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Celebrating 100 Years of the Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon

Gordon A. Jensen, PhD¹

In the summer of 1913, the Evangelical Synod of Manitoba and Other Provinces, at its synod convention in Rosthern, SK, voted to establish a seminary in Saskatoon, SK. The purpose was to train pastors raised on the Canadian prairies to serve the Lutheran congregations in western Canada. German Lutherans and Mennonites fleeing from Russia had been flooding into western Canada since the transcontinental railway – one of the promises of confederation – had been completed in the 1880s. The Manitoba Synod, as it was called, found it difficult to get German enough speaking pastors from the United States and Germany to minister to the numerous congregations being established in the prairies. While the seminary in Breklem, Germany and Ebenezer Seminary, often called Kropp Seminary in northern Germany, had tried to meet the need, with the blessings of the General Council (an umbrella organization of Lutherans headquartered in the Eastern USA.), the demand far outstripped the number of pastors who dared to enter into this ‘mission field.’

The Manitoba Synod was an offspring of the Canada Synod, one of the members of General Council. Formed in 1897, a mere 16 years later the Manitoba Synod soon decided that it must train its own pastors. At that convention in Rosthern in 1913, the president of the Synod, Jürgen Goos, was elected to be the president of this new seminary. With its formation, the Lutheran College and Seminary brought to fruition the dreams of the founders of the Manitoba Synod, including the Rev. Dr. Martin Ruccius. Young men from the prairies would be trained in the prairies to serve parishes on the prairies. This decision came at a crucial time, for a year later, the outbreak of World War I cut off the supply of pastors from Germany.

In the first article, Adrienne Jones takes us back to the early struggles of the Lutheran Church in Atlantic and Central Canada, as it tried to become established under the shadows – and dominance – of the Church of England. A common trend emerged, as she notes, of Lutheran congregations becoming Anglican, primarily because they had difficulty obtaining Lutheran pastors, while Anglican priests were close at hand. She traces the experiences of three Lutheran congregations in Halifax and Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, and Williamsburg, Ontario. These three case studies give us a glimpse of the ongoing tensions between Lutherans and Anglicans, as well as the practical realities that often determined denominational affiliations. These case studies also remind us that Anglicans and Lutherans today need to work diligently and proactively in fostering and developing viable full communion relationships today. Practical considerations do not always overcome denominational loyalties.

The next articles focus on the history of German Lutheranism on the prairies. Michael Diegel explores the ‘father’ of German Lutheranism in western Canada, who was

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instrumental in the development of the Manitoba Synod. While Pastor Heinrich Schmieder was the first German Lutheran pastor, arriving in the 1880s in Winnipeg, it was really Ruccius's hand that shaped the Manitoba Synod around the turn of the 20th century.

The third article, about the beginnings of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, explores how the Lutheran seminary began and how its founding vision for theological education was shaped by the vision of Jürgen Goos and others who joined him in this enterprise. This paper was originally given at the 100th Anniversary Celebrations of LTS held in November of 2013 in Spruce Grove Alberta, where three students gathered around Pastor Goos to begin their theological training.

Shane Hein takes us into the 1970s and 1980s, when Lutheran Church-Canada students were able to take their theological education at the seminary in Saskatoon- a seminary owned by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC) and the Lutheran Church in America- Canada Section (LCA-CS). This was at the same period of time when the ELCC, LCA-CS, and the LC-C were actively involved in merger talks, hoping to form one main Lutheran church in Canada. Events south of the Canadian border involving new directions being taken by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (the parent body LC-C), along with a decision by the ELCC and LCA-CS to ordain women, eventually led to the withdrawal of LC-C students from Saskatoon and the formation of Concordia Seminary, the LC-C seminary that opened in the mid-1980s.

The final article explores the theology of William (Bill) Hordern, the president of Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon from 1965 to 1985. A native of Saskatoon, Dr Hordern also had an illustrious teaching and writing career. His insistence on students engaging the context in which they lived, along with speaking theologically in easily understandable language, was something that influenced and shaped a generation of pastors. This paper was originally delivered on the occasion of the awarding of the William Hordern chair of Theology – the first endowed chair of theology at LTS – to the author of this article, who also served as the editor of this volume.

The editors hope that with these articles, the readers will get a glimpse into the age-old struggle the church – not just Lutherans! – have faced in trying to proclaim the Gospel in the context in which they live. To paraphrase Luther, the Gospel is not good news until it is good news “for you.” As the Lutheran churches struggle along with the churches of other denominations to have a credible and meaningful voice in our context today, perhaps our struggles in the past can serve as guides and reminders that we are not the first to face such challenges. Nor will we be the last. The journey continues.