

1991

SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

## THE FORMATION OF THE MISSOURI SYNOD

### -- The Ministry of the Church --

**B**y the mid-1840's, due to the faithful efforts of Pastor Wilhelm Loehe working out of his parsonage in Germany, the ministry of the church was beginning to take root in the states of Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. The Bavarian faction, with Loehe's assistance, had established a seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In Missouri, the Perry County Saxons, after struggling to overcome the awful repercussions of expelling their leader, Pastor Martin Stephan, had also opened a seminary in Altenburg. It was the union of these two factions, their ideals, beliefs, and confessions, that led to the formation of our precious Missouri Synod. Certainly there were other individuals and groups involved, but by far the main roles were fulfilled by Pastor Loehe's Bavarians and Pastor Walther's Saxons.

The struggle in Perry County, Missouri had been extremely difficult. In essence, the Saxons constituted a group of urban Germans who now found themselves in the

primitive wilds of the American frontier. Constructing and living in log cabins, hunting wild game, and dealing with other elements of the frontier were alien to them. Fevers, cholera, consumption, and other diseases took a heavy toll.

The spiritual struggle proved even more difficult to overcome. The ouster of Stephan left them in a quandary in defining the ministry of the church. Were they a church or simply followers of Pastor Stephan? Were they a mob that had committed grievous sin in leaving Germany and breaking up families? Had they the right to call pastors and teachers? Were the pastors still pastors after some had deserted calls in Germany, and were the sacraments administered by these pastors valid? These and other deep questions lay heavy on their hearts and especially that of C.F.W. Walther.

Then, on two evenings, April 15 and 21, 1841, in a tiny log cabin "college," the troublesome questions

*"Tell of all his wonderful acts!"*

were put to rest. In the famous "Altenberg Debates," Pastor C.F.W. Walther convinced the colonists they had the right to regard themselves as members of the true church. The local congregation, he proposed, possesses the Office of the Keys and has authority, based on Scripture, to call pastors to administer this office and also has the authority to discharge any preacher or teacher who teaches contrary to the Scriptures or leads a life that gives offense, as in the case of Rev. Stephan. The local congregation, in Walther's view, was autonomous and supreme; and the office of the ministry was derived from the congregation, not vice versa. In the eight articles that he presented, Walther clearly laid out the principles constituting the true church - principles that guided the formation of the Missouri Synod and affect its polity to this very day.

Shortly after the "Altenberg Debates," Pastor Walther left Perry County to accept a call to Trinity Congregation in St. Louis, often called the "Mother" church of the Missouri Synod. From St. Louis, Walther began publication of a bi-weekly church periodical, *Der Lutheraner*.

**D***er Lutheraner* proved to be successful, and eventually some of Pastor Loehe's men obtained copies. "Thank God," declared Rev. Wyneken, "there are true Lutherans in America!" Pastor Lochner wrote, "We (the Bavarians) felt ourselves at one with them (the Saxons) through *Der Lutheraner*. Longingly we awaited the issue of this publication. *Der Lutheraner* gave us courage to make an approach toward a closer union." The closer union was to be, of course, the Missouri Synod.

Rev. Loehe in Germany was also impressed, and although he had reservations, he encouraged contacts between the two groups. Several Loehe men traveled to St. Louis to meet with Walther and others to discuss the formation of a new synod. For seven days they worked out the issues and formulated a tentative constitution which was then printed in *Der Lutheraner*.

One of the Loehe men was Rev. Friedrich Lochner, and it was on this trip that he met his future bride, Walther's sister-in-law.

The next meeting was held in

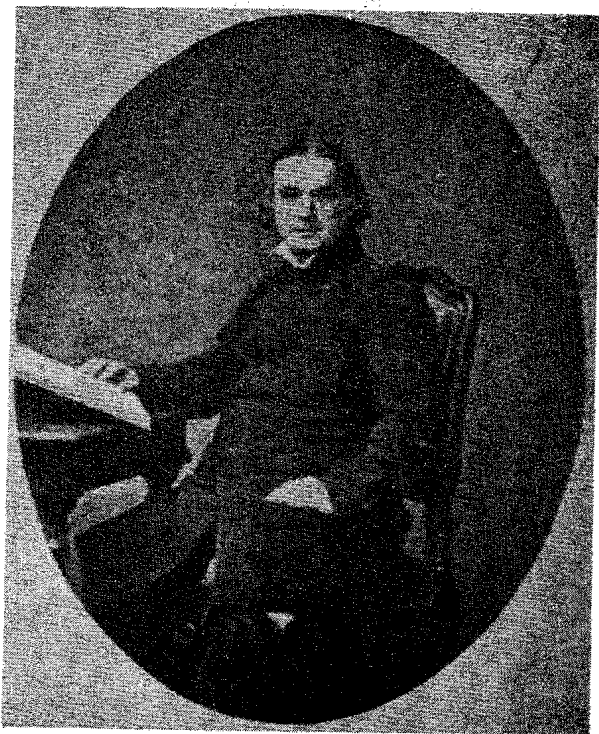


Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhem Walther

Fort Wayne, and Walther made the trip to attend. On the final leg of the journey, on a canal barge, he met Rev. Craemer, and the two enjoyed several deep and long discussions of mutual concerns; they were to remain life long friends. So we see that from the very beginning, two of Springfield Trinity's future preachers, Lochner and Craemer, were not only intimately acquainted with C.F.W. Walther, they were also instrumental in laying the groundwork for the Missouri Synod.

It was on Jubilate Sunday,

April 25, 1847, that the pastors and delegates began their first synodical convention in Chicago. They met in First St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church and formed **Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und Anderen Staaten** (The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States), later changed to **The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod**. Rev. C.F.W. Walther was elected its first president, and his publication, *Der Lutheraner*, was formally made the official publication of the young synod.



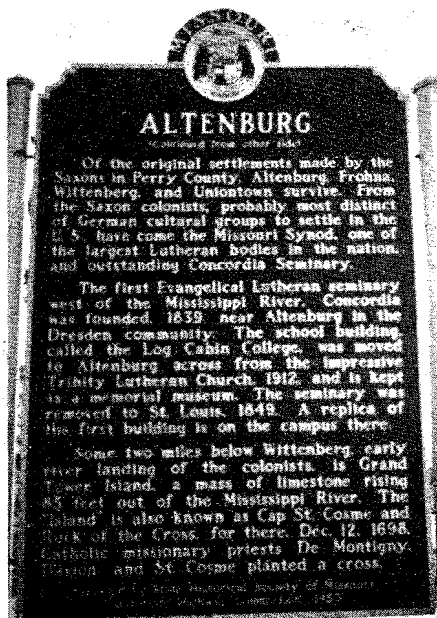
**Rev. Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe**

The "practical" Concordia seminary in Fort Wayne was "given" to the synod by Pastor Loehe, and after some arrangements, the log cabin college in Altenberg, which was to become the "theoretical" seminary, also became a part of the synod.

As mentioned, Pastor Loehe, in Germany, had some reservations about some of Pastor Walther's concepts of the ministry of the church. In particular, Loehe disagreed with the relationship between clergy and laity and, with his German authoritarian background, had difficulty with the democratic principles in the new American Missouri Synod. These reservations deepened, and in an effort to overcome them, Rev. Walther

traveled to Germany to meet with Loehe. They had many long and cordial discussions, and they developed a high mutual regard for each other, but the differences remained. Finally, in 1853, Loehe officially removed his support and began a new synod in the state of Iowa, but the break had no serious impact on the Missouri Synod.

**T**he Missouri Synod was founded and on its way to a tremendous future. The growth and the blessings that God has showered on it are another story, but the definition of the Ministry of the Church had been established and had become a part of our heritage.



Plaque near the site of the first "logcabin" seminary in Altenberg, Missouri