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# THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

FROM THE NATIONAL  
LUTHERAN COUNCIL —

## NLC HELD "MIGHTY INSTRUMENT IN THE HANDS OF GOD" FOR LUTHERAN UNITY

New York.—The half century spanned by the National Lutheran Council was described here during its final annual meeting as "perhaps the most explosive period of civilization" in history. Setting the Council's creation and activity against the backdrop of global developments during the last five decades was Dr. Donald R. Heiges, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminaries at Gettysburg and Philadelphia. The former staff executive drew attention early in his address to two world wars and several other historical events, contending that "only within such a context can the life and work of the Council be understood and assessed." He spoke before a dinner gathering of more than 100 persons, composed chiefly of councillors, staff personnel, and guests.

As the 48th and final annual meeting of the cooperative agency, the 3-day session was marked by steps to transfer much of its current program of activity to the new Lutheran Council in the United States of America. Scheduled to begin operations next January as the successor to the NLC, the LCUSA will embrace the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. Only the LCA and the ALC participate in the present agency.

After pointing to the creation of the Council on Sept. 6, 1918, Dr. Heiges held that its history falls into three stages, "although judgments differ concerning the beginning and ending of each stage."

"The first two decades," the former executive secretary of the NLC Division of College and University Work said, "have usually

been characterized in terms of 'rise and decline,' and correctly so."

"Enthusiasm ran high in the early years because of the great outpouring of compassion and gifts for overseas work following World War I," he explained, noting more than \$7,000,000 in material and cash contributions for relief, reconstruction, and orphaned missions between 1919 and 1925. It was primarily because of this work in almost a score of countries, he said, that the Lutheran World Convention, the forerunner of the present Lutheran World Federation, came into being in 1923. "Activity became limited to the domestic scene, however, in the late twenties," he continued, "and suffered greatly for lack of funds during the depression years of the thirties . . . and because of a resurgence of institutional loyalty and anxiety."

The second stage in its history was attributed by the seminary president and councillor to heightening international tensions in the late thirties. "With the launching of Lutheran World Action (the annual financial appeal of the Council) in 1940," he said, "what might be called the 'golden age' of the Council swept on through World War II, gave birth to a new domestic program, and moved into far-flung international involvements which captured the imagination and support of Lutherans as never before in history." Budgets grew "from \$30,000 in 1938 to \$1,450,000 in 1958," he said, and the Lutheran World Federation, an international agency of 42 member churches with more than 52 million members around the globe, was established in 1947.

"Finally a third period began to emerge in 1959—60, which can be characterized in terms of consolidation and anticipation," he said. "Practically no part of the program could any longer be labeled 'emergency.'

Cooperative action was here to stay, and on an astonishingly wide scale."

He then noted that the Council's eight participating church bodies had been reduced to two churches through mergers and that "theological conversations eventuated in sufficient consensus" to undertake the planning for the LCUSA.

Dr. Heiges also touched on various aspects of the work of the Council and its related agencies. Among them were special ministries to temporary communities, displaced persons, and military families in civilian communities; home missions, college and university work, military chaplaincy and services to armed forces personnel, public relations, welfare, immigration and refugee services, and others.

Statistically, he pointed out that the aggregate of Lutheran World Action contributions has exceeded \$80,000,000 for needs in

80 countries and that 1,184,000,000 pounds of material aid, valued at \$172,000,000, has been distributed through Lutheran World Relief, an agency serving the NLC and the LC-MS Board of World Relief.

Heiges told the gathering that three "great achievements" have highlighted the Council's history:

"The National Lutheran Council has been a monumental response to human needs the world around, and out of such response have come strength and a sense of destiny.

"The National Lutheran Council has been a mighty instrument in the hands of God to bring together the scattered members of the Lutheran family.

"The National Lutheran Council has been the theater in which faithful and dedicated persons have played roles, both small and great, to the glory of God and the realization of His purposes among the children of men."