

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne For the Life of the World

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Seminary Past

By Cameron A. MacKenzie

Seminary Present

By Charles A. Gieschen

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By Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Seminary

What now? That was the question that Pastor Wilhelm Loehe had to answer. What was he supposed to do now?

A few months earlier, in January 1841, he had published an article based on reports from missionary F. C. D. Wyneken about the deplorable conditions of German immigrants in America—no churches, services, catechism instructions or baptisms! Without Lutheran pastors, there was a real risk that they might fall prey to the frontier’s false prophets and so with their descendants be lost to Lutheranism—maybe even Christianity—forever! So people had responded to Loehe’s plea by sending money to do something about the situation. But what?

The answer to Loehe’s question—and prayer—arrived in the form of a person, who appeared at Loehe’s door with the simple request, “Send me.” His name was Adam Ernst, a shoemaker by trade and a pious man with good catechetical instruction. Moved by Wyneken’s report, he was ready to leave home for America to assist in the work of establishing the Lutheran Church on the frontier—the wilds of Ohio and Indiana and Michigan.

Shortly thereafter, another volunteer showed up, George Burger, a weaver, and Loehe had a second candidate for mission work in America. In less than a year they were “ready,” and off they went in July 1842

with instructions about working among the immigrants while remaining fully committed to the Lutheran Confessions as a correct summary of God’s Word. Over the next decade or so Loehe and his colleagues would send about 80 more “emergency helpers” to America. Most of them would join The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Originally, the plan was to train men as helpers for pastors, as teachers and catechists. However, reports from the field soon convinced Loehe that what was needed was pastors, so Loehe began training more men for pastoral ministry. He also realized that there was a need for training in America, so he began to support an already-existing Lutheran seminary in

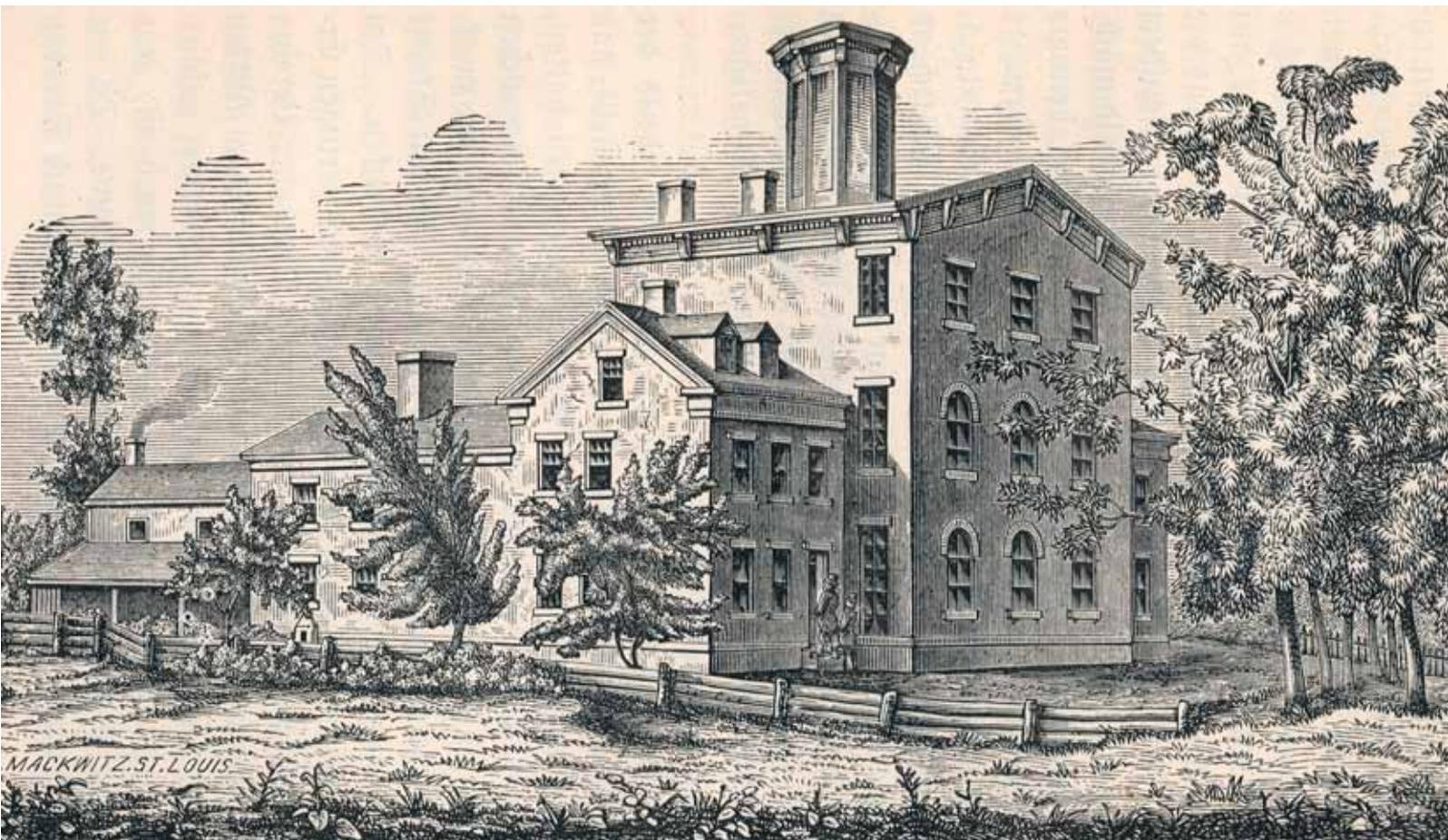
Columbus, Ohio, and directed students to that institution. Unfortunately, this arrangement lasted just a brief time, since the seminary and its sponsor, the Ohio Synod, were struggling over just how “Lutheran” they wanted to be—and the advocates of confessional Lutheranism appeared to be losing. So Loehe looked for an alternative arrangement.

Along with Wilhelm Sihler, pastor of St. Paul’s in Fort Wayne, Loehe decided to establish a *truly*



Past

by Cameron A. MacKenzie



Left: *portrait of the young F. C. D. Wyneken and the first two pages of Aufruf an die lutherische Kirche published by Pastor Wilhelm Loehe in 1841 describing the deplorable conditions of German immigrants in the 1800s.*

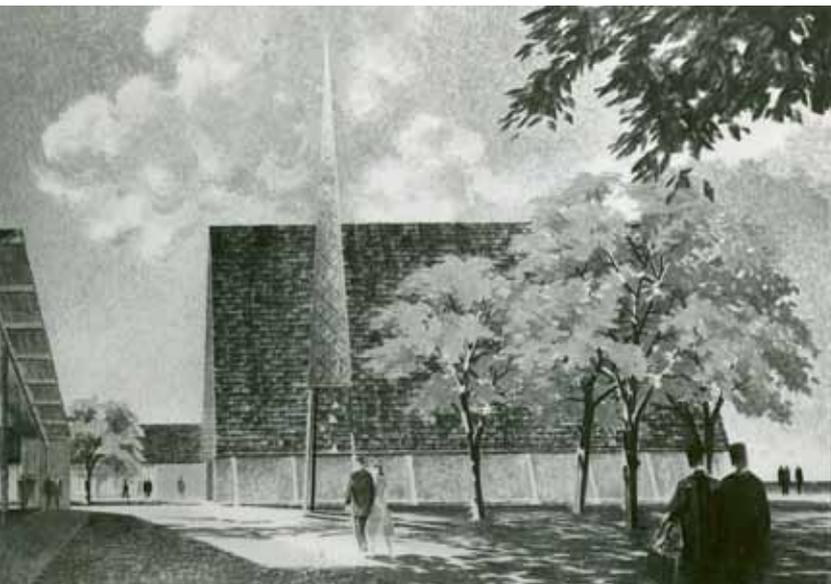
Above: *Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., circa 1860.*

Lutheran seminary on the American frontier. He recruited and then sent 11 students and a teacher. By the fall of 1846, they had safely arrived in Fort Wayne and classes had begun. This was the birth of Concordia Theological Seminary.

Just about the same time, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was taking shape, and Wilhelm Sihler again was playing a major role. When the new synod met for the first time in the spring of 1847, Sihler and Loehle’s men combined with Lutherans originally from Saxony (in Germany), led by C. F. W. Walther, to create a church body with solid biblical and confessional commitments. Sihler offered the Fort Wayne seminary to the Missouri Synod, contingent upon Loehle’s approval (which soon arrived), and the new church body had its first seminary!

Much has changed since then, of course, but Concordia Theological Seminary has remained an integral part of the Missouri Synod’s system for training future pastors. For much of its history, it was the “practical seminary.” This meant that—just as

Concept drawing of Concordia Senior College now the Concordia Theological Seminary campus.



its founders had begun—it continued to recruit older students with less formal theological education but with considerably more life experience. Their training included whatever general education was necessary as well as courses in Bible and doctrine, preaching, teaching and everything else that effective yet faithful pastoral ministry required.

Synod’s other seminary, located in St. Louis, developed a different kind of program. Its students were recruited as young teenagers and were required

to undergo many years of training, especially in biblical languages. Eventually, the Missouri Synod developed a network of “prep” schools to prepare young men for the St. Louis seminary. On account of its emphasis on formal education, it was known as the “theoretical seminary.”

After World War II, the practical seminary proved its usefulness once again and provided many pastors for a rapidly growing synod in the late 1940s and 50s. But by the 1960s, synodical expectations for the training of its clergy were changing. The Springfield seminary terminated its pre-seminary program and began to require a bachelor’s degree for admission. For its part, the St. Louis seminary began to accept students who did not have the full prep school training.

At the same time, the Missouri Synod was beginning to polarize theologically with the Springfield seminary generally maintaining a more traditional position. By 1973 the difficulties resulted in the synod convention condemning the doctrinal position of the faculty majority at St. Louis as “false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures.”

When the dust began to settle, the Missouri Synod still had two seminaries but neither of them was what it had been before. The faculty majority had walked out of the St. Louis seminary early in 1974. This gave Synod the opportunity to reconstitute it on the basis of more traditional theological principles. Synod relocated CTS to Fort Wayne in 1976. Here it completed the transition from a practical, non-degree pastoral training program to a more academic one with biblical language requirements and a Master of Divinity degree as the standard outcome.

The seminary’s history did not end in 1976. In 2003, it initiated a graduate level deaconess training program; and in 2008, it began to train men (mainly by means of internet-based courses) as Specific Ministry Pastors. The seminary also broke ground on a new library in 2009. Now almost completed, the new structure demonstrates God’s continued care for the seminary in providing the resources needed for the school to continue its work of training pastors and deaconesses for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. 🏰

The Rev. Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie (Cameron.MacKenzie@ctsfw.edu) serves as chairman of Historical Theology and The Forest E. and Frances H. Ellis Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

