

United Lutheran Synod in Iowa

In 1848 a young Illinois minister tucked a Bible into his saddlebag and crossed the Mississippi to scour the country for Lutherans and gather them into congregations as a shepherd would gather his flocks. This man was the Rev. Jacob Scherer, who with others pioneered what is known today in its centennial year as the United Lutheran Synod in Iowa. This is the Iowa organization of the United Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran body in the nation.

Lutheranism in America owes an incalculable debt to Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg, a plucky German who came to the United States in 1742, at the age of thirty-one. Muhlenberg, who is usually called the "Patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America," focused his activity in the Philadelphia area, where he became pastor of three churches. His spirited leadership soon won him wide recognition. He defied the barriers of poverty, bad roads, and unbridged rivers — so discouraging to the overtaxed clergy of that day. He learned to speak Swedish and Dutch, and he found time to help these nationalities as well as his own parishioners, most of whom were German.

Founder of one of the greatest of all American

colonial families, Muhlenberg by dint of great energy and gifted insight kept on making Lutherans aware of their religious heritage when they were insidiously tempted to compromise it. In 1748 he organized what is now the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the first Lutheran synod in point of time to be formed in America. Muhlenberg lived until 1787 and great was his reward for the forty-five strenuous years he devoted to the Lutheran and American causes. His motto was: "The Church must be planted."

In 1820 a national Lutheran body — the General Synod — was organized. Iowa churches became affiliated with the General Synod in 1869. In 1918 a further significant step was taken by the formation of the United Lutheran Church in America, with national headquarters at Philadelphia, when the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South were merged.

The structure of the U.L.C.A. may be compared with a democracy. It begins with the individual who joins with others to comprise a congregation, with a pastor "called" as leader. The congregations are banded together into synods, headed by officers elected by lay and pastoral representatives of all the congregations.

On the national level the United Lutheran Church in America with its thirty-four member synods can be compared, in some respects at least,

with our federal government, for it has both national and international programs of assistance, education, and welfare. The membership of 2,143,023 in the U.L.C.A. is set out in 4,304 congregations, located in 44 states, seven Canadian provinces, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Hawaii. There are 4,158 ministers, and church property is valued at \$349,132,793.

The 1954 budget of the United Lutheran Church in America is \$6,007,590. The largest single expenditure nationally is for new mission churches in the United States — churches which must be helped through difficult times or early years until they can be self supporting. The 1954 budget calls for an expenditure of \$2,206,500 for mission churches, 696 of them — an expenditure clearly regarded as an investment, and in which Iowa shares.

Foreign missionary work was begun about the time a small group of ministers effected an organization in Iowa. Today the U.L.C.A. has missions in Argentina, British Guiana, India, Japan, Liberia, Hong Kong, and — the newest field — Malaya. A key to the growth of Lutheran missions overseas is found in the fact that there are more than twice as many native ordained pastors as there are American pastors, serving the 260,251 members in the areas mentioned.

The United Lutheran Church in America also is strong in education and social work, with twelve

colleges in this country, one in Canada, and one in India; and thirty-one child care institutions and agencies. The United Lutheran Synod of Iowa helps support one of these — the Lutheran Welfare Society of Iowa, with offices in Des Moines. The U.L.C.A. also assumes responsibility for the care of the aged and for the training of youth. It has thirty-six homes for the aged, and conducts fifty-three summer camps and schools for youth, including the Luther League of Iowa Camp at Lake Okoboji.

This, then, is the United Lutheran Church in America, which traces its history to a group of thirty led by Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg in 1748. Among those thirty was Balthasar Beil, an ancestor of Dr. Alfred J. Beil of Des Moines, now president of the United Lutheran Synod in Iowa.

It was in 1848, just 100 years after Muhlenberg's historic Philadelphia meeting, that Rev. Jacob Scherer was commissioned to plant the Lutheran Church in Iowa. A minister and teacher in Illinois, Scherer learned that the Lutheran Synod of Illinois wanted a man to band Iowa Lutherans together into churches. He volunteered to visit these widely scattered settlers, many of whom were lonely German immigrants who could not speak English.

It was to these homes that Jacob Scherer came, through storm and flood, through bitter cold and blistering heat. He consoled. He advised. He

planted the church. During his first year of exploration he organized the first English Lutheran Church in Iowa, at Douds in Lick Creek Township, Van Buren County. Organization began in 1848, and the constitution was adopted on October 20, 1849, with twenty-nine persons signing the charter roll. The church, active today with a congregation of fifty-nine members, was named Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church.

A record of the day's events, after adoption of the constitution, shows that the collection totaled \$4.60, of which 30 cents was spent for a "church book," probably the one in which the constitution was written; the remainder was given to Scherer. On January 25, 1851, the congregation voted to buy one acre of land on which to build a log cabin church. The "12 to 15 members there" voted that the house, among other things, "shall be 11 feet high," and that it "shall have but one door and that a double door." Scherer lived to see this first church completed, but his health was broken by the rigors of the missionary life; he died of typhoid fever in October, 1851, at the age of thirty-five. The log cabin later burned, and the present church building was completed in 1875.

The second U.L.C.A. church in Iowa was Salem Lutheran, a rural church near Princeton, in 1852. The congregation was dissolved in 1902, after most of the Salem members began attending Zion Lutheran in Princeton.

On February 10, 1854, Pastors G. W. Schaeffer, F. R. Sherer, J. D. Schaeffer, and D. Tulles met with Judge Joseph Brobst at Knoxville to organize the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Iowa. This meeting was the culmination of six years of exploration by the missionaries, under hardships that cost the first of these men — Jacob Scherer — his life. Brobst served as chairman of the meeting, Pastor Schaeffer as synod president in 1855, Pastor Sherer as treasurer, and Pastor Schaeffer as secretary.

The formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa helped in the organization of new churches. Thus, the First Lutheran at Iowa City and Trinity Lutheran at Tipton were founded in 1855; both First Lutheran at Fairfield and St. John's Lutheran at Ely were established in 1856.

Many early Lutheran services in Iowa City were conducted on the steps of Old Capitol. The congregation was organized on April 22, 1855, with thirty-four members. A lot was purchased and a "neat house of worship" erected in 1858-1859 on the corner of Market and Dubuque streets. This frame building later was remodeled into apartments and moved to another location. A new church was built in 1894.

The founder of the Iowa City church was the Rev. H. F. Ealy, the first man to be ordained by the Iowa Synod. Ealy's name appears frequently in the records of early Iowa churches. From Iowa

City, Missionary Ealy went to Ely in 1855, where Lutherans had been meeting in the Banner Valley schoolhouse, east of the community.

In February, 1856, Ealy organized the congregation as St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ely. The first St. John's church was erected on the corner of the Christopher Fuhrmeister farm in Johnson County. In 1886 the congregation bought a nearby Methodist Church for \$250. This housed the congregation until a new church was completed in 1950, and the old church and pews were sold — for \$250.

During the 1850's many young men were leaving the seminaries before graduation to become missionaries. Part of their task was to gather statistics on the number and the location of Lutherans, a service valuable to the national organization. They frequently helped organize new churches. To aid those who had not completed their educations, the Iowa Synod encouraged self-education by assigning the pastors topics — such as "The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century" to read and discuss at the next convention.

Among these early Iowa Synod pastors was Andrew Axline, a college graduate, who came to Fairfield from Ohio in the summer of 1856 to teach school. Axline was reared as a Lutheran and licensed to preach before leaving Ohio.

That same summer Franklin Huntzinger, a miller, came to Fairfield with his family from

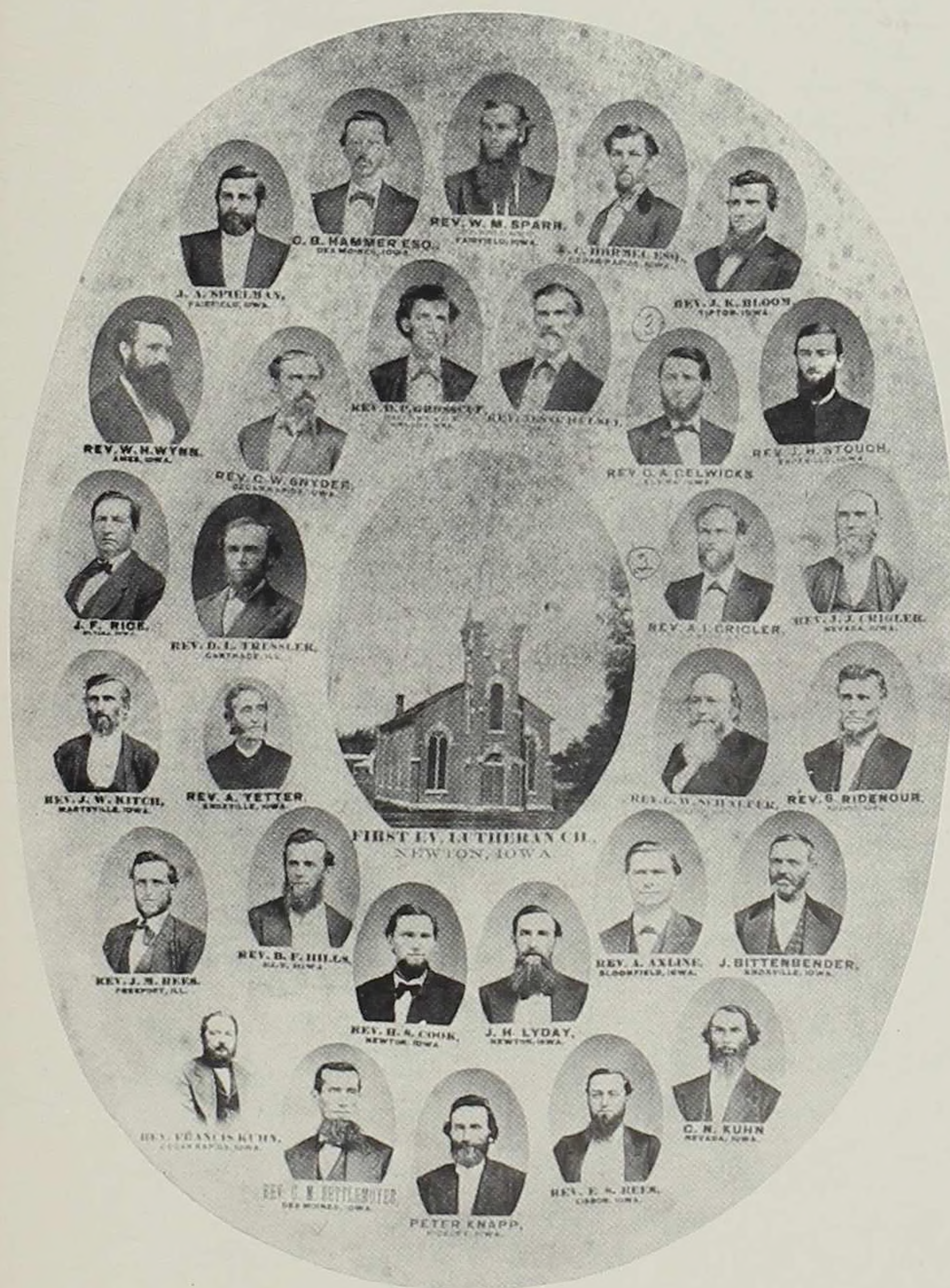
Pennsylvania. Huntzinger was deeply concerned because there was no Lutheran Church in the community. Soon schoolteacher Axline called on the Huntzinger family. During this visit the Huntzingers learned Axline was licensed to preach. Under Axline's leadership, a Lutheran congregation was organized in the Huntzinger home in the fall of 1856. As the congregation grew, services were conducted first in a store and later in the courthouse. Axline's ordination followed, and he was installed as the Fairfield pastor in 1857. Huntzinger deeded the ground where his first mill stood for a church. A year later a church was completed on the site, and Fairfield's main streets replaced the foot paths which led to the mill door.

In addition to serving as a pastor, Axline founded Axline Academy and managed Fairfield University, a private school until 1863, when it was reorganized as Fairfield College. In 1861 Axline left Fairfield to serve as Chaplain of the Second Iowa Regiment during the Civil War. He later returned to his school and church duties, remaining in Fairfield until 1874. Pastor Axline was president of the Iowa Synod in 1861, 1862, and 1866, though serving in the Union army part of the time.

Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society

Trinity Lutheran Church at Tipton was organized on August 12, 1855, by a missionary named

MEMBERS OF EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD OF IOWA



20th Convention Convened at Newton, August 25-31, 1874

EVANGELISM — CHURCH GROWTH



Synodical Committee at St. Mark's, Dubuque



Palm Sunday Accessions at St. John's, Des Moines

MISSIONS — CHURCH GROWTH



Established Congregations Transfer Members

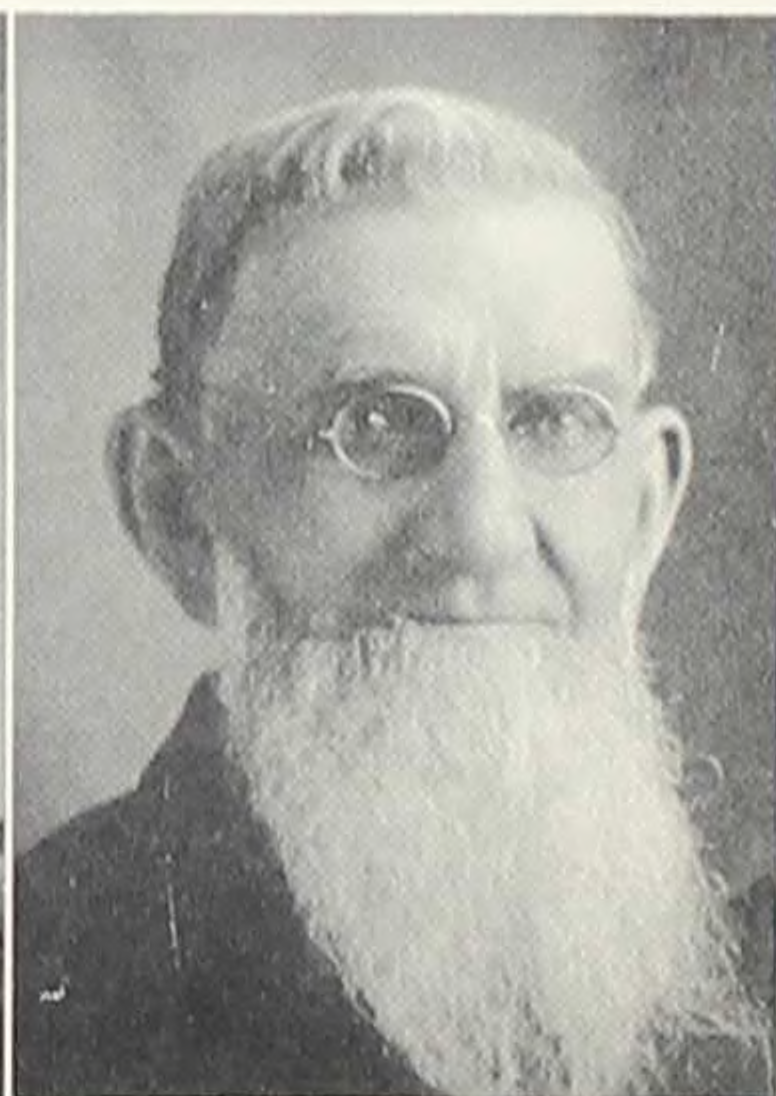


New Mission Miracle at Eldridge

HISTORIC CHURCH LEADERS



MRS. ELIZA STOVER



REV. J. K. BLOOM



SISTER SOPHIA JEPSON

OFFICERS OF UNITED LUTHERAN SYNOD IN IOWA



REV. ALFRED J. BEIL
President
Des Moines

REV. RALPH ECKARD
Secretary
Newton

JOHN BERGER
Treasurer
Cedar Rapids

REV. MARVIN SUHR
Vice-President
Webster City

Solomon Ritz. The first auxiliary of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society was established in Trinity's white frame parsonage in 1875 by the Rev. J. K. Bloom. This Lutheran pastor had been impressed by a Methodist Women's Missionary convention and he urged the women of his congregation to create a similar society. By the close of 1875, the Iowa Synod had four auxiliaries, with seventy members, who contributed about \$58 that year.

Mrs. Laura Snyder of Cedar Rapids, first state president of the auxiliary, was sent by the Iowa Synod to the General Synod meeting at Carthage, Illinois, in 1877, to ask national recognition and acceptance of the organization.

Impressed by the enthusiasm of the Iowa group, the General Synod appointed a minister to organize the national society, and called a convention to meet in June, 1879, in Canton, Ohio. A new era opened when 116 persons — mostly ministers — approved the organization of the General Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the General Synod, with an auxiliary in every congregation. In 1880, the Society sent out its first foreign missionary — to India.

Today the Woman's Missionary Society is one of the most active and important units in the entire United Lutheran Church. During 1953 its 111,488 active members raised \$105,189 nationally for such causes as missions, ministers' pension fund,

deaconess' work, and education. The Society has 3,425 active Iowa members who raised \$18,000 in 1953.

Luther League

Another vital organization of the United Lutheran Church is the Luther League, or youth group. The Iowa Synod was caught up in a fever that swept most American denominations in the late nineteenth century to organize their youths into Christian Endeavor societies.

By the 1890's the average individual Lutheran church was tending to consolidate all its youth societies into a Luther League. These leagues were organized into state or district leagues, and these in turn were affiliated with the National Luther League. In states so organized the work crossed all synodical lines, combining Danish, Swedish, German, and English Lutheran youth into one state or district League. Efforts to initiate a state Luther League were begun by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa in 1893.

Such a group was first organized in 1897, and again in 1904, but it failed initially as a cooperative state-wide venture. Among the leaders in this adventure was Dr. William H. Blancke, of Davenport, educator and pastor for fifty years. Before his retirement from the ministry in 1937, Dr. Blancke wrote a history of the League movement. Of the 1904 convention in Fort Dodge, he said:

"At this convention there were representatives from Swedish, Danish, German, Norwegian and English-speaking Lutheran Churches present and participating." Dr. Blancke blamed the failure of the joint League plan on "suspicion and misunderstanding" among the church groups. Nationally, the Luther League of the United Lutheran Church in America had 30,610 members ranging in age from 12 to 20 and above. Membership in Iowa in 1953 was 682.

One of the most popular Luther League projects in Iowa is the week-long summer camp at Lake Okoboji. The Iowa Synod rents the camp for a program combining campfires, cruises, and Christianity. It gives young people a chance to meet national and state church leaders, and to do some leading themselves. According to one leader: "Summer church camps do more to draw young people into full-time church careers than any other single factor."

The Brotherhood

The third major organization of the U.L.C.A. is the Men's Brotherhood, founded in Iowa in 1912, and organized nationally in 1918. Although smallest in membership of the three auxiliary organizations, the Brotherhood takes the leadership in several important church functions, as follows: it helps to conduct the Every-Member Canvass for financial pledges in most churches, sponsors

Boy Scout troops and athletic teams, provides the men for performing duties ranging from ushering to repair work, and sponsors regular dinner meetings and programs. The Brotherhood is open to all men of the congregation. Its national membership is 31,864. In Iowa it numbers 486.

The Iowa Synod and Education

One of the first concerns of the Iowa Synod was the establishment of a college in Iowa. In a synod meeting held at Knoxville on May 24, 1855, the delegates approved a resolution to establish "an institution for the education of youth" to be called "Central College of Iowa." The resolution expressed concern for the fact that "God in His providence is now throwing a very large number of Lutherans from the Eastern states into Iowa," and suggested that the college be located at Fort Des Moines if possible, thus making it the "most western college in the United States." The minutes also reported the selection of the Rev. Reuben Weiser of Pennsylvania as college president.

At the annual meeting in May, 1856, President Weiser reported that a building had been started on "college hill" west of Fort Des Moines, and that residents of Iowa's future capital city had subscribed \$10,000 toward the building fund. The cornerstone was laid following the meeting on May 21. Unfortunately, the Panic of 1857 created difficult building problems.

At the state conventions of 1858 and 1859, church executives presented a gloomy picture. The college was unable to meet its debts, church memberships were falling, and financial strength was waning. Ministers were receiving little or no salary. Annual salaries at the time ranged anywhere from \$49 to \$800, but eight of the ten salaries reported in 1859 were under \$500. In 1860 Central College was sold to the Baptists of Iowa. In the early 1900's the buildings and grounds were sold to the Catholic Church. Dowling High School is located where Central College stood.

The U.L.C.A. then purchased a school at Albion from the Marshall County High School Company, with the intention of making it over into a theological seminary; but lost this school, called Iowa Lutheran College, in 1870. One reason the synod probably did not hold on was that Carthage College was founded in Carthage, Illinois, that year, and it was felt this school would serve the educational needs of Iowa.

Thus, while there is no U.L.C.A. college in Iowa today, Iowa Synod gives its support to the general educational program of the U.L.C.A. by including Carthage College and Central Seminary at Fremont, Nebraska, in its annual budget. In 1954 this amounted to \$16,500 for Carthage and \$10,755 for Central.

In performing its educational work, the Iowa Synod is one of six Iowa Lutheran bodies of the

National Lutheran Council which cooperates in sponsoring Lutheran student organizations at four non-Lutheran colleges in Iowa: Iowa State College, the State University of Iowa, Drake University, and Iowa State Teachers College.

Deaconess Training Program

Another important phase of the church in education is the deaconess training program. A deaconess may serve as a social worker in a single congregation, do nursing in a Lutheran institution if she is a trained nurse, teach, or do foreign mission work. A deaconess carries the title of "sister." She may marry, but she relinquishes her deaconess post when she does.

This new field of Lutheran work opened more than a century ago when Dr. William A. Passavant observed the work of deaconesses in Europe and brought the idea to America. The U.L.C.A. has two deaconess motherhouses, or training schools, in Philadelphia and Baltimore.

One of the earliest leaders in the deaconess program was a Des Moines woman, Sophia Jepson, now retired. Sister Sophia was consecrated in 1895, and was directing sister of the Baltimore motherhouse from 1903 to 1932. Another Des Moines woman, now a deaconess serving an Akron, Ohio, church is Sister Jane Wirt. Sister Harriet M. Franklin, formerly of Fairport, Iowa, now is on the staff of the Baltimore motherhouse.

The growth of the Iowa Synod of the U.L.C.A. has been steady, with a great spurt in membership over the last ten years. In 1860 there were 45 churches and 1,179 members in Iowa, but the number of churches dropped to 27 by 1879, with 1,191 members. In 1903, the synod had a baptized membership of 3,278. By 1923 the baptized membership had risen to 9,565, and by 1933 it had almost doubled — 18,862. Today the Iowa Synod has 34,044 baptized members — representing a gain of more than 10,000 in the last ten years — and 37 churches served by 41 pastors. There are 19 other ministers on the synodical roll serving in other capacities. The largest congregation in the Iowa Synod is that of St. John's in Des Moines, with a baptized membership of 6,159.

The 1954 budget for the synod is \$159,173. The giving allotment per adult member now stands at \$10.32. Much of the United Lutheran Church growth both in Iowa and the nation is accomplished through mission churches organized in unchurched areas through the combined efforts of lay leaders and synodical officers.

Two mission churches were organized in Iowa in 1953: St. Matthew Church at Davenport, with 72 adult charter members; and Faith Church at Eldridge, with 234 adult charter members. The newest mission congregation is that of St. James Church at Bettendorf, organized on March 7, 1954, with 106 adult members. It is being called

the "centennial church" because it was taken into membership at the Synod's state-wide centennial convention at Davenport in May of that year. Other areas now being considered as possible locations for mission churches are Urbandale (northwest Des Moines), Cedar Rapids, and Camanche. All three of the missions organized during 1953-1954 have pastors and have begun their own building programs. They will be partly supported by the Board of American Missions of the U.L.C.A. and partly by the Iowa Synod until the congregations can manage alone.

Although the Iowa Synod does not have a home for the aged in Iowa, it helps in the support of the Tabitha Home, a residence for the aged and for homeless children, located at Lincoln, Nebraska. The synod also helps to support the Nachusa Lutheran Home for Children at Nachusa, Illinois.

Both the Iowa Synod and its parent organization — the U.L.C.A. — maintain the vital interests of Christianity by activity in national as well as international interdenominational organizations. The U.L.C.A. is a member of the National Lutheran Council, the National Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches. It confidently cooperates with these and other powerful church alliances in the spread of the Gospel.

MARY QUALLEY