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# THE LUTHERAN STUDENT MOVEMENT IN CANADA — A Brief History and Analysis

*Kenneth C. Kuhn*

The Lutheran Student Movement in Canada (LSMC) is a national association of students attending universities and colleges across the country. It has local chapters in about fifteen locations, three regional organizations, and a national executive. The life of the LSMC revolves around its annual study conference held over the Labour Day weekend. Randy Smith, a student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, is the current chairman.

## HISTORY

Although the roots of the LSMC and its predecessors can be traced back for at least forty years, to date no history of the movement has been compiled. This brief description is only a bare outline, drawing upon limited sources. Sources from Eastern Canada were not available as this summary was written.

*Early Beginnings.* Minutes of a 1952 conference of the Maple Leaf Region of the

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1. This essay is a revision of a paper originally prepared for a joint consultation between the LSMC, the Student Christian Movement and Yanik (a student group in Quebec) held in Montreal in February, 1977. Written shortly after the death of Donald H. Voigts, former executive secretary of the Divisions of Educational Service and Campus Foundation Activity of the Lutheran Council in Canada, it was compiled with a view to beginning a process of reflection upon the historical development of the LSMC and of campus ministry in Canada.

Lutheran Student Association of America (LSAA) indicate it as the thirteenth annual gathering of that group. Thus an identifiable inter-campus Lutheran university group existed as early as 1939, likely pre-dating that time in some locations. The representatives attending the 1952 convention came from the University of Alberta, Edmonton; Camrose Lutheran College; the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute, Camrose; the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon; the Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute, Outlook; and Luther College, Regina.

The Maple Leaf Region comprised the Western Canadian unit of the LSAA, the latter including both Canadian and American students. The emphasis in this early period appeared to have been Bible study, evangelism and mission. Publications in the post-war period indicate concern about correlating faith with academic studies, training students for effective witness and leadership in congregations, and relating to high-school-aged Luther Leagues. Relationships with other Christian student groups appeared to be intermittent and cautious at the local and regional levels, though there were ecumenical links at the international level.

The LSAA was closely related to the predecessor church bodies of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America through a Division of Student Service of the National Lutheran Council. It had a membership in the World Student Christian Federation as early as 1952. The involvement of Canadian students in the LSAA came to its height in 1955 when the annual "Ashram" of the LSAA was held in Banff National Park.

*Autonomy.* Beginning in the middle 50's Lutheran students in Canada sought to form an indigenous Canadian organization, structurally independent of the American body. The motivations to organize a Canadian student group included the desire for a more inclusive fellowship including students of the Missouri Synod, and feelings of nationalism to more adequately reflect the Canadian situation in the church and in the student movement. The initiative to form an indigenous Canadian student group from the Maple Leaf Region in the west, which eventually won concurrence from the Eastern Canada Region. A series of consultations through joint committees of the two LSAA regions in Canada was conducted from 1956 to 1960. The formulations of the National Committee on Inter-regional Relations, and the National Committee on Autonomy came to their fruition in 1961. In that year the constituting convention of the Lutheran Student Movement in Canada (LSMC) was held September 8-11 at Waterloo Lutheran University. Donald Storch, a student from Edmonton, was the first president. At that time there were fifteen local chapters of the LSMC, including those at the Alberta and Saskatchewan schools already mentioned. Also included in the fifteen were chapters at the Universities of British Columbia, Calgary, Manitoba, McGill, McMaster, Queens, Western Ontario, and Waterloo Lutheran.

The constitution included in its statement of purpose:<sup>2</sup>

Within the context of the Lutheran faith and teachings, the purpose and aims of the LSMC shall be on a chapter level to confront students with the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, seeking to have them commit their lives to Him and seeking to make them aware of their responsibility as willing servants of Christ by striving:

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2. LSMC Constitution and Bylaws, 1961.

- A. to make the student aware of the relevance of the Gospel in the academic community,
- B. to help the student deepen his faith in Jesus Christ through Bible study and other study,
- C. to challenge the student to bear witness to his Christian faith,
- D. to encourage Lutheran student fellowship, and
- E. to encourage the regular participation of each student in the program of a local Lutheran congregation of his choice.

The structure of the new movement included *chapters* on the local campus level, an annual *Senate* with delegates from each chapter, an elected *Cabinet*, and three *Regions* in western (Alberta — B.C.), central (Manitoba — Saskatchewan), and eastern (Ontario, Quebec, Maritimes) Canada. The LSMC also included provisions for *Diaspora* members, i. e., individual members not associated with a local chapter.

From 1960 to 1970 the LSMC had annual conferences and Senate meetings, published national publications, provided a number of international scholarships to foreign students, promoted local and regional activities, stimulated and worked toward inter-Lutheran unity, sponsored an international cross-Canada speaker series, had a number of summer work projects, sponsored a Latin America project involving summer language study in Mexico, and, in 1970, organized the "Brazil '70 Project", a study tour in South America and participation in the fifth assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

It was also during this period that the Lutheran churches intensified involvement in university ministry through the Canadian Lutheran Council. In 1956 the Rev. Donald H. Voigts was appointed the first full-time chaplain at the University of Alberta, and for Western Canada. The Rev. John Vedell became chaplain at the University of Western Ontario in 1957, and also had responsibility for campus ministry in Eastern Canada. In 1960 Pastor Voigts became Executive Secretary of the Division of Student Services of the then Canadian Lutheran Council. By the late 60's full-time chaplains were at work in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Waterloo and Montreal, with active ministries in Regina and the Maritimes. The growth of the LSMC in the 60's corresponded to the growing support of the churches to university ministries. The growth of campus ministry also gave some new directions to student activity. Local groups came to be closely associated with "student centres", i. e., chaplains' residences or other facilities for student gathering, and student activity included worship and increased concern with social issues. Although the Lutheran Student Movement continued to see itself as autonomous from the Lutheran Church, the movement and campus ministry were closely related.

*Crisis and Decline.* A combination of factors contributed to a decline in the effectiveness of the LSMC in the late 60's and early 70's. The movement became overburdened with its own internal structure — perhaps overextending itself and becoming bogged down in organizational rigidity. The growing interest in social action of the sixties, combined with a distrust and antagonism toward institutions in general resulted in impatience with the organizational structures and procedures of the LSMC itself. The constitution was suspended, and a less structured organization emerged — the election of a co-ordinating committee with a general secretary. The movement became almost exclusively involved with social action concerns: Latin America, poverty,

university reform. Thus it became more detached from its biblical and theological roots, influenced to some extent by the emergence of the "secular" theology of the 60's as epitomized in Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Harvey Cox.

The anarchism of the movement during this period resulted in poorly organized and poorly attended national conferences in 1971 and 1972. Re-examination and restructuring of campus ministry by the Lutheran Council at this time also weakened the capacity of the professional staff to support the movement. Some cutback in the number of campus pastors also occurred during this period. It was a time of identity crisis, fragmentation and general decline. The LSMC seriously considered disbanding during this crisis period.

*Recovery and Integration.* A turnaround for the movement occurred in 1973. The Lutheran Council's Division of Educational Services provided a concerted effort to revitalize the movement. The national conference that year had a positive, exploratory theme; it was held at Banff in Western Canada, the traditionally strong area of the LSMC. The national conference in 1974 in Regina was well attended, and drew some strength from the neo-evangelical Jesus movement which was accompanied by a new confidence among Christians. The reorganized structure of the LSMC became stabilized with the annual election of an executive, from which was chosen a chairman, treasurer, secretary, project secretary, publication editor and conference chairman. The executive also began meeting twice yearly, contributing to more effective continuity and follow-through.

The recovery of the movement was not at the expense of social critical concern; this is evidenced by the national conference in 1975 in Kenora which focused on native peoples. In 1976 the national conference on Whistler Mountain in B.C. was attended by 90 students, the largest annual gathering of the LSMC in recent years. It had its focus on worship. It had strong theological input. Yet, at the same time, it gave attention to social action concerns — native peoples, international development, energy resources. The movement thereby moved into a stage of integration. The rebuilding of the LSMC as a purposeful, cohesive and functioning group has continued through the 1977 and 1978 national conferences held in Quebec and Saskatchewan respectively.

As the LSMC moves into the 80's, it embodies the biblical theological and liturgical dimensions of the Christian community living in dynamic tension with the secular, social and prophetic dimensions of the Christian life-in-action. The future shape of the movement would appear to integrate these dimensions of the church's life and expression, though a reduced staff support at the LCIC level makes the student movement more dependent upon its own resources.

## FEATURES

The history and life of the LSMC has been marked by a number of reoccurring features:

1. *Biblical-theological.* The student movement has typically included explicit biblical and theological rooting through Bible Study, theological considerations and

worship at all levels of LSMC life.

2. *National Independence.* Canadianization of the Lutheran churches that the structure of the church might reflect its social context and thus better meet the particular needs of the Canadian situation has pervaded the life of the movement, particularly in the 50's and 60's. The LSMC is a strongly Canadian nationalistic movement.

3. *Lutheran unity.* In the LSMC, Lutheran students are united in a common movement. The LSMC has repeatedly advocated the unity of the Lutheran church bodies in Canada.

4. *Student movement autonomy.* The LSMC views itself not as an auxiliary of the Lutheran churches, but as an independent movement. The self-direction of the movement reflects a motivation to overcome the divisions among the Lutheran church bodies in Canada.

5. *Christian social responsibility.* The LSMC has been active and outspoken on church and society issues: poverty, native peoples, multi-national corporate power, national energy policy, racism.

6. *International awareness.* Through foreign student scholarships in the 40's and 50's, international study projects in the 60's and 70's (Latin America, Guatemala, Dar es Salaam), and through linkages with international organizations (Lutheran World Federation and the W.S.C.F.) LSMC has featured a dimension of international consciousness-raising.

7. *Liturgical renewal.* In its conferences and gatherings the LSMC has embodied a spirit of renewal in the worship life of the Christian church, in recent years advocating an informal, intimate, participatory, celebrative and eucharistic expression of Christian community.

8. *Publications.* Contact among Lutheran students across Canada and the expression of ideas and opinions of students has been stimulated by a long list of newsletters and other publications: Polar Star, Campus Lutheran, Backbone, Scope, Nimbus, New Life. The current publications are *One*, a newsletter, and *Yodh*, a journal of opinion.

9. *Leadership preparation.* The earlier life of the movement was typified by frequent workshops on leadership and organization skills. The church is punctuated by persons — both clergy and lay — who gained important leadership experience in the student movement, and whose attitudes were shaped by the LSMC.

10. *Ecumenical relationships.* Increasingly the LSMC has shown an openness to share information and work together with other student movements, in the interests of the larger goal of Christian unity. This has been most apparent through participation in the WSCF. Local groups sometimes have cooperative activities with the Student Christian Movement, Newman and Varsity Christian Fellowship groups. Chaplains of the various denominations frequently work together in some aspects of ministry.

## ANALYSIS

Four theoretical models are suggested as perspectives to analyse the development of the Lutheran Student Movement.

1. *Socialization model.* From some perspectives, the life and development of the LSMC can be viewed as part of the church's socialization process. Socialization in the

church involves the recruitment, orienting and training of youth for mature participation in the church. This perspective would stress the continuities between the LSMC and the church organization. Certainly the effectiveness of the LSMC is frequently judged by the church on the basis of the socialization model.

LSMC is evaluated on the basis of its effectiveness in reaching out to university students with the gospel (recruitment), maintaining and reinforcing the belief system and values of the church (educating, value formation), preventing the defection of Lutheran Christians from the church during their transitional university years (conservation function) and motivating and training students for membership and leadership in congregations (equipping, training function).

The LSMC, in fact, has performed these functions of socialization for the Lutheran churches, to a greater or lesser degree, over its life span. The degree to which the socialization function has been prominent as a goal, or has been achieved successfully, remains a question to be answered by further investigation and research.

2. *Segmentation of radicalism model.* Sociologists Philip Hammond and Robert Mitchell studied the role of campus ministry in the life of the church<sup>3</sup> and found campus ministers to be more liberal and radical, both politically and religiously, than parish ministers. This led them to suggest that campus ministry functions to segment radical elements in the church. Liberal, critical and potentially disruptive persons are insulated from broader church involvement and influence in a separated structure.

This model would appear to explain some elements of the development of the LSMC. University students in general tend to be more liberal than their non-university age-mates, and members of the church-at-large. In a separate organization they are segmented and contained. New ideas can be explored and expressed by students without threatening the status quo of the parent body.

The LSMC has tended to be more progressive than the church-at-large in matters related to both church and society: church unity, theology, liturgy, ecumenism, nationalism, minority rights, international development, equity and justice. In some of these areas students have "led the way" and the church has followed. When the church has accepted some of the innovation introduced by the student wing, LSMC has functioned as a reformist movement in the church.

3. *Development of organizations model.* Theories of organizational development have been applied to religious groups which trace a pattern of development from spontaneous sectarianism to organized conventionalism. Ernst Troeltsch, for instance, suggested a typology of religious organization tracing a development from the sect type to the church type to the ecclesia type.<sup>4</sup>

In this model church organizations initially emerge with belief systems and behaviours radically distinct from the larger culture, then modify these views over time to conform with the values of the dominant culture. A transition occurs from sect to church, from ultra-conservatism (or counter-culture radicalism) to conventionality.

Second, in the organizational developmental model, groups develop from informal organizational patterns to formal, rigid, bureaucratic structures. An organization tends to become more formally structured and oligarchical.

Some aspects of the LSMC conform to both dimensions of the organizational devel-

3. Philip E. Hammond and Robert E. Mitchell, "Segmentation of radicalism: The case of the Protestant campus minister," *American Journal of Sociology*, 71 (September, 1965).

4. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church* Vol. II, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1931.

opment model. In the early LSAA period, the LSMC took shape from the pietism and fundamentalism typical of Lutheran expression on the prairies. Over the years it became more liberal, even radical. Equilibrating pressures returned the movement from both ultra-conservative and radical tendencies to "make peace" with both the church and the society.

Organizationally, the LSMC began as an informal group, gradually acquiring the trappings of a developed organization: constitution, formal structure, bylaws, bureaucracy, interest in the preservation of itself as an institution. The decline of the early 70's was a reaction against this rigidity of organization bringing about a modified and less-structured mode of operation. The ability of the LSMC to adapt to new conditions by transforming its structure has been a factor contributing to its viability.

4. *Generational social movement model.* The values of a given generation tend to be uniform within that generation and contrast with the dominant values of preceding and succeeding generations. Change and emergence in value orientations are expressed through social movements. The values of generational cohorts are shaped by the particular historical crises faced by that generation: depression produced a valuing of hard work and industry; military threat produced militant industry and cohesion; post-war rebuilding produced desires for stability; affluence produced strains to distribute the affluence through the society to minority and poverty groups; misguided imperialism in Southeast Asia produced anti-war sentiments and pacifist values. Succeeding generations, therefore, take on distinctive sets of values as a function of societal survival, and these values are embodied in social movements.

From this perspective the development of the LSMC can be viewed not so much from the perspective of its relationship to the church, nor from its internal organizational dynamics, but from the effects of changing social values on emerging generations of Lutheran students. A pattern of conservatism in the 30's, stabilization in the 40's, nationalism in the 50's, radicalization in the 60's and integration in the 70's are value patterns which are descriptive of both the LSMC and the larger society.

From the generational social movement point of view, the development of the LSMC is related to the change in value systems of youth which reflect the dynamic adaptiveness of social systems to new knowledge and new behaviours which upset the equilibrium of a system. The transition from the dominance of religious values to their replacement by secular values is the broad social-cultural context in which the LSMC has developed. The issues raised by both national and international tensions have shaped the faith expression of the movement.

Each of the four models — socialization, segmentation, institutionalization and generational value change — explain some aspects of the development of LSMC. Which model would appear to be the "best fit" requires further examination. Predictions regarding the effectiveness of the LSMC, or of the future directions the movement should take, are likely to be based upon the assumptions of one or more of these models.

From this brief historical description and analysis, it is apparent that Lutheran students in Canada have struggled to create a viable identity in their life together, have functioned as a focus for innovation within the church, and have been responsive to expressing the gospel within the social context of our nation. The fact that a student movement has persisted for four decades demonstrates the viability of Lutheran organizations within the Canadian situation.