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BRIEF STUDIES

LUTHERANS OF AMERICA TOP 8 MILLION IN MEMBERSHIP

On August 15 the News Bureau of the National Lutheran Council issued the following statistics: Membership of the Lutheran churches in North America passed the eight-million mark in 1958.

A total of 8,090,043 Lutherans in the United States and Canada was reported here in the annual statistical summary issued by the National Lutheran Council. The total marked a gain of 223,723 members or 2.84 per cent during the past year, somewhat less than the average increase of about 3.3 per cent over the past decade.

Comprising the third largest Protestant denominational grouping in America, the Lutheran churches are exceeded in numbers only by the Baptists and the Methodists. The United States has 7,839,894 Lutherans, and Canada has 250,149. The latter are affiliated with parent bodies in the United States.

The Council's summary is based on statistics supplied by 16 Lutheran church bodies, plus the Negro missions conducted by four groups associated in the Lutheran Synodical Conference. Thirteen of the bodies recorded increases in membership, two reported no change, and two suffered a loss. All submitted reports this year.

The eight bodies that participate in the National Lutheran Council—United, Evangelical, American, Augustana, Lutheran Free, United Evangelical, Suomi Synod, and American Evangelical—have 5,362,008 baptized members. The Synodical Conference—consisting of the Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Slovak Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Synod, with Negro Missions—has 2,703,275 members. Four independent bodies—National Evangelical, Finnish Apostolic, Lutheran Brethren, and Eielson Synod—total 24,760 members.

The gain in baptized membership of 223,723 in 1958, distributed among the 17,714 congregations, represents an average increase of 12.6 new members per local church. In the two previous years (1956 to 1957) the gain was 14, slightly higher than the average for the past decade. Confirmed or adult membership advanced by 128,254 to a grand total of 5,345,084, a gain of 2.5 per cent. This would indicate an average accession of 7.2 adult members per congregation in 1958, about the average of the past 10 years.

For the 14th consecutive year the highest numerical increase was made by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and among the

major bodies it also showed the greatest gain on a percentage basis. The synod added 86,974 baptized members, or 3.9 per cent, to boost its total membership to 2,315,107. Over the past 14 years it has added 874,736 members, an average of 62,481 annually. The Missouri Synod is the second-largest Lutheran body in America and one of four with more than a million members.

The top-ranking United Lutheran Church in America reported a net increase of 44,181, or 1.8 per cent, for a total of 2,439,792 members. The third-place Evangelical Lutheran Church gained 36,312, or 3.4 per cent, to 1,119,121. The American Lutheran Church added 32,245, or 3.3 per cent, and passed the million mark to 1,005,174 members, the fourth largest Lutheran group.

The greatest gain percentage-wise of any body, regardless of size, was recorded by the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America. However, its increase of 625, or 14.8 per cent, to 4,845 members covers a two-year period. Next highest was the National Evangelical Lutheran Church with a gain of 914, or 9.6 per cent, to 10,414 members.

Other gains were reported as follows:

Augustana Lutheran Church, 14,909, or 2.6 per cent, to 591,107; Joint Synod of Wisconsin, 3,798, or 1.1 per cent, to 346,790; Lutheran Free Church, 2,944, or 3.8 per cent, to 80,248; United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2,403, or 3.7 per cent, to 67,032; American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 528, or 2.3 per cent, to 23,571; Evangelical (formerly Norwegian) Lutheran Synod, 403, or 3 per cent, to 14,004; and Negro Missions, 14, or 0.2 per cent, to 7,443.

The Eielsen Synod reported 1,500 members and the Finnish Apostolic Church 8,001 members, the same figures as the previous year.

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, or Suomi Synod, showed a decrease of 2,318, or 6.1 per cent, to lower its membership to 35,963, while the Slovak Church dropped 209, or 1 per cent, to 19,931.

In the field of parish education, the churches enrolled a record total of 3,838,399 pupils, 112,465 more than in 1957. Sunday schools gained 14,447 pupils, vacation Bible schools 86,018, released-time schools 1,590, and parochial schools 10,410.

Sunday schools had 2,556,743 pupils in 17,200 schools served by 300,446 teachers; vacation Bible schools had 991,165 pupils in 11,314 schools with 95,955 teachers; released-time schools had 118,569 pupils

in 1,981 schools with 8,355 teachers; and parochial schools had 171,922 pupils in 1,668 schools with 6,007 teachers.

In all but one instance there was a marked increase in the number of pupils, teachers, and schools in these respective areas of education. The exception was in the number of Sunday schools, where a decrease of 102 schools was reported.

Most of the parochial or Christian day schools are conducted by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod with 1,267. Others are sponsored by the Wisconsin Synod with 215, the American Lutheran Church with 80, the Evangelical Lutheran Church with 39, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod with 15, the United Lutheran Church with 10, the Slovak Church with 2, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and National Evangelical Lutheran Church with 1 each. In addition, 38 schools are operated jointly as part of Negro Missions.

The number of ordained Lutheran pastors rose to 17,969, an increase of 474 over 1957. Of these, 13,295, or 429 more than the previous year, were serving in pastorates during 1958.

The number of congregations totaled 17,714, a net gain of only two, while the number of preaching places decreased by 12 to 400. The addition of only two congregations, and the drop in Sunday schools and preaching places, is attributed largely to the increasing merger of local churches both within and beyond synodical boundaries.

Property valuation showed an increase of \$128,765,408, or 7.8 per cent, to a grand total of \$1,784,932,631.

At the same time, indebtedness increased by \$30,758,189, or 11.2 per cent, to a total of \$306,035,927. In 1945 church debts amounted to \$14,656,131, but the trend has been sharply upward every year since then, reflecting the postwar building boom and mounting costs.

In congregational finances, expenditures by the churches for local expenses increased by \$19,673,638 to a total of \$313,195,378. Contributions to church work at large showed an increase of \$5,949,045 and reached \$76,256,976. Total expenditures amounted to \$389,452,354, a gain of \$25,622,683 over 1957.

A separate compilation of statistics for the Lutheran churches in Canada, included in the foregoing figures, revealed that Canada has 250,149 baptized members, and 158,280 confirmed or adult members. They are served by 1,052 congregations and 81 preaching places. The clerical roll consists of 636 pastors, of whom 518 are serving congregations.