

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at One Hundred & Fifty Years

1847 to 1997

The year 1997 marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of [The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod \(LCMS\)](#). With slightly more than 2.6 million members, the LCMS is the second largest of the Lutheran bodies in America with a membership that continues to walk together—the meaning of “Synod”—in much the same way as it was originally organized.

First named the “German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States,” the name was shortened to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at its 100th anniversary in 1947. Today the name “Missouri Synod” serves to tell us that our church’s long history is an important part of its identity and that it has the unique heritage of being born out of the Middle West of the United States.

From its very beginnings the LCMS has been made up of individuals from many backgrounds—a people called by God to live out their Christian faith together as a church. One group was Saxon Lutherans in Germany who in the early part of the 1800s were determined to remain faithful to the Word of God in spite of the age in which they lived. Faced with the unbelief that accompanied Rationalism, temptation and persecution became a part of their daily lives. While they suffered both in body and in spirit because of their beliefs, they were sustained by their faith in Jesus Christ that they confessed in the teachings of the Lutheran church.



Martin Stephan.

Led by Pastor Martin Stephan, these faithful Christians turned their faces in a new direction to which God seemed to be pointing them. America and its freedoms offered the promise that they could continue to believe and practice their old Lutheran faith. Landing at New Orleans and traveling by steamer up the Mississippi, the group came to Missouri. Eventually a young pastor named C. F. W. Walther was to lead them in their new homeland. Walther was to rise as a church leader and eventually become the first president of the Missouri Synod. He showed his fellow immigrants that it was the Word of God and not a particular country or form of polity that made them a church. At one hundred and fifty years, the LCMS still holds the Scripture as the “only rule and norm of faith and life” and the Lutheran Confessions as trustworthy and faithful teachings.



The synod’s constitution, 26 April 1847, Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Chicago



C. F. W. Walther.



Friedrich C. D. Wyneken.

Compassion was another reason the LCMS was formed. One hundred and fifty years ago compassion was kindled in hearts on both sides of the ocean when Friedrich C. D. Wyneken, a pastor of true pioneer spirit and concern for others, traveled the American frontier bringing the saving Word of God and administering baptism and the Lord’s Supper to God’s scattered people.

Wyneken was alarmed when he found that many believers had fallen to the cares and hardships of their new life. He wrote a plea for help on behalf of these endangered souls. His plea was read in Bavaria, Germany, by a pastor of equal compassion for the lost, Wilhelm Loehe. Loehe was to see to the



Wilhelm Loehe.

training of twenty-two pastors for service in the United States. In 1846 a seminary was established in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Today two LCMS seminaries, [Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana](#), and [Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri](#) (originally established as a log cabin college in Perry County, Missouri, in 1839), continue to send out men with compassion for souls. The congregations of the LCMS also operate a Lutheran university system, high schools, elementary schools and early childhood programs.



Concordia Teachers College
Addison, Illinois.

“Blessed, and at the same time a blessing” best describes the last one hundred fifty years for the LCMS. Through individual congregations and the organizations affiliated with the synod the saving Gospel has been shared with millions. In the 19th century missions began with a concern for Native Americans in Michigan and Minnesota. Later the synod’s attention was focused on reaching out to and gathering German immigrants into congregations. In 1877 ministry began among Americans of African descent, including the founding of black congregations, schools and later a college. Foreign mission fields were established before the century was over. A publishing house was started in 1870, today known as [Concordia Publishing](#)

[House \(CPH\)](#). By 1920 an organization that had begun as a youth society and was to become the Walther League supported one-third of the synod’s missionaries. During the world wars over 150,000 members served their country. At the same time the First World War was the watershed that precipitated a transition from German to English in worship and parochial education. The use of the German language had continued into the 20th century, while at the same time English-speaking congregations, publications and even an English district had come into existence.

Today the synod's congregations continue to walk and work together providing many of the same programs originally called for in the 1847 constitution (the education of children and the training of pastors). Naturally there is more. Today there are relief programs and care facilities for those with special needs—assisting the emotionally and physically injured and challenged to see, hear and understand the goodness of God. Organizations like the [International Lutheran Laymen's League](#) and the [Lutheran Women's Missionary League](#) pursue ministries that go beyond traditional media of radio and television and extend to satellite communications and cyberspace. All of these marvelous ministries would have been unimaginable to the synod's founders. At one hundred and fifty years The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has changed much and yet has remained the same. And that is the meaning of “synod”—walking together and at the same time going somewhere. The message and mission remain the same over time, even as Missouri Synod Lutherans go as a people sent forth by God's blessings.



Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri

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