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For the Life of the World

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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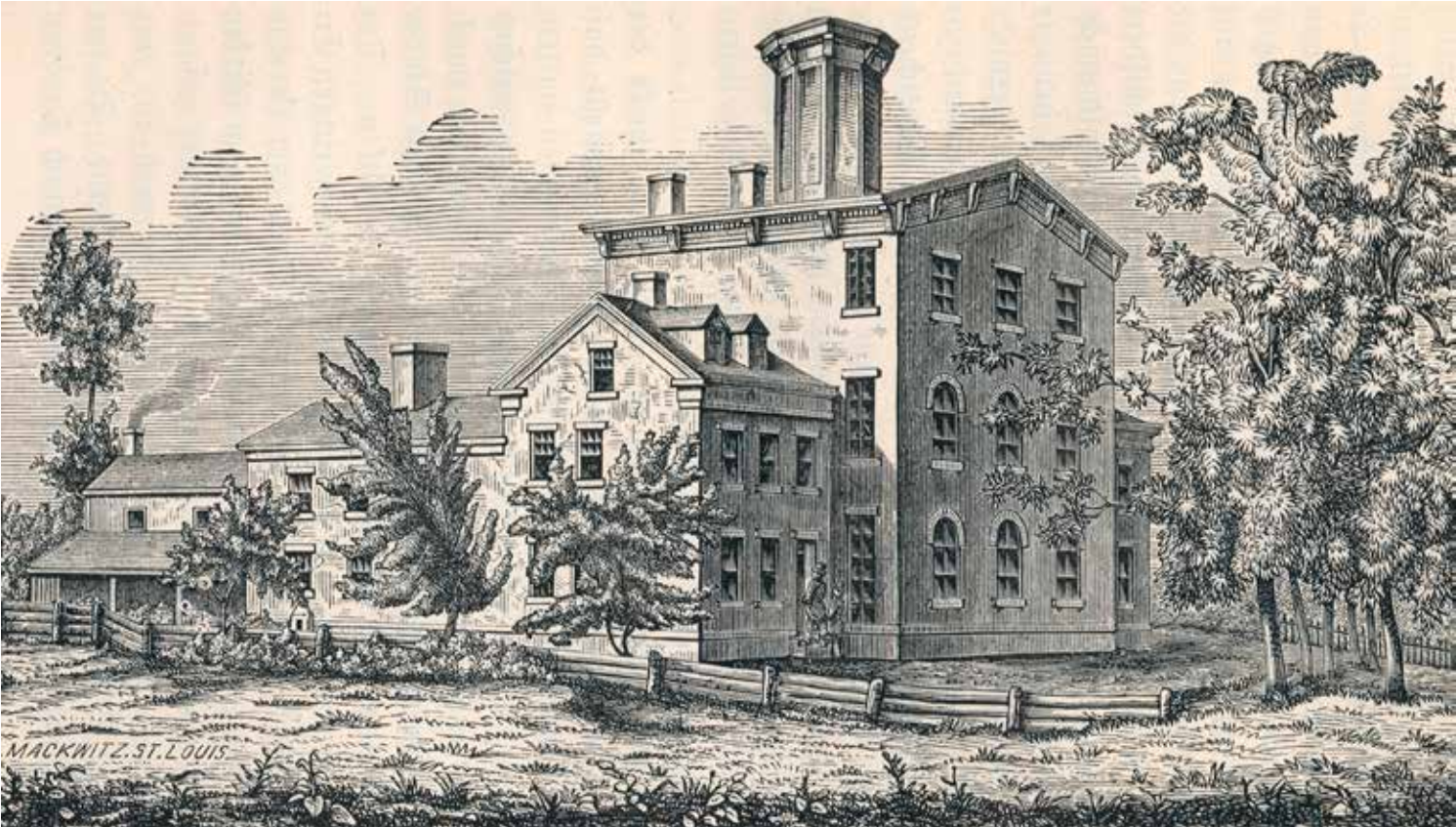
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Looking at Lutheranism today, one would ask how have we gotten where we are? What factors have helped us to become a worldwide reality? How has our identity been nurtured over time? Any answers provided would have to include the contribution of CTSFW. There can be no doubt over the Seminary’s pivotal role in the inculcation of Lutheran identity among people both here in North America and in all other continents. Our Seminary has become a hub in which foreign and national students converge and leave fully loaded with theological fuel.

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“Oh, Give Thanks



There were already plenty of Lutheran seminaries in the United States when Concordia Theological Seminary was founded in 1846. There were already plenty of Lutheran synods in the United States when The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was founded in 1847. So why bother? Simply put, because the confession of the biblical Gospel was at stake.

American Lutheranism was at a crossroads in the mid 1840s. The confessional pietism of the early synods (e.g., the Pennsylvania ministerium founded in 1748) had given way to a more radical expression of Lutheranism. “American Lutheranism” questioned the applicability of the sixteenth-century Lutheran Confessions as contained in the *Book of Concord* of 1580 to

the American setting without major adjustment and even correction. As Lutheran seminaries began to appear like mushrooms, they all grappled with the question of Lutheran confessional identity and application.

The oldest truly functioning Lutheran seminary was the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, founded in 1826. Set in the town that a

to the Lord!”

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.



future Civil War would make famous, Gettysburg pushed the envelope of Lutheran identity, arguing that unless Lutheranism accommodated its theology to prevailing American Evangelical Protestant assumptions, it would quickly cease to exist. Other seminaries quickly followed, including Lutheran Southern Seminary (founded 1830 in Pomaria, South Carolina, but eventually settling in Columbia, South Carolina), and the Ohio Synod’s Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary (founded in 1830 in Canton, Ohio, but moving shortly thereafter to Columbus, Ohio).

As the 1830s gave way to the 1840s, questions about the relationship of the contemporary church to the historic Confessions confronted Lutheranism in the United States. Among those driving the church into a more robust confessional subscription and practice were immigrants, both individuals and groups, who made their way to the American Midwest. Among them were a group of just over 650 (mainly from Saxony) who, in 1839, founded their Log Cabin College, which grew into today’s Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Earlier, in 1838, Friedrich Wyneken had arrived in Fort Wayne and immediately realized the twofold (at least!) challenge facing the immigrant church. First, there was a theological drift of the church in America. Second, there was a desperate need for congregations and pastors to serve the spiritually destitute Germans of the Midwest. Appeals to Germany generated some response, but Wyneken, and then Wilhelm Sihler, knew that the situation called for a seminary on American soil that could form servants for the church and its mission in the U.S. That dream was realized in 1846 when 11 students began their studies.

“Oh, Give Thanks to the Lord!”

It has continued through the years to today, as we begin our dodransbicentennial (175th) celebration. Certainly there have been challenges over the years. From 1861 to 1875, CTSFW operated conjointly with CSL and resided in south St. Louis. From 1875 to 1976, Springfield, Illinois, was the Seminary’s home. Those 100 years were filled with challenges that included World Wars I and II, as well as the move

From 1861 to 1875, CTSFW operated conjointly with CSL and resided in south St. Louis. From 1875 to 1976, Springfield, Illinois, was the Seminary’s home. By 1975, the Synod determined to return the Seminary to Fort Wayne, this time on the campus of Concordia Senior College. For the last 44 years we have been blessed to reside on this beautiful campus. More important than the setting, however, are the people—the pastors, deaconesses, lay leaders, and missionaries whom God has prepared for service in the carrying out of the mission entrusted to His Church.



Of course, things change. Speaking as a historian, things are not really better or worse today—they're different. However, the need for the proclamation of the Gospel remains foremost and focuses our work. The need for a strong confessional Lutheran identity remains central. At 175 years old, CTSFW today is among the oldest continually operating Lutheran seminaries in the United States.

from German to English in the LCMS and the Great Depression. Questions about Springfield's sustainability were regularly raised. And yet, by 1975, the Synod determined to return the Seminary to Fort Wayne, this time on the campus of Concordia Senior College. For the last 44 years we have been blessed to reside on this beautiful campus. More important than the setting, however, are the people—the pastors, deaconesses, lay leaders, and missionaries whom God has prepared for service in the carrying out of the mission entrusted to His Church. They are the ones who "Make Known His Deeds!" here in the United States and throughout the world.

Though it wasn't easy to get things rolling in 1846, and even as we faced challenges in 1946 at our centennial, God has been faithful to CTSFW and has blessed it richly. In the last 10 years we have worked hard to plan strategically for the future, basing our goals and endeavors on solid data. We established four endowed chairs, raised the funds to complete the library expansion project, and more than doubled our endowment. We continue as a faculty to refine the curriculum of the Master of Divinity and other degree programs to ensure that they are giving our students the best possible educational experience and preparing them for their work in the church. Not surprisingly, this kind of attention resulted in a strong affirmation by our accrediting agencies of the entire work of the Seminary in 2010—something we expect will be repeated this year as we complete our comprehensive visits with the Higher Learning Commission and

the Association of Theological Schools. While we could list any number of other achievements, the most important one is that we have been able to relieve the financial burden on our students by partnering with you to guarantee that 100% of residential student tuition costs are covered. Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to continue pastoral, diaconal, and missional formation, though certainly not under the mode that we prefer.

Of course, things change. Speaking as a historian, things are not really better or worse today—they're different. However, the need for the proclamation of the Gospel remains foremost and focuses our work. The need for a strong confessional Lutheran identity remains central. At 175 years old, CTSFW today is among the oldest continually operating Lutheran seminaries in the United States. Gettysburg has merged with Philadelphia to form United Lutheran Seminary (2017). Lutheran Southern is now part of Lenoir-Rhyne University. Trinity, the successor to the Ohio Synod's seminary, is now part of Capital University. By God's grace and with your help, CTSFW has served well and faithfully. Living under the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, our future is assured. There remains nothing else we can say then, but...

"Oh, Give Thanks to the Lord!" 🏰

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