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Scott R. Murray

The first verb in the introduction to the *Book of Concord* is “we subscribe.” Remarkably, the last word in the text of the *Book of Concord* (except the signatures themselves) is “we subscribe.” What does it mean to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions?

10 **Memories of Seminex**

**David P. Scaer, Dean O. Wenthe,
Walter A. Maier III, and Christian A. Preus**

At the time of the 1974 Walkout, two of our authors were serving at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, one was a student at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, and one was a teenager living in faculty housing on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

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Corrections: Winter 2023 *For the Life of the World*

- Page 15: Dr. Todd Peperkorn presented at a campus ministry event at College Hill Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, not Cedar Rapids.
 - Page 22: CTSFW student Aaron Wade, not Andrew Berg, appears in the fieldwork assignment day photo with the Rev. Andrew Yeager.
- Thank you, readers, for letting us know.



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Seminex at the Ha

Controversies in the church can have a real impact on families. Anyone who has experienced conflict in a local parish can probably relate a story or two about families that were adversely affected when parents and children, brothers and sisters, found themselves on different sides of a congregational conflict. It's painful, disruptive, and can have generational impact.

Take that to the church body level, and the disruptive potential of church conflict can take on striking proportions. Leadership changes, institutions are impacted, and even years later, most tragically, relationships are affected.

That's where we find ourselves presently—recognizing a particularly painful anniversary in the history of our church body.

On February 19, 2024, we observed the fiftieth anniversary of one of those family conflicts, and the disruptions that we feel from the events of that day remain with us. On that chilly February day, the vast majority of students and faculty at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, left the seminary campus and established what they called "Concordia Seminary in Exile." Their claim was that they remained "Concordia Seminary" since they were the same students (mostly) and the same faculty (mostly) working through the same curriculum at what had been Concordia Seminary, but now would always be called "801" (after its physical address, 801 De Mun Avenue).

The precipitating factors of the event are many, but the immediate cause was the suspension of Dr. John Tietjen (1928–2004) from his office as president of the seminary (January 20, 1974), the declaration by the majority of students to effect a moratorium on classes (January 21, 1974), and the action of the

faculty majority to recognize the student moratorium and to see in Tietjen's suspension their own (January 22, 1974).

While a small cadre of professors and students continued their classes, the seminary—and the synod—struggled to find a solution to the division. It proved unrealizable. By mid-February the seminary's Board of Control demanded that the faculty agree to return to work. Failure to do so would result in termination. When the deadline of Monday, February 18, at noon passed, the contracts of those professors who chose not to return set the stage for the events of Tuesday, February 19.

The events themselves did not take particularly long—just several hours. There was the vote to go into exile, the planting of crosses in the Quad, the gathering at the Luther statue and boarding up of the Walther Arch, and finally, the procession off the campus with the tolling of the bells covering it all. But the impact of those actions remains. Students and faculty processed off campus and were welcomed by other institutions in the St. Louis area (specifically Eden Seminary and the Divinity School of St. Louis University) where the seminary-in-exile—everyone soon called it Seminex—began its work. Eventually it occupied a series of buildings before ultimately being absorbed into the work of the Lutheran

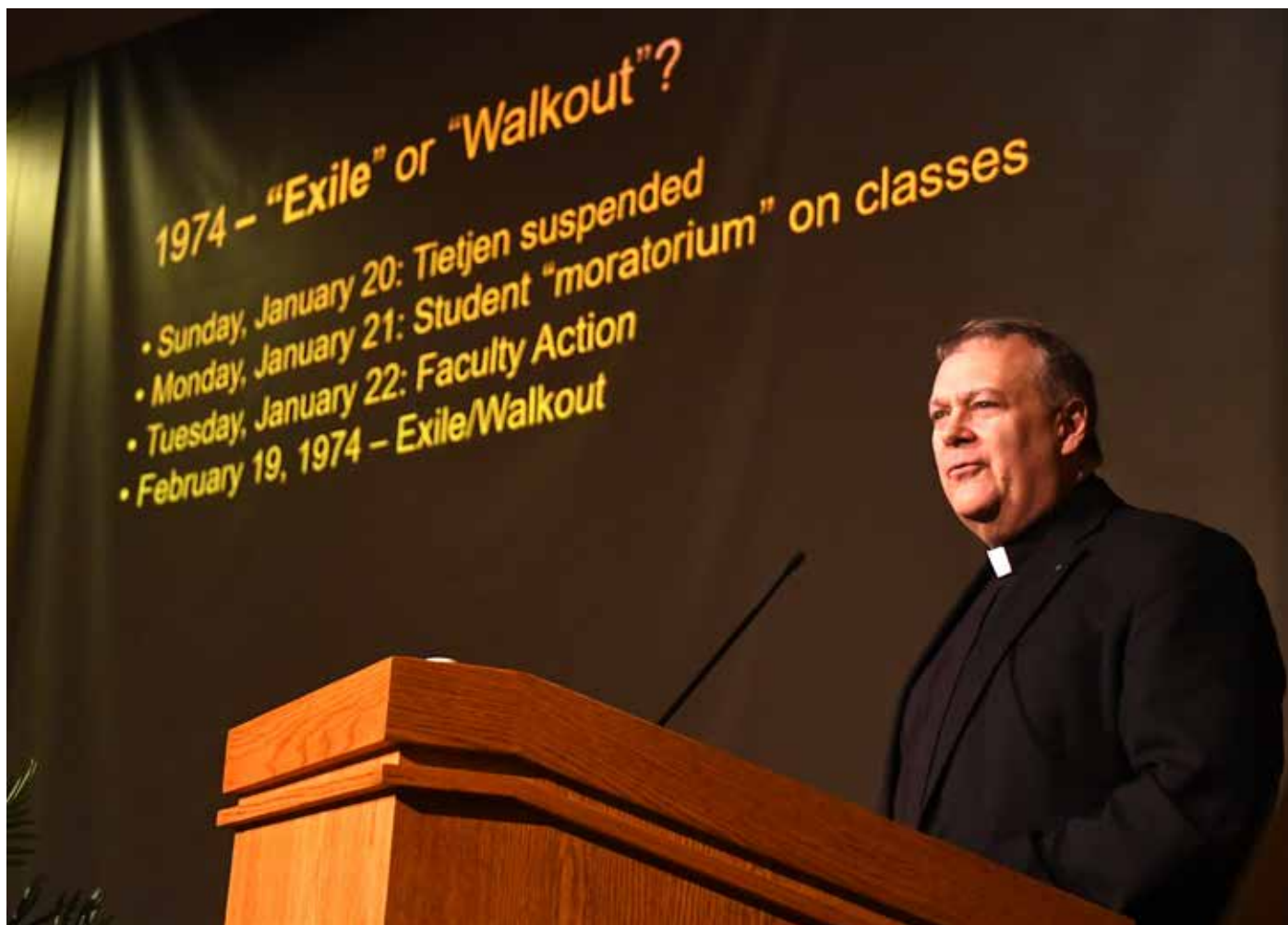


Photograph by Paul Ocbressa. Used by permission of the estate of Paul Ocbressa. All rights reserved.

I regularly teach a required course on the history of Lutheranism in the United States. When I ask the students what they are interested in learning about in the class, their unanimous response is "the Walkout." I often then show a little video of the actual event and then tell them, "That's it." But then I back up and say, "An event of this importance simply doesn't appear out of nowhere. Let me tell you more."

If-Century

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.



School of Theology at Chicago, even while retaining an identity of its own in its new home.

We’ve even struggled with how to refer to the events. Was it properly an “exile”? Some would say yes, others no. Was it a “Walkout”? Again, yes and no are the answers. Still others have settled on “Walk Off,” while others note that after the events of February 19, a number of participants did make their way back onto the 801 campus for lunch.

How one answers the question largely shows one’s commitments. John Tietjen told his version of the story in *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). The seminary Board of Control earlier straddled the issue somewhat by calling it *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1977). But the volume leaves no doubt as to where the board stood. In the

end, personal commitments will likely determine the descriptor one chooses, but in today’s Missouri Synod, most people simply refer to “the Walkout.”

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Left: *Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. delivers his presentation on *Seminex* in a packed Sihler Auditorium January 17 of Symposia Week at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.*

Conflict is conflict. It is painful and disruptive. Some would argue that the Walkout made resolution impossible. Others would say that the outcome was predetermined. It is my hope, however, that now that we are fifty years down the path from February 19, 1974, that a new generation of scholars will take advantage of the mass of materials that are available through, for example, Concordia Historical Institute and the Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, so that the story may be told more fully and faithfully for the generations to come.

then I back up and say, “An event of this importance simply doesn’t appear out of nowhere. Let me tell you more.” Many—today perhaps most—of our students were not even born in 1974. What they know of the controversy is secondhand at best. But they are keenly interested in what transpired. And I strive to put it in the context of the larger narrative of American Lutheranism, neither overstating nor understating its importance.

Because what was it really all about? A snapshot like the one just given cannot capture all that was involved in the controversy. The books that have already been written about it and the ones that are to come are partial treatments, written by people who have commitments and biases that affect not only material they include in their narrative but also the very way in which they tell the story. That is part of the challenge of doing history.

In December 1976, a number of pastors and congregations formally left the Missouri Synod and established the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Some members of my family were part of that move. Others, including my own parents, opted for

other church bodies like the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). Some—and I was one of them—stayed in the Missouri Synod. The bottom line was where we had been a largely LCMS family, we were no more. And we are not today. Perhaps the drifting away would have happened without the events of 1974, but they certainly accelerated the process.

That left us to sift through what it all meant. The last time I was together with my father, who was a church musician, and his two surviving brothers, who were both pastors/theologians, we talked about “Seminex.” We always did when we got together. And although we had strongly differing perspectives on matters of theology, I always respected them for the integrity they showed in holding to their positions and, even more so, for the effort they made at maintaining our relationship and the encouragement they always gave to me, even as I followed a path different from theirs.

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*Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. is President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. He is currently finishing a book on *Seminex*, which is expected to be published later this year.*

