came up. They feared “splintering” the Synod. But between 1852 and 1854 the Synod decided to create four regional districts into which its member congregations would be divided. (In that year the baptized membership of all these congregations was 10,551.) The Synod acted with these understandings:

- Theological unity throughout the Synod would be preserved by the general president continuing to visit each parish (a provision that lasted until 1864). The 1854 Constitution made the president the greatest coordinating factor in the church body, assigning him total supervision of all synodical work, within constitutional limitations, and supervision of all district and synodical officials.
- The district presidents were to assist the synodical president. They were given basically the rights and duties originally given the general president, including status as CAO of the district and the duty to ordain, install, and suspend.
- District lines were to follow state lines as much as possible.

The 1854 Constitution set out Synod/District functions and duties, reserving to Synod:

- General supervision of doctrine and its application in each district
- Designating district boundaries
- Handling appeals from decisions at the district level
- Home missions in areas outside the districts
- Foreign missions
- Establishing, maintaining, supervising all synodical educational institutions, including election of faculty
- Examining those who seek synodical membership, assigning theological candidates and arranging ordination, installation. (One joined the Synod, and in that act also became a member of the appropriate district.)
- Publishing religious periodicals as official church organs
- Establishing fellowship with those not associated with the Synod

Districts were to administer their own affairs. The 1854 Constitution said each could adopt bylaws necessary for its own conditions. But the synodical constitution was to be the constitution of each district. District bylaws could not conflict with it. Specific items of district business:

- Examining candidates for the teaching office, and ordination and installation of candidates for the ministry
- Home missions within the district

Until and including 1872, congregations were represented not only at district conventions, but

also at the synodical convention, by two delegates (one pastoral, one lay). Starting in 1874, delegates to synodical conventions could be sent by groupings of 2 to 7 congregations.

From 1854 to 1874, district officials were elected at the synodical convention.

Visitation circuits were established in 1866 to lessen the duties of district presidents. Circuits were created at the discretion of the districts.

In general, during this period:

- The Synod was not regarded as a federation of districts, nor did districts create the Synod. Clearly, the Synod created the districts.
- Districts were to carry out assignments given by the Synod. Article VII of the constitution was not thought to apply to district-synod relations. Districts had “home rule” over affairs pertaining to themselves, but not “autonomy.” They were not intended to protect the parishes from the Synod or vice-versa.
- The districts administered in smaller geographical units the total program approved by all the congregations meeting as Synod in convention. Ideally, the districts were to extend the synodical voice and program to the congregational level, and also make congregational activities and voices more audible to the entire Synod.

## **1872-1922**

Between 1854 and 1874, there had been an explosion of districts. Thirty were created or redefined, over one a year on average! The chart of districts looked much different by the Synod's 25th anniversary (in 1872) than people had perhaps dreamed when they surveyed the original four districts in 1854.

Districts were created by the Synod in convention, usually at the urging of the pastors and churches most affected. Sometimes a district itself suggested that it be further divided. Those on the scene proposed, while the Synod disposed. At least once, however, the Synod suggested that a district think about possible re-alignment if a new neighboring district had been established, but the Synod did not force a district to give up some of its congregations. Note also that growing complexities of district division after 1900 prompted the Synod in some cases to adopt enabling resolutions that could be carried out at the discretion of the districts involved.

Some reasons for district division given during these years:

- Too many pastors and congregations in one district already
- District too big to conduct effective conventions.
- Serve the Kingdom better
- Make “Synod” more personal to congregations and people
- Give more opportunity for involvement in synodical-district matters
- Districts wanted to give more attention to their peculiar problems

In 1874 the Synod directed that districts elect their officials at district conventions.

In 1899 the Synod stated that each district had jurisdiction over the administration of its own affairs, and that each was independent in administering such affairs.

The 1899 Handbook said that pastors who persisted in false doctrine or offensive conduct despite repeated admonition by the district president, the congregation, and the district ministerium would be dealt with by the district in convention. If one admonished by the convention did not hearken, he would be excluded from the district and his congregation was to carry out Christ's command to treat him as a heathen and a publican.

Since the constitutional revision that became effective in 1920, little has changed [as of 1960-61]. Circuit visitors are now called counselors, district treasurers may be elected or appointed as the district prescribes, and district officers are no longer elected the year after a synodical convention.

In short, there were no significant changes in the overall relation between the Synod and its districts from 1872 to 1922. Most changes pertained to internal structure of districts.

#### Regarding district presidents:

“It didn't take long for the district President to become an important ‘cog’ in the total administration of the Synod, with chief activities centering in personnel matters. He was involved in the District-Synod relationships in visitations, appeals, ordinations and installations, placement, calls, colloquies, discipline, financial and miscellaneous matters which may be termed ‘interim action.’ It should also be remembered that the district Presidents were at times called in to perform certain duties for the Synod which affected the districts during the time when the Synod did not have the multiplicity of its present boards, commissions, and agencies” [Report 2B, p. 12].

The district president's chief function was to supervise pastors and teachers in the district and officially to visit churches regarding doctrine and practice. In time the roles of the synodical president as supervisor of district presidents and circuit visitors as assistants of the district president were delineated.

The 1908 synodical convention reinforced the essential “jurisdiction” of the district presidents by saying that intersynodical matters (matters involving Missouri Synod pastors and congregations and those of a sister synod) were to be resolved through the synodical president, not the district president.

Although the district president remained responsible under the constitution of the Synod for suspension and removal from office cases, the Synod established electoral colleges at its educational institutions that could suspend or remove a professor and terminate his salary and free home.

From 1899-1911 the district president and a lay delegate from each district comprised the nominating committee for the next synodical convention.

Sometimes district presidents individually or as a group were called upon to make interim decisions on matters of import to the whole synod. E.g., the district president in conjunction with the synodical president authorized a construction project at Concordia, Missouri between conventions. In 1914, mission board was to initiate work in new countries with advice of synodical and district presidents.

Since 1869 a pre-convention committee (originally, two pastors and three laymen) met a few days before a synodical convention. By 1911, if not earlier, it involved all district presidents, the synodical Board of Control, and other individuals.

In 1893 the Synod set the size of an electoral circuit at 5 to 7 congregations. In the constitutional revision of 1917 circuit size was set at 10 churches, minimum. Also in 1917 districts were charged with working out their own circuit borders.

The original function of a circuit visitor was supervision of doctrine and practice. Slowly counselors came to be communicators promoting the synodical program to their circuits. “What was originally conceived as a highly spiritual office, instituted for the proper supervision of doctrinal and moral standards of the Synod, gradually emerged into that of a synodical agent in the lowest level of the administrative structure” [Report 2B, p. 19].

### Boards and commissions:

Sometimes the Synod created a board or commission, then an equivalent was formed on the district level. Sometimes districts created boards and the Synod followed suit. At times the relationship between Synod and district boards was intimate and well-defined, at times not.

At first all home mission moneys went into the synodical mission treasury for distribution to district boards. By 1887 the districts requested \$11,000 more than what was available, and local drives were initiated to meet immediate needs in the districts. By 1896 the districts were sending only their surpluses to the synodical mission fund. This coincided with the general time period when home missions were beginning to be regarded exclusively as a district responsibility, not one of the Synod as a whole.

The Synod split off a Church Extension Commission from its Home Missions board in 1905. Several districts already had Church Extension Commissions by then. The synodical commission received the “surplus funds” forwarded by the district treasurers, over and above what the district commissions needed. In 1908 the synodical commission suggested that all church extension moneys first go to the synodical commission, but the Synod declined to make this change.

A similar situation obtained with the synodical Board of Support and Pensions, which was started as early as 1889, but only after districts had similar boards. The synodical board received only district surpluses, which were so slight that in 1896 the Synod resolved to obligate (*verpflichten*) the districts to remit their surpluses. By the next (1899) convention little had changed. The districts had only partially carried out the 1896 demand. This time the Synod stated an “urgent wish” for cooperation. This marked the beginning of several years of shortfall at the national level, the ultimate solution to which was a reorganization of the General Relief Board at the 1917 convention. Now the board had district subcommittees whose job it was (in cooperation with circuit visitors, notably) to see that the districts were contributing sufficiently.

The tightest plan for Synod-district coordination among boards was brought forward in connection with parochial schools. In 1914 the Synod created a schools commission, but several districts already had a counterpart. The plan called for boards/committees at

Synod, district, and circuit levels.

### Synodical Educational Institutions

In 1896 the Synod received from the respective districts the institutions at Bronxville and Concordia, Mo. Grateful but concerned about additional synodical spending and other responsibility, the convention urged districts not to establish schools without prior synodical approval.

During the first 20 or so years of the 20th century the Synod and some districts essentially cooperated in running colleges. At Winfield, Oakland, Portland, and New Orleans the district controlled the institution while the Synod provided – and paid for – the faculty! But not necessarily all the faculty: starting in 1911, support for the non-theological departments at Winfield and Bronxville was to be provided by private societies and local funds. In 1904 a “college society” directly called two of the professors in New Orleans.

Throughout this time districts as such contributed buildings or substantial funds toward buildings at most of the prep schools.

### Unity and Fellowship

Original misgivings about district division – that it would bring disruption to the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace – were not completely unfounded, especially around the turn of the century. The greater numbers of districts and their increased activities at the time made for heightened independence and autonomy.

District conventions, coming between synodical conventions, served as good occasions to explore proposals before bringing them to Synod. In some cases, especially involving large expenditures between synodical conventions, the prospects were presented to the district conventions in a kind of referendum.

Synodical membership dues (\$1.00/year until 1878; \$2.00 thereafter) paid for all district proceedings to be sent to every member of the Synod, an effective way for everyone to have all the doctrinal essays and know what was going on elsewhere. In time there was dissatisfaction with the dues. But in 1899 the Synod adopted principles set down by Pieper and A.L. Graebner in deciding to keep the system.

- Concerns that the majority was imposing something on the minority were waved aside. The dues and what they funded were not a theological matter as such. This was a constitutional matter, and every member of the Synod should conform to the constitution’s provisions.
- “In our Synod it is . . . self-evident that a standing member not only receives the Proceedings but also reads them in order to keep himself properly informed” [Report 2B, p. 34].

Membership dues were finally discontinued in 1912. Inevitably, in 1920 the Synod resolved that the *Synodalbericht* no longer be issued as a periodical. Each district was to arrange for

CPH to publish its report. Any district that wanted even its doctrinal essay printed in full had to bear the printing cost.

As this inter-district communication vehicle was in demise, intra-district publications were on the rise. Schwan already disliked the idea of district papers toward the end of the 19th century, when there were only a few. He thought they detracted from coordinated synodical activities and limited the horizons. In 1911 the Synod said, "Insofar as these are not considered the official organs, the publication of district periodicals is not in opposition to the synodical Constitution" [Report 2B, p. 36].

### Adjudication

Before 1908 all appeal matters on district and synodical levels were handled by *ad hoc* committees. In 1908 Synod urged individual districts to create "confidential committees" whose job it would be to assist in cases where a decision by a district president was appealed to the district convention. This was not a group for arbitration, but for investigating and possibly helping the president reach a decision.

In general, during this time period the Synod considered itself, assembled in convention, as the final court of appeals. It was the "court of first instance," so to speak, in appeal matters regarding official synodical agencies. Otherwise efforts were made to resolve all cases as close as possible to where they occurred, beginning at the local level. The Synod insisted that the *ad hoc* committees chosen to work on cases be elected, not appointed.

### English District

The English Conference started in 1872. It approached the Synod for admission as a district in 1887. The Synod told it to form a separate Synod, for an "English District" was deemed undesirable at the time.

By 1902 relations were strained between the two synods. Missouri adopted several recommendations and clarifications that year. Essentially these amounted to a set of reasons to get the German and English speaking churches together in one Synod, for the sake of cooperation rather than duplication of effort. This step was perhaps deemed more feasible than before because by 1902 more and more Missouri congregations were using English. "A close synodical union etc., would avert also this danger, that in the enthusiastic pursuit of special interests on the part of the Germans as well as on the part of the English the chief goal of church work, namely, the building of the Kingdom of God would be forgotten, liberal practice be introduced, and the unity of the spirit be destroyed" [Report 2B, p. 42].

There was a constitutional problem: the provision that only German could be spoken on the floor of the synodical convention, which was one of the unalterable provisions of the constitution. The 1902 committee proposed, and the Synod adopted, the following:

"Synod can nevertheless act on the committee's recommendation . . . because this action lies in an area totally different from the other provisions of Chapter II. God's Word demands and sets the limits for all the other provisions of Chapter II, but paragraph 7 plainly lies in the area of Christian liberty. It would be contrary to the spirit, yea, to the expressed teaching of Synod, if one should want to put this provision in para-

graph 7 on the same level with the other paragraphs of Chapter II . . ." [Report 2B, p. 43].

In 1911 the English Synod became the English District of the Missouri Synod.

In general, during this period:

- “One of the primary functions of the district was to bring the synodical program on a personal basis to the district constituency” [Report 2B, p. 47].
- “The Synod historically has never taken the initiative nor a decisive step in creating new districts. The initiative came chiefly from the pastors and people within the potential district” [Report 2B, p. 47].
- There was a tendency for districts, originally created equal, to become grouped into two categories: independent and dependent, based on the district's financial wherewithal. Hence, a problem: “Frontier” districts were usually poor, and needed help. But at just this time, older districts were starting to send simply their “surplus” to Synod. They desired to provide for their own first, before even admitting there was a surplus. This led to more problems:
  1. Dependent districts wanted to become independent as quickly as they could, so the tendency was to sit on more of their funds to that end.
  2. Large, unwieldy districts would be reluctant to suggest division, fearing that all or some of the new districts after division might have to be dependent.
  3. Competitive spirit between districts negatively impacted work at large.
- Districts got more and more involved in their own peculiar challenges, and less interested in what was going on elsewhere in the Synod. “Eventually this paved the way for a few to feel that the Synod was a federation of districts and not a whole with parts” [Report 2B, p. 48].
- “In theory the districts were bound to carry out the assignments given to them by the Synod. However, increasingly, it can be noticed that the districts began to take a negligent or callous attitude toward synodical resolutions applying to them.” Why? Maybe:
  - Except theology, Synod had a consultative, advisory attitude toward its parts.
  - The synodical president, limited by the constitution and overloaded with work, was unable to see to it that resolutions were carried out properly in respect to districts.
  - Busy with Kingdom work, districts did not take time to carry out resolutions.
  - The system of reporting may not have been adequate.
- The relationship between synodical president and district presidents did not suffice to maintain integration between national Synod and districts. Other lines were established:
  1. Some district boards/commissions worked as “subcommittees” with synodical counterparts
  2. Synodical boards with no district counterparts (e.g., foreign missions) had liaisons with districts.
  3. Some synodical boards had no visible organizational connection with the districts, e.g., the electoral college, CPH board, deaf missions.

Recommendations to define better the relationships between district and synodical boards/commissions were sometimes brought, but the Synod did not adopt any except in the financial sphere.

- Communications between districts and between districts and the Synod were breaking

down. A “we” and “they” attitude was developing between the Synod and its districts.

- The dynamic of districts, especially the poorer ones, needing to scrap together money for home missions and having none left to send on tended to develop a sense of independence or autonomy on the part of districts.
- “The original position of the Synod toward its districts was reversed, and a new pattern was established. While the Synod itself originally divided into districts in order to do more effective work, the districts subsequently were reluctant to divide for fear that they might lose some of the independence which had been gained through their own financial and numerical growth” [Report 2B, p. 52].
- “The Synod exercised absolute and exclusive control in supervising doctrine and practice in all its areas including educational institutions. In financial matters, on the other hand, it tended to ‘bargain’ and ‘contract’ for district support in the establishment, care and maintenance of the colleges and seminaries. Since dollars and cents spelled action and work, a prevalent attitude tended to transfer a greater amount of authority to the districts” [Report 2B, p. 53].
- “Originally the most important link in the District-Synod relationship was the district President. He had the somewhat unenviable position to represent the constituency in his own district, and at the same time assist in the general coordination of and furtherance of the entire synodical program. Gradually, with an increased use of the Counselor and the development of commissions and boards (on the synodical and district level), his responsibilities to coordinate became even more difficult” [Report 2B, p. 54].

## **1922-1961** (when the report was filed on which this summary is based)

At the beginning of this section is the story that Walt Rosin picked up in his article for *Issues in Christian Education*.

### Organization of New Districts

“During the past forty years, it may be said that Synod has become more and more concerned that the proposed district have a reasonably large membership; that it have a potential supply of able and mature leaders; and that it potentially be reasonably self-supporting” [Report 3B, p. 4]. After 1922 the Synod grew somewhat more picky when processing resolutions proposing district division, insisting on clear, well-defined reasons for division and plans for the new district. It turned down a number of requests to create new districts. On the other hand it granted requests on grounds such as:

- Size or geography of the area warrants a separate district
- Population growth could best be met with a new district
- No church large enough to host the district convention
- District business too extensive – can’t be handled by dist. convention
- New district would promote greater activity by people, more money

In 1953 the Synod called upon the “College of Presidents” to set up guidelines for creating new districts, and in 1956 it urged that districts contemplating division make use of these criteria. The criteria said:

- The basic unifying principle of the Synod is the supreme authority of God's Word. “There is always the danger of dividing Synod administratively into so many small units that it becomes increasingly difficult to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 7].
- Another consideration is decentralization “in order to bring Synod administratively closer to the congregations” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 7].
- Before dividing a large district into smaller ones, try these things:
  1. Strengthen the circuits.
  2. Offer more specialized leadership on the district level.
  3. Spread out committee and board representation within the district.
  4. Try to involve more delegates in discussion at district conventions.
  5. Ask: will a new district be the best means to put talents to work?
- Outstanding mission opportunity could be a reason to organize a new District. Population trends should be considered together with Board for Home Missions.
- Great distances from churches to dist. office could be reason for a new dist.
- Consider money. Will new district be able to support itself? Build a CEF?

Thus, when districts grew during this period, they did not necessarily divide, but rather created a more extensive central bureaucracy. “Synod seems to be particularly concerned about preserving the unity of the Church through strong Districts, rather than dissipating this unity through the creation of a large number of splinter districts” [Report 3C, p. 11].

### Constitution and the Districts

Already in the 1917 Constitution of the Synod (thus affecting this entire period), the delineation of responsibilities of the *allgemeine Synode* and those of the districts (noted above, p. 2 of this summary) was deleted. Article XII of the Constitution, “Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation” replaced the previous material.

Despite the provision that the synodical Constitution is the Constitution of each district, the Synod has given approval to a constitution written by a district. In 1926, when the Eastern District was incorporated, a constitution for it was presented for approval to the synodical convention. It was approved on the grounds: 1.) that it had no contents conflicting with the synodical constitution, and 2.) a district constitution would help along business matters. At one time or another the Southeastern District and the English District have had constitutions. The latter, adopted at the 1961 district convention, “perhaps expresses a greater independence than any other District.” It says: “The District shall have supreme authority in the administration of its affairs and the conduct of its program. The District shall exercise its authority through a delegate convention . . . .” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 19]. Dr. Suelflow concludes: “There is certainly considerable variance in the manner in which the Constitution of the Synod is recognized as the Constitution of the Districts in their own Constitutions and Bylaws” [Report 3C, p. 19].

### District Presidents

The relationship of the district presidents to the synodical president has for years been defined in the synodical bylaws.

District presidents began working together as a group as early as the 1860s. Starting in 1899 they, together with one lay delegate from each district, served as the synodical convention nominating committee. The duty of handling placement of candidates was given to the “College of Presidents” later.

In 1950 the Synod resolved that district presidents should be placed on all the various floor committees of the synodical convention so the Synod might have the benefit of their experience on all matters [1950 Proceedings, p. 555-556].

Involvement in finance: In 1935 the Synod resolved that District Presidents, district finance committees, and circuit counselors be urged to see that congregations remit monies contributed to the Synod regularly and frequently. In 1959 the Synod asked them to be concerned about congregations failing to give sufficiently to support District and Synod, and to receive reports of congregational pledges for work at large.

Sometimes district presidents were used as sounding boards for projects or policies. In 1941 the Synod called upon district presidents to take an active role in the formation of the LWML by calling district-wide conventions to decide the character and purpose of such an organization at the district level.

Ecclesial functions of district presidents: The 1959 convention resolved “That we urgently request the President of the Synod to instruct the District Presidents to make the Lodge practice of congregations in their Districts a matter of special concern . . .” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 22]. Generally, however, district presidents were not involved in intersynodical affairs. There were some exceptions. In 1923 the North Wisconsin district president was empowered to deal with disputes involving the equivalent district of the Wisconsin Synod. In 1953 the Synod resolved that district presidents conduct discussions with their opposite numbers in the old ALC. In 1959 the Synod asked District Presidents to foster better relations at the local level with other Synodical Conference synods.

“Originally the prime function of the District President was to supervise the pastors and teachers in his District, and officially to visit and acquaint himself with the congregations especially in matters of doctrine and practice” [Report 3C, p. 23]. Of course, districts were much smaller then. Although this frontline work has been delegated to the circuit counselors, the district president remains ultimately responsible for supervision. [See 1998 Bylaw 4.75, which has remained basically unchanged since 1953.] District presidents have had a continuous role in appeal and suspension cases, albeit changed from time to time in its details.

### Circuits and Counselors

As noted, the position of circuit counselor was first brought into being to fulfill a spiritual function, visitation. In time the counselor came to be used to promote programs. In 1923 the Board for Parish Education submitted a resolution that the Synod adopted, asking circuit visitors to work for the creation of parochial schools.

In time, circuits began to fulfill more than the original visitation and electoral functions. In 1932 and 1935 the Board of Parish Education reported that circuits provided natural units of organization for Sunday Schools. Also in 1935 the Synod urged circuits to foster and supervise youth work in their areas. In the field of public relations, there were 550 circuit

committees on PR by 1956. Circuit committees also helped to raise funds in “Building for Christ” (1956) and, before that, the “Call of the Cross” (1941). Financial boards have frequently asked circuits, especially counselors, to be actively involved in raising funds to meet the synodical budget.

Dr. Suelflow wrote in 1961: “Under the present system of establishing electoral circuits it is possible for great inequity to exist between the representation of large congregations and small congregations. As is well known, the electoral circuit is not based upon communicant membership, but simply upon the number of parishes” [Report 3C, p. 34].

NOTE that this is no longer so. 1998 Bylaw 5.01 sets the size of a circuit at 7 to 20 congregations with an aggregate communicant membership of 1500 to 10,000.

Via C. Thomas Spitz, Dr. Suelflow quoted a statement by former President W.J. Stelling of the Western District:

“There has been great Circuit development in the last twenty-five years [1936-61]. It seems to be a good solution, for either the Districts must be reduced in size or the responsibilities of the Circuits must be increased. Circuits ought to be particularly active, and assigned the responsibilities of pursuing the work in their local areas, especially the problems of mission outreach as it pertains to the Circuit” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 35].

### Boards and Commissions

The synodical board for Parish Education was only created after several districts already had such boards. Consistently since 1923 the synodical board's reports to the conventions reflected cooperation between synodical and district education boards. In 1941 the synodical board reported that its secretary had visited with several district boards and officials. The 1950s saw the beginning of two-day educational conferences that brought together reps of the synodical boards, district boards, and the Synod's educational institutions.

In 1929 there were eight district superintendents of schools serving twelve districts. Obviously some districts were sharing their superintendents. In 1959 the synodical Board for Parish Education reported that it was sending its staff members, on invitation, to help plan for new schools in places that lacked the attentions of a superintendent.

There was close cooperation between the synodical Board for Home Missions (est. 1878) and the district mission boards (the first of which was in Michigan, 1873). Sometimes this cooperation was in personnel, sometimes in financial matters. In 1935 the Synod urged Districts to take over missions that had been up to that time sponsored directly by the Synod. By 1953 the synodical board stated that “The primary responsibility for carrying on the Home Mission Program of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod rests upon the thirty-two districts and not upon Synod's Home Mission Board” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 39]. In 1959 the Synod adopted a resolution stating the relationship between district mission boards and the synodical North and South American Mission Board. It amounted to the synodical board giving counsel to the district boards on projects to be undertaken.

A synodical Board for Young People's Work was established in 1920, eleven years after the first such district board. The synod continued to urge districts to create such boards. By 1932 nearly every district had. Cooperation was close between district and synodical

boards in this area.

The synodical Department of Social Welfare was relatively new in 1961, but early on it advocated the establishment of similar departments at the district level.

Not all synodical boards have district equivalents -- e.g., the Board for Higher Education, the Committee on Church Architecture, Foreign Mission Board. In other cases the lead was definitely taken by the district boards, e.g., campus ministry, with a synodical board simply acting in an advisory capacity.

### Synodical Educational Institutions

Districts have generously supported the Synod's institutions of higher education. Donations of land, money, and buildings have been given. (But since 1922 the districts have not had the role in running the institutions that could be found in a few cases previously with prep schools.)

### Unity and Fellowship

Looking back, it is interesting to note that from 1854 to 1878, districts only were permitted to keep sufficient funds for incidental purposes. They sent all other monies to the synodical treasurer. Also, from 1854 to 1874 the district officers were elected at the synodical convention.

An earlier section of this report noted that in 1920 the Synod ceased publication of the *Synodalbericht* as a periodical. Each district was to arrange for CPH to publish its report. In 1926 the Synod left the publication of all district proceedings to each district, but not necessarily through CPH. (If the district did not go through CPH, its doctrinal essay was to be reviewed before printing by the St. Louis faculty). In 1929 the Synod changed its mind a bit and directed each district to send its proceedings to CPH for printing. But the districts did not comply. This state of affairs persisted through the 1930s, depression years when CPH was eager for the work! The matter was not touched again until the 1959 convention assigned the College of Presidents the task of studying the possibility of establishing an official policy on the publication of district convention proceedings.

In the late 19th century district publications began appearing. In 1932 the Synod resolved that "the contents of local papers (Parish, District, etc.) present chiefly the necessary local information and that none of these papers take the place of our synodical publications" [quoted in Report 3C, p. 51]. In the mid-'30s district publications (often called "Supplements") started appearing in conjunction with the Lutheran Witness.

### Adjudication

There are 3 basic categories of disputes in which districts might become involved:

1. District-District disputes
2. Adjudication of appeals by members of the Synod
3. Cases of congregational discipline, where a congregation might have to be dealt with for having excommunicated improperly

Dr. Suelflow offered a summary of the procedures in place at the time of writing.

### General Comments on Adjudication:

- Appeals from district level decisions to synodical level adjudication reduced in number as the Synod grew larger. (7 cases in 1923; 2 in 1956).
- “Perhaps in matters of adjudication more than in any other area the proper channel to be followed from the Circuit to the District to the Synod is most clearly outlined and most clearly followed” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 55].

### English District

As more and more of the rest of the Synod started communicating in English, questions arose concerning the continuance of the English District. As early as 1923 the president and visitors of the Western District petitioned the Synod to amalgamate the congregations of the English District into the respective geographical districts. The Synod decided that such a proposal would best come from the English District and asked it to discuss the matter. (That the Synod referred the matter to the English District in 1923 has been used by apologists for the English District to claim: the Synod understood early on that any amalgamation should be freely proposed by the English District, not forced on it.) The district appointed a committee that recommended continuing the district, and the district adopted this recommendation.

In 1932 the Synod instructed its President to appoint a committee to give good reasons for amalgamation. In brief, they were:

1. Closer fraternal relations between pastors, so a closer-knit church body.
2. More unified front on the local level, including more united defense against schism and sectarianism.
3. “A diffusion into wider circles of the progressive methods in use in many of the English District churches and a quicker realization of many things for which the English District stands” [quoted in report 3C, p. 59].
4. Saving money in connection with conventions, conference, visitations, etc.
5. More unified general mission policy. No “second district” in the domestic mission field.

The English District responded that amalgamation at that time would be premature, but it assured the Synod that when it thought the time for such action has arrived, it would “not neglect to inform the Delegate Synod” [quoted in report 3C, p. 60]. The Synod responded in 1935 that the time for amalgamation had come and that the President appoint a committee to work on it and hopefully wrap it up by the next synodical convention, 1938. By 1950 no such thing had happened. The Synod adopted a resolution saying, among other things, “There is no evangelical spirit behind the contention that nothing should be said or done unless the English District of its own volition makes recommendation” [quoted in report 3C, p. 60]. But there was [obviously] no amalgamation during the 1950s.

The English District carried on aggressive mission outreach, using the Church Extension Fund more than any other district during the ‘30s and ‘40s. By 1961 it was the fifth-largest district of the Synod. Moreover, through the [then] 50 years of its history it had released some 100 congregations to the geographical districts.

### In general, during this period:

- After the mid-‘20s the Synod exercised greater care in matters of District division and creation than in the previous 30 years or so.

- “The maturing and expanding Districts, in view of modern modes of transportation and communication, were less inclined to recommend internal division than previously” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 66].
- Districts differ in geography, finances, manpower, etc. No “average district.”
- Growing independence continued to characterize District-District relations, for reasons given already in the 1872-1922 portion of this study.
- Three periods emerge:
  1. 1854-1900: coordination, intimacy.
  2. 1900-1920s: District predominance. 1917 Const. is from this time!
  3. 1920s-1961: struggle by districts to keep certain forms of independence, curbed by national administration

“It may be averred that the Handbook at the present reflects particularly the second stage of these relationships, and does not adequately take cognizance of the present status” [quoted in Report 3C, p. 67]:

  1. Relationships between Synod-District executives not adequately defined
  2. Relationships between Synod-District boards, commissions need work
  3. Internal relations of all officers, at all levels, need more delineation
- With more synodical boards, commissions, and executives, Districts have been used less for initiatory, emergency, and crisis situations.
- Deletion of the (1854) detailed delineation of Synod/district functions from the 1917 constitution may have accelerated fragmentation.
- While relations of district presidents to the synodical president have been well defined, the clarity of the relationships between boards at synod and district levels have varied, sometimes to the point of being hardly defined at all.
- Growth of districts since 1922 has increased the distance between congregations and districts. Therefore more people have looked at the circuit, but in general circuits have received inadequate attention.
- “In the Synod-District relationship there seems to be need for:
  1. Greater use of Districts in the interim planning and interpretation of synodical and congregational work.
  2. Effective channeling of administration through District and Circuit.
  3. Closer relationships between the Districts.
  4. Re-evaluation of the role of non-geographical districts.
  5. Consideration of the establishment of special criteria re district creation and division with reference to an ideal size.
  6. A definition of the objective of the Districts.
  7. A panoramic view of the Districts’ relationships to the Synod in more than 100 years of development seems to indicate that the pragmatic approach was used in meeting the problems and attempting solutions.
  8. A further definition of ‘proper channels’ where these seemed to have caused confusion and perplexity” [Report 3C, pp. 70-71].