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Our "Practical" Seminary

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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Springfield, Illinois, is 125 years old this year, right? Well, maybe. August 1846 is indeed the official date of the opening of our "practical seminary." But . . . the work of this seminary began two years earlier in 1844, when Pastor Frederick C. D. Wyneken undertook to train two men in his parsonage in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In 1845 Wyneken accepted a call to Baltimore; his successor, Dr. Wilhelm Sihler, continued this work. The students were graduated in 1846 and 1847; both their names, G. Jaebker and C. Frincke, appear on the first roster of the Missouri Synod, Frincke being Synod's first missionary-at-large, Jaebker, pastor of a church near Ft. Wayne.

Wyneken had solicited help from Wilhelm Loche and in August 1846 it arrived in a big way—eleven German theological students and their instructor, R. Roebellen, to complete their training in America. The seminary was formally organized, a four-room house rented as a dormitory, and classes for the eleven begun in Sihler's parsonage. Dr. Sihler was the first president, Cand. Roebellen, the first instructor. Roebellen was soon replaced by another Loche man, Cand. A. Wolter, who taught the languages—Latin, Greek, and Hebrew as well as dogmatics, exegesis, and church history. Sihler taught dogmatics, exegesis, pastoral theology, isagogics, symbolics, and catechetics.

In 1847 when the Missouri Synod was organized, Loche had at the request of Synod transferred the institution to this body, continuing to support it with books, money, and students.

Wolter died in a cholera epidemic in 1849, about the same time the seminary bought a 14 acre campus about a mile east of Ft. Wayne. The first building erected on this campus was named for him the Wolter House.

Wolter's successor, Pastor A. Biewend, was called by the seminary at St. Louis after only ten months at Ft. Wayne. His successor was Pastor F. A. Craemer of Frankenmuth, Michigan, beloved teacher and later President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield.

At the 1860 convention of Synod it was resolved that the practical seminary should be moved to St. Louis, to be operated jointly with the theoretical seminary. This was done in 1861, and C. F. W. Walther gained another hat, becoming president of the practical seminary. The joint operation didn't work too well; there was friction both between the faculties and the student bodies, and so, in 1874, the proseminary was removed to the campus of the defunct Illinois State University in Springfield. A group from Trinity Congregation had attempted unsuccessfully to use the buildings for an "Evangelical Lutheran Female College and Normal School," but

only a few students and no teachers could be found for such a project. When space became short at St. Louis, the twenty-nine pro-seminary students were offered accommodation in Springfield. The seminary proper remained in St. Louis. Proseminary students and teacher, G. Kroening, lived and worked in one building, the long-since-demolished *Kaffeemuehle*. In August 1874 the first delegate Synod, meeting in Ft. Wayne, bought this building for \$7,474.38, and resolved to move the whole practical seminary there. This was done in August 1875.

On September 1, 1875, the beginning of the school year, the practical seminary began its official career in Springfield, with a student body of 114 and a faculty of two—Craemer as president, and Kroening as instructor. The *Kaffeemuehle* was still the only place to eat, sleep and learn, and this situation continued until 1882 when the overflow of students necessitated additional dormitory space. In 1876 Kroening and Craemer were joined by H. C. Wyneken, but there were no further additions to the faculty until 1881.

In this year Teacher J. S. Simon was called, but this was no real addition to the teaching strength of the faculty, since Wyneken was in poor physical health and frequently had to cancel his classes. There were apparently no particular entrance requirements. Dogmatics consisted of a review of the Dietrich Catechism, used in many congregations for catechism instruction of the young—though for many the review might have been necessary. It was not until 1918 that by resolution of Synod the completion of the eighth grade was made an entrance requirement. The same meeting lengthened the proseminary by one year, added a sixth professor—the sainted Dr. Neitzel was called to this post—and expanded the curriculum so that graduates might be eligible for teaching certificates in those states where pastors were not automatically eligible to teach in parochial schools. Professor R. D. Biedermann was president at the time, having succeeded Professor R. Pieper in this post in 1914. In 1922 Professor H. A. Klein became president, and on October 11 of this same year the Wyneken Missionary Society was formed—Dr. Neitzel was faculty advisor. The purpose of the society: "To promote the missionary zeal of the students, to educate them in the proper methods of spreading the Gospel, and also to do practical missionary work."

And practical missionary work was done. Many of the congregations in the smaller communities around Springfield owe their existence to mission preaching of the Wyneken Society. In 1937, not only were canvassing, hospital, poor farm, nursing home and jail visiting actively being pursued, but the Society was producing a weekly half hour radio program on WTAX Sunday at six in the evening: the Concordia Hour. In 1943 the Society found it necessary to purchase an automobile to transport students to the more farflung outposts of their missionary endeavor. Dr. H. B. Hemmeter was president, having assumed his office September 13, 1936.

Dr. Hemmeter's presidency marked a change of direction for

the seminary. Even through the 1920's the seminary was preparing men to preach and catechize, giving them little more than a general high school education in addition. Was there still a need for such men? Synod was dubious. In 1932 and in 1935 resolutions were presented to close the practical seminary. In 1935 the resolution for closing actually was passed by a vote of 266-265, but the Chairman of the Floor Committee proposed further consideration of the question. When this was done a few days later, the vote was 283-256 in favor of retaining the institution. But the institution had to change. New Testament Greek, which had been taught almost clandestinely as a "Greek Circle," was introduced into the regular curriculum. An entrance requirement of two years of high school was made, raising the educational level of graduates to four years beyond high school diploma. Moves were made toward accreditation by the State of Illinois as a degree-granting institution. The physical plant was renovated, and several new faculty members appointed. In 1938 the Finnish Synod, N. E. L. C., entered into an agreement with Synod that they should provide an instructor in the Finnish Language and train their pastors at Concordia Springfield. Professor Alexander Monto was appointed to this position in September 1938, teaching also a number of courses in the regular curriculum.

In 1941 all high school teaching was abolished, and a high school diploma was required of entering students. In 1943 the Illinois State Department of Education accredited Concordia as a teacher training institution on the elementary level and recognized the course of studies as equivalent to a B. A. degree. The Board of Control the same year took action to reincorporate "Concordia College," empowering it to grant the usual academic degrees.

From that time on, the seminary became increasingly conscious of academic requirements and in some way approximating the American system of theological education. Dr. Walter A. Baepler, who succeeded G. Christian Barth as president, raised the entrance requirements from a high school diploma to two years of college. This of course paralleled the German gymnasium-university system. It was also parallel to the synodical system of junior college followed by seminary education. The synodical system stressed the classical languages—something which the Springfield seminary did not require for entrance. Dr. George Beto added further impetus to academic excellence. During his time the library, with now nearly 70,000 volumes, was constructed. He established the principle that the seminary would prefer to accept college graduates. During his tenure about half of the entering students met this requirement. He also laid down the ideal that seminary professors should have completed their doctorate degree. Dr. J. A. O. Preus carried this program to completion so that in the fall of 1968, the seminary was received as a member with American Association of Theological Schools. Instrumental in this accreditation was Dr. Lorman Petersen. The degree of Bachelor of Divinity is fully accredited and will be replaced by the Master of Divinity degree in 1973. In July 1969 the seminary

had the singular honor of having its president elected to head the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The seminary was not on center stage, but it was at least sharing some of the beams of the lime light. Dr. Richard J. Schultz has headed the seminary since 1970 and has continued to stress that the seminary is "practical," that the school exists to serve congregations by giving them pastors. But now "practical" does not exclude academic excellence and theological erudition. Suddenly the seminary discovered that its middle name was "theological": Concordia *Theological* Seminary. The Synod was now looking to Springfield for guidance in confessional as well as practical matters.