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A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH TO MERGER WITH THE LUTHERAN
CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

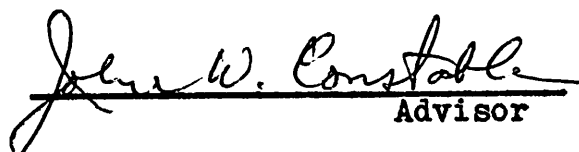
A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
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by

Harold William Austermann

May 1970

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During my year of vicarage, I was privileged to work under a pastor W. Arnold Ranta. This pastor had originally entered the ministry under the auspices of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, having been graduated from the Springfield Seminary in 1951. His first assignment was as pastor to several congregations and preaching stations in the Thunder Bay district of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, an area centering in the Port Arthur—Fort William region of Ontario, Canada. From there he moved to a congregation in Ohio, and a year before my vicarage, he assumed the pastorate at St. John in Chester, Illinois. During my year at St. John, he related to me many of the experiences he had had as an N. E. L. C. pastor during the early years of his ministry. It was these experiences that aroused my curiosity, and which have caused me to seek a greater understanding of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, especially since it is the only Lutheran body thus far that has merged with the Missouri Synod.

In chapter II, I will give an historical survey of the Finnish emigration to the United States, and the resultant formation and growth of both the Suomi Synod and the Apostolic Lutherans or Laestadians, as a prelude to the formation of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. In chapter III, I will trace the history of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church to 1956. In chapter IV, I will cover the actual merger process

to completion in January of 1964.

CHAPTER II

EVENTS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The period 1850 to 1900 set the groundwork for the formation of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, for it was in this time span that the greatest influx of Finnish immigrants into the United States and Canada occurred. Despite the distance and hardships encountered in a nineteenth century trans-Atlantic crossing, 380,000 Finns reached the continent in an effort to escape the conditions precipitated by numerically large landless agricultural working classes, the piercing and biting weather of the northern regions of Finland which proved to be a formidable obstacle to efficient farming, and the uncertainty of a rapidly changing economy which might eventually be dominated by Russian power.¹

In increasing numbers, the Finnish element arrived in the continental United States, first settling in areas along the eastern seaboard, in Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. From these initial settlements, they advanced westward through the northern tier of states to establish settlements in Ohio, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Dakotas. Further advances, in later years, were even made through Wyoming and Montana to the western coast, to California, Oregon and Washington. Along with

¹John I. Kolehmainen, The Finns in America (Hancock: Finnish Book Concern, 1947), p. 10.

the movement in the United States, there was a sizable if scattered Finnish population movement through the provinces of Canada.

The reasons why the majority of Finns remained in the northern areas have been subject to much speculation. Attempts were made to establish Finnish communities in southern regions, in Mississippi, in Alabama and Texas, but these always met with limited success and eventually disappeared. In the north, however, Finnish communities thrived. Some attribute it to geographical forces--in their opinion, "the indispensable concomitants of Finnish settlement were cold snow, boulder strewn areas, lakes typical of a glaciated terrain", while others attribute it to aesthetic appeal, "who for example could resist the shrewd land agent's description of Upper Michigan, 'a beautiful nature, healthful atmosphere, many lakes rich with fish, streams and rapids....a domain eternally safe from cyclones, snowslides, hailstorms, floods, famines....and poisonous snakes.'"² While the previous description is fanciful and far from the truth, the whole character of the northern region of the United States lent itself more readily to the Finnish spirit than did the southern regions. Another reason why the Finns settled mainly in the northern areas in their own colonies, rather than dispersing uniformly throughout the United States may be that they experienced great difficulty in learning the English language since their native language, Fenno-Urgic, was completely dif-

²Ibid., p. 19.

ferent from the Germanic and Latin language background of most other Americans.³

The Finnish had a rugged spirit, a spirit which was well suited for the demands of heavy manual labor. Finns could be found in a diversity of employment, working in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, Indiana and Wyoming, in the iron mines of Michigan and Minnesota, in the copper mines of Michigan and Montana, in the silver mines of Utah, in the gold mines of California and the Black Hills, in a textile mill in Massachusetts, and in a tin mill in Pennsylvania. Yet a great number of the immigrants of Finnish background continued in the occupations they had had in Finland itself--lumbering and logging, fishing to supply distant markets with cod of New England, trout of Lake Superior and salmon from Oregon, and, of course, agriculture and farming.⁴

Having looked briefly at the historical background of the emigration of the Finns to the United States, it is necessary to ask what ideals of religion these people brought with them, in order to understand the reasons for the formation of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. Lutherans constituted the bulk of the immigrant church-going public, although it must be "admitted that many Finns inevitably discovered it was not necessary to go to church, pay a preacher's salary, or sweat

³J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years (Ironwood:National Publishing House, 1958), p. 17.

⁴Kolehmainen, p. 30.

in the company of a catechism at a reading examination in Free America,"⁵ an attitude, no doubt, enhanced by the ability of many Finns to imbibe to extremes. Yet certainly, some Finns felt the compelling need to establish worshipping communities among themselves, as they contracted for employment and set up new households in America, but it was not until 1867 that the first Finnish worshipping communities along truly congregational lines were established. These were located in Hancock and Calumet, in the "copper country" of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. At their inception, the congregational make-up was not purely Finnish but included members of Swedish and Norwegian background, people who had come to America in the decades preceding the Finnish influx. Due to the lack of Finnish clergy in the "new world", a Norwegian pastor served these congregations until an ordained Finnish minister could be found to oversee the two congregations. This occurred in 1876 when Alfred E. Backman took charge of the congregations at Hancock, Calumet, and Allouez.⁶ He labored there until 1883, when of necessity he returned to his homeland Finland. J. J. Hoikka, D. D., meanwhile, completed his course of study at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, and succeeded Backman in these parishes in 1883.

The third ordained minister arrived in America in 1885.

⁵Ibid., p. 36.

⁶Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1964), p. 126.

His name was J. K. Nikander, a name that would play an important part in the first unifying synod of Finnish churches five years later. More Finnish ministers came in the intervening years between 1885 and 1890, among them K. L. Tolonen and William Eloheimo,⁷ who also would play prominent roles in the formation of the first Finnish synod, as well as the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Both Backman and Hoikka, of whom I spoke before, while serving the congregations in Hancock and Calumet, also made journies to Ohio to preach and conduct confirmation classes throughout the 1880's, pastor Backman until the time of his return to Finland, and Hoikka until the arrival of William Williamson, a grocer by trade in Finland, but who because of a very close association with the Gospel Association of the State Church of Finland, was ordained by the Hauge Synod in 1887. In 1890 he assumed direction of the congregation that had been organized at Ashtabula Harbor in 1884, as well as the church at Fairport Harbor. At the end of January, 1890, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ashtabula Harbor was officially formed--in actuality, though, it was nothing but the continuation of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, the church established in 1884.⁸ Because of the energetic spirit of Williamson, small

⁷Juergen L. Neve, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Burlington:Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), p. 330.

⁸Gustaf A. Aho, "History of the First Finnish Lutherans in Northern Ohio and the National Evangelical Lutheran Church," Concordia Historical Quarterly, XL (April 1967), p. 4.

congregations also were formed at Coneaut, Erie, Perry, and Cleveland, Ohio.

Williamson was a forceful preacher, zealous for sound doctrine, and almost fanatical in his insistence upon an ordered life. He attacked fearlessly the corrupt life of Finnish immigrants, their drunkenness, gambling and immorality.⁹ As a result of his attacks, there was both a positive and negative reaction. The positive reaction showed itself in a revivalist movement among certain of the Finns; the negative was voiced because the teachings of Williamson seemed heretical, and because he was a strict disciplinarian, requiring personal announcement for communion, refusing to commune an impenitent drunk on his sick bed, and rejecting as sponsors a couple who operated a saloon.¹⁰

In May, 1890, he was asked to resign his pastorate, but when he proved that his teachings and actions were all based upon the Word of God and the Confessional Books of the Lutheran Church, the request was rescinded. However, bitter opposition to Williamson remained. It was immediately after this episode that a great portion of the Ashtabula and Fairport Harbor churches broke away and joined the Suomi Synod of which I will speak presently.

Up to 1890, none of the congregations dispersed throughout the northern United States had established a church struc-

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

ture for organic unity. The only true identifying factor among the Finns at this time was their common cultural heritage. However, in 1889, the first embryonic elements of a church synod for Finns situated in northern Michigan were formed in the minds of the four ministers mentioned before: J. J. Hoikka, J. K. Nikander, K. L. Tolonen, and William Eloheimo. The actual organization of the synod took place on March 25, 1890 in Calumet, Michigan, through the assent of these four pastors and seventeen lay delegates representing nine congregations. These four pastors and nine congregations constituted the whole of the synod in the United States at this time. The name given to this union was The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, or Suomi Synod in shortened form. Suomi, a Finnish word which interestingly means "marshland", may have been chosen to retain within the Synod a sense of identity with Finland--this however is only speculation.¹¹ Nikander was elected president of the new Synod; Tolonen, vice-president; Eloheimo, secretary; and Hoikka, notary. Confessionally, the new synodical members stood near to the Church of Finland, even to the extent of employing the liturgy of the State Church in their services. The basis of their church polity was congregational, with authority from the congregations vested in a Consistory of four members who were to oversee the effective functioning of the Synod.¹²

¹¹Valdimar J. Eylands, Lutherans in Canada (Winnipeg: The Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod in North America, 1945), p. 260.

¹²Neve, p. 331.

This type of polity has survived in the Suomi Synod, even though it became a constituent member of the United Lutheran Church in America in 1962, yet it is a polity in direct contradiction to the hierarchical structure of church authority established in the Church of Finland.

The headquarters of the new Synod were established in Hancock, Michigan, where the Synod also founded a college and seminary for the preparation of indigenous Finnish Lutheran pastors. Finland in the 70's and 80's had provided all the pastors, except for J. J. Hoikka, but because demand exceeded supply of pastors due to the influx of Finnish immigrants during this period, the founding fathers saw the distinct need for the Suomi College and Theological Seminary. Their dream was finalized in 1896, when classes began in a rented house, with Dr. J. K. Nikander serving as president. Their fervent hope was that the shortage of pastors thus would be alleviated, a shortage that was acutely felt in the United States, but even more so in Canada. It was not uncommon to find multiple parish situations under the direction of one pastor, or congregations without any leader at all. In the latter case, they depended entirely upon the occasional visits by men like J. J. Hoikka, Kaarlo Huotari, J. Wargelin, Jacob Mantta, M. Luttinen and M. Lepisto.¹³

As the Hancock seminary grew, Finnish pastors with an ability to speak bilingually in both Finnish and English were graduated to assume pastorates in those congregations that pre-

¹³Eylands, pp. 263 - 265.

viously been mostly on their own. However, even up to 1962, not all vacancies were filled.

From its meager beginnings in 1890, the Suomi Synod's growth has been relatively minor in comparison to other Lutheran bodies. As of 1964, it had only 102 pastors and 153 congregations with approximately 36,000 members. It carries on its mission work through the Foreign Mission Society of Finland, which has fields in Ovamboland, South Africa, and Honan, China. It publishes its own newspaper, the Paimen Sanomia.¹⁴

With this short historical summary of the Suomi Synod, we return to 1890. Universal acceptance of the new Synod was not forthcoming from all Finnish congregations. Two groups felt that they could not in good conscience join themselves to the Synod. One group was the Apostolic Lutherans and the other, a group which saw the constitution of the Suomi Synod as hierarchical in character, the very accusation the founders of the Suomi Synod thought they had avoided in the constitutional structure of the Synod.

The Apostolic Lutherans were found in dispersed groups from Calumet and Hancock, Michigan, and the rural districts of Minnesota to Astoria, Oregon. While they were called Apostolic, a name that was espoused by the church in Calumet in 1879 and has come to be the common title for this church group, their proper designation was Laestadians, arising from their insistence upon following the tenets of the Finnish revivalist, Pro-

¹⁴Neve, p. 332.

vost Lars L. Laestadius of Pajari, Sweden, who labored among the Finnish speaking people of that city until his death in 18-61. Many of the immigrants arrived in America holding his particular views--they accepted in part the general creeds of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, but emphasized visible evidence of regeneration, and insisted that conversion could only be perfected through auricular or private confession before a preacher or brother in the faith, and that there was no absolution of sins other than by the placing of hands on the head of the truly penitent during the proclamation of forgiveness.¹⁵ As a result of such beliefs, they were excluded from fellowship with other Finnish bodies.

Simplicity was the keynote of the whole of congregational faith and life among the Laestadians--there were no synodical or conference ties; no educated ministers, only lay preachers; no educational institutions; no organs in their churches or steeples; no publishing house. They did, however, carry on extensive mission work both at home and in the foreign mission field.¹⁶

Again this church was congregational in its polity, but is relatively insignificant in Lutheran circles. As of 1964, it had 22 ministers, 59 congregations and 8,000 members.¹⁷

¹⁵Wentz, p. 314.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 315.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 315.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

We come now to the other group, the history of which will form the major portion of this paper. The Suomi Synod had been formed, but a group within the congregation of J. W. Eloheimo were dissatisfied with the constitution as it had been framed for the new Synod. They saw in the constitution Eloheimo had drawn up distinct evidence of a hierarchical, centralized form of church government. Thus, when Pastor Eloheimo requested his congregation at Calumet to seriously consider ultimate union with the new Synod, a great number of his parishioners declined most vehemently. As a result, Eloheimo, by personal dictate, excommunicated the group which numbered more than half of his congregation. It was these people that formed the first National Lutheran congregation, formed because they desired a church which would be democratic in structure, maintaining the autonomy of the individual congregation.¹ As a counteraction, the Fenno-American Synod, based on hierarchical principles, was founded by Pastor Eloheimo, after having divorced himself from the Suomi Synod. Ultimately though, he even joined the National Lutheran Church, the very church he had decried in the beginning.

For an eight year span, there were four Lutheran bodies

¹J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years (Ironwood:National Publishing House, 1958), p. 2.

among the Finns: the Suomi Synod, the Laestadians, the Fenno-American Synod and the National Church. This latter body had been rather nebulous in its organization for these eight years. In addition, there were many independent pastors and congregations which would never unite with the Suomi Synod, and yet had no affiliation with either the Fenno-American Synod or the National Lutheran Church. Because of the nebulous character of the National Church and the lack of a unifying element among the independent pastors and congregations, a Pastor Karl Koski of Rock Springs, Wyoming, took it upon himself to extend invitations to these pastors and congregations to attend a meeting at Rock Springs for the express purpose of concretely and constitutionally organizing a new National Evangelical Lutheran Church. The meeting was held on June 26, 1898, with Pastor Koski presiding over the individual representatives of the nine congregations that had accepted the invitation.² It was unanimously decided by these men to form what was to be called the Finnish-American National Evangelical Lutheran Church, with emphasis upon the word "National", which in Finnish is Kansallinen, an ellipsis of Kansanvaltainen, meaning "democratic".³ The full title, the Finnish-American National Evangelical Lutheran Church, was the proper designation for the church until

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Gustaf A. Aho, "History of the First Finnish Lutherans in Northern Ohio and the National Evangelical Lutheran Church", Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XL (April 1967), p. 6.

1946, when the title was shortened to the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. From this point on in the paper, I will only refer to the church in this shortened form.

In choosing a title for their new church, the men expressly wished to avoid the term "synod", because one, it was already in the name of one of the Finnish groups, and second, and more importantly, such a word had for these men distinct hierarchical overtones.

A constitution was drawn up to provide initial guidance and direction, and a body of officers chosen. The election of a president, however, presented a problem--Pastor Karl Koski would have been the logical choice, but he declined because he felt unqualified to assume the responsibilities of the presidency. In an effort to find a leader for the church, nominations were called for from the floor. Pastor Koski, however, was the only one to put forth a name for consideration: Pastor William Eloheimo. This nomination was indeed strange in view of the fact of Pastor Eloheimo's association with the "episcopal" Fenno-American Synod and his questionable attitude toward a "democratic" church.⁴ Nevertheless, with many misgivings on the part of the founding members, a telegram was sent to Pastor Eloheimo asking him to consider the presidency. The following day the men received an affirmative answer from Eloheimo. Thus, the National Church had its full complement of officers: Pastor William Eloheimo, president; Pastor Koski, vice-president; Char-

⁴J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 5.

les Orth, secretary.

Conventions, according to the constitution, were to be held annually, but no convention was convened in 1899. The enthusiasm that had surrounded the formation of the church in 1898 had waned sharply in less than a year. New life had to be infused into the organization, and this new life came in the person of Pastor Wilhelm Adrian Mandellof, who had come from Finland to assume the pastorate at Calumet after Eloheimo left. A convention was called for October, 1900, in Ironwood, Michigan, and because neither Koski, Orth, or more importantly, Eloheimo was present, Mandellof was asked to assume the presidency since he had shown a genuine interest in further visible organization of the church.⁵ The first constitution was revised and updated under his direction; a conscientious program for the enlistment of new pastors was begun, which resulted in the ordinations of J. H. Heimonen and John Warmanen, both lay preachers, as well as the addition of Pastor M. Kivi of the Free People's Church.

A brief word regarding the history of the Free People's Church, as an offshoot of the Gospel Association of the State Church of Finland, would be in order, since the Association and its evangelical emphases of universal forgiveness of sins, the right of every sinner to accept forgiveness of sins without any advance preparation except the confession of his sins, certainty of salvation, and regeneration through Baptism, were strong

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

factors in the early existence of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁶

The Free People's Church was founded by Pastor William Williamson of whom I spoke earlier. It began in January, 1900, and consisted of five small congregations, whose proper designation was the Evangelical Lutheran Free People's Church. It remained independent of the Suomi Synod, and because the National Church in its earliest stages seemed to Williamson incapable of becoming an established church, he and his church remained disassociated with it. However, when Williamson saw the new life Mandellof infused into the church, he seriously reconsidered joining his church to the N. E. L. C., so seriously in fact, that Williamson called a meeting of the five congregations to debate the question. The outcome of this meeting was the approval of the congregations for the merger, with actual consummation taking place on September 1, 1901.⁷

Mandellof, during the tenure of his presidency, also saw the pressing need for a church publication. His vision resulted in the printing of a semi-monthly paper called "The Clouds of Witness" or Todistusten Joukko in Finnish. This paper served as a connecting link between the congregations of the N. E. L. C. and gave status to the church because of the articles written

⁶J. E. Nopola, "The National Evangelical Lutheran Church", The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church (Edited by Julius Bødsieck; Minneapolis:Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), p. 1701.

⁷Gustaf A. Aho, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, p. 7.

by Mandellof, a State Church minister of Finland.⁸

The church continued to grow under the leadership of Mandellof. In his convention report of 1901 at Calumet, Michigan, Mandellof stated that the National Church had 13 pastors, 29 congregations and 6,210 members. It was at this convention that the unanimous opinion was expressed for the first time in the short history of the N. E. L. C. that "union with the Suomi Synod should be effected....four overtures had been made prior to this time, yet this fifth time, like the preceding four, fell on "deaf ears".⁹

A year later, in 1902, at the convention in Ashtabula, Ohio, the church had grown to 18 pastors, 40 congregations and 10,300 members. It was at this convention that Pastor William Williamson was elected vice-president of the National Church. It was in this year also that both Mandellof and Williamson came under attack by Professor A. Hjelt of the theological faculty at Helsinki University accusing them of imagining that the National Church alone was the true church. Hjelt based his charge on a statement that had been in "The Clouds of Witness" --"Whoever would find Christ must first find the church, for how otherwise can it be known where Christ is?"¹⁰ Mandellof refuted this charge by showing that the statement had been taken directly from Luther, and as a result, the National Church

⁸J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 7.

⁹Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰Gustaf A. Aho, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, p. 7.

felt compelled to reject the rationalistic views of Hjelt. It would remain true to "salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ."

As the church continued to grow, another need became evident to the National Church--a "people's college", or Kansanopisto, which would prepare ministers for the N. E. L. C., as well as provide education for Finnish immigrants both in the practicalities of their environment and their Finnish heritage. Capital for the school was obtained by selling shares on the open market, and such money as was obtained was placed under the directorship of a shareholder's association. West Duluth, Minnesota, was chosen as the site for the college, and after the fall quarter had been completed in a rented facility in Minneapolis, the school officially opened on January 3, 1904, under the directorship of Pastor E. W. Saaranen of Finland with a total of thirty-six students. Two dollars a week was charged for room and board, eight dollars per semester. Students were required to rise at seven in the morning, attend classes to five in the afternoon, and in addition, were required to attend Sunday evening worship and convocation sessions.¹¹

When the annual convention of the National Church was held at the college in 1904, growth in the church was again evident. The number of pastors had risen by two from the previous year, and the total membership by 3,748. The National Church now had 20 pastors and 14,300 members. It was at this convention

¹¹J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, pp. 9-10.

that more stringent requirements were placed upon men for ordination into the ministry of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹² Prior to this time, the church had been lax in its requirements--any man could be ordained if he was a true believer and orthodox in his doctrine. It now became necessary for him to have certain academic prerequisites.

The year 1905 and the years following spelled disaster for the young church. First, and most importantly, Pastor Mandellof decided to return to his native Finland, a decision that may in part have been brought about by his awareness of the attempts of atheistic Socialists to gain control of the "people's college" at West Duluth. Because of the great number of shares these Socialists held in the shareholder's association that had provided the money for the construction of the college, they succeeded in their attempts and then transformed the "people's college" to a Worker's college before a single candidate had been graduated.¹³ Secondly, many of the most prominent of the church's officials became involved in serious scandal, and thirdly, a publishing house, which had been maintained by a small investment group in Ironwood, Michigan, for the benefit of the National Church, went bankrupt in the winter of 1905, leaving the church without a means for publishing material.¹⁴

It was now a time for rebuilding what had been lost. The

¹²Ibid., p. 10.

¹³J. E. Nopola, The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, p. 1701.

¹⁴J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 11.

most immediate need was a new leader, and so Pastor Williamson, who had served in the capacity of vice-president of the National Church, was elected to the presidency. He served only from 19-05 to 1908, being forced to resign that position in 1908 when rumors of his scandalous conduct were voiced more loudly. Indeed, his tenure in office did little to begin the rebuilding process.

With the resignation of Williamson, the church was once again without a leader. To fill the void, the National Church called Pastor Karl K. Rissanen, a lay preacher who had served a congregation in Astoria, Oregon, and had been ordained into the ministry in 1903. He assumed the presidency in 1908, and immediately was requested to review the actions of Williamson. His investigation resulted in the removal of Williamson's name from the National Church roster at the convention in 1909, and Williamson's self-renunciation of membership in the N. E. L. C.¹⁵ Williamson's former congregations at Ashtabula and Fairport Harbor, Ohio, were split on the action taken against him, but these attitudes only added to the distress that weighed heavily on the N. E. L. C. at this time.

During the six years that Rissanen served as president, from 1908 to 1914, there was a gradual loss in membership, until in 1914, the National Church had only 13 pastors serving N. E. L. C. churches with a membership of 7,360, although the numbers could be increased by counting the N. E. L. C. pastors

¹⁵Gustaf A. Aho, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, p. 8.

who were serving independent congregations.¹⁶

Renewed efforts toward union with the Suomi Synod were also forthcoming in 1914. However, certain obstacles still prevented such a union--the Suomi Synod's insistence upon N. E. L. C. pastors receiving additional training at Suomi College, and the fear of the N. E. L. C. that evangelical preaching would be suppressed in such a united church. Meetings were held to discuss union, but when conventions of both churches were held in 1915, the Suomi Synod shelved the whole question, and the N. E. L. C., finding this out, rejected the idea of further overtures to the Suomi Synod, seeing that agreement in doctrine was lacking to the extent that union was impossible.¹⁷

The N. E. L. C. was at a low point in 1914. The church was desperately in need of a man like Mandellof to reawaken the N. E. L. C. Such a man was found in the person of Peter Wuori. While not as dynamic as Mandellof, Wuori possessed the necessary qualifications to administer the operation of the N. E. L. C. Wuori, who served as president from 1914 to 1918, had come to the United States in 1893 to serve as a lay preacher to congregations in New Jersey and Minnesota. He had studied under Mandellof who ordained him into the ministry in 1901. A distinct contribution Wuori made to the N. E. L. C. came in 1907, seven years before he assumed the presidency of the National Church, and two years after the demise of the original publishing house

¹⁶J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 49-50.

in Ironwood, Michigan, when Wuori began publication of Auttaja, a religious news weekly, which has served the Finnish speaking contingent of the N. E. L. C. continuously, even past merger with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1963. In order to print Auttaja, a new publishing plant was erected in Ironwood, Michigan, to replace the plant that had gone bankrupt in 1905.¹⁸

The N. E. L. C. celebrated its twenty year anniversary in 1918. While events to this time gave little reason for celebration, it could not be denied that the National Evangelical Lutheran Church was firmly established on the American scene, despite its lack of wealth and prestige, the very elements that had accompanied the formation of the Suomi Synod. What caused the N. E. L. C. to endure? Two reasons can be mentioned. First and primarily, it was a lay movement, people who had come to faith through the work of the Gospel Association of the State Church of Finland. Because of their intensive belief in personal and universal forgiveness, the grace of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and the covenantal nature of Baptism, they could speak of the total depravity of man, yet live in the certainty that Christ had atoned for all sins. Secondly, they extensively studied Scripture, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions in Finnish and thus were able to repel the attacks of the Suomi Synod which said the N. E. L. C. promised heaven to anyone who professed faith without regard to his life, and the Laestadians, who claimed that faith of all people who

¹⁸Ibid., p. 14.

had not received absolution from them was a dead faith--all three groups were nominally under the State Church of Finland, but differences were so great here in America they could never join in a united worship.¹⁹

With the failure of the "people's college" back in 1905, the N. E. L. C. had been left without a seminary for the training of pastors. Thus, from 1905 to 1917, the pastors of the National Church were men without academic training, coming primarily from the lay-oriented Gospel Association of the Church of Finland.²⁰ These facts brought a decision by the delegates of the 1917 convention at Calumet to make another attempt at a National Church seminary. The site was to be Ironwood, Michigan. The school itself opened in January of 1918 with Pastor Arne Wasunta serving as director. Conjointly he held positions of instructor at the seminary and president of the National Church for a four year period, from 1918 to 1922, before he returned to Finland as a result of the scandal caused within the National Church by his association with the Masonic Order and the Knights of Kaleva.²¹

During the time of Wasunta, another pastor from Finland, K. E. Salonen, assumed the presidency of the seminary. He held this position from 1918 to 1923, and served also as president of the N. E. L. C. during the last year of his presidency at

¹⁹Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰J. E. Nopola, The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, p. 1702.

²¹J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 22.

the seminary. The school, however, was forced to close down in 1923 after only five years of operation because of the loss of interest on the part of Salonen and his unwillingness to continue his teaching duties there. Though several pastors had come through the seminary during its five year existence, once again the N. E. L. C. was without a seminary, a state that would continue to 1931.²²

Up to 1922, the N. E. L. C. seemed closely allied, both spiritually and doctrinally, with the Gospel Association of Finland, although in the early years of the National Church there had been really no active interchange with the Association. Yet it could not be denied that most of the N. E. L. C. men had received their training and acquired their religious convictions through the work of this group. Thus, when Salonen, an Association pastor, entered the National Church, it could only be construed as further cementing the relations between the National Church and the Association. It was Salonen's interest in mission work which opened the door for an awareness of the need for mission in the N. E. L. C. and caused the N. E. L. C. to support the mission programs of the Association in Japan.²³

The relationship between the National Church and the Gospel Association, was broken in 1922 and the years following by events that transpired in Finland itself. Freedom of religion was granted, meaning that there was no longer a legal re-

²²Ibid., p. 22.

²³Ibid., p. 24.

quirement of belonging to the State Church of Finland. Men were free to choose their own church affiliation, or even establish entirely new churches, as was the case with the founding of the Free Churches of Finland. Such freedom had come as the result of an upheaval in the State Church, when a controversy arose over what the term "evangelical" was really meant to imply for the church--did it mean a totally spiritual orientation or did it mean a totally revivalistic orientation in order for the State Church of Finland to be true to its established theological doctrines?²⁴ When the elements of this controversy reached both the members of the National Church and those who still retained alligence to the Gospel Association here in America, each body took a differing view on the issue. The Gospel Association, since it was intimately associated with the State Church, espoused the views set forth by the State Church on the issue, while the National Church's stance on the issue was greatly influenced by what occurred next in its history: contact with the Missouri Synod.

The first contacts between the National Church and the Missouri Synod came as the result of communication between Pastor H. Patiala, a minister in Finland, and Pastor Theodore Hansen of the Missouri Synod in the United States.²⁵ As a result

²⁴Walter K. Kukkonen, "The Evangelical Movement of Finland in America", Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XLIII (August 1969), p. 125.

²⁵J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 25.

of the contact between these two, further relationships were established between Finnish pastors and the Missouri Synod. When the knowledge gained by these Finnish pastors concerning the Missouri Synod filtered down to the N. E. L. C. pastors, and they saw a certain doctrinal consistency between themselves and the Missouri Synod, immediate exploratory investigation toward possible fellowship between the two groups was undertaken. At the convention of the National Church in 1922, a committee was appointed to approach the leaders of the Missouri Synod. A meeting between the two groups was held in February of 1923 in Ironwood, Michigan, and since this meeting proved fruitful, another meeting was called for April of that year in Chicago, which the president of the Missouri Synod himself, Dr. Pfothauer, attended. While the general feeling was for fellowship because of the evident doctrinal unity between the two bodies, vehement opposition was voiced by members in the National Church under the leadership of Salonen, centering in the fact that the Missouri Synod only allowed male suffrage in the government of the church, whereas in the N. E. L. C. women's suffrage was also allowed.²⁶ Despite Salonen's thinking that this question was an insurmountable barrier to fellowship, altar and pulpit fellowship was declared between the National Church and the Missouri Synod in 1923. As Walter Kukkonen puts it in his article, "The National Church now turned its back on the Evangelical Movement in Finland, and changed its revivalistic heritage to a

²⁶Ibid., p. 26.

theological orthodoxy consistent with Missouri."²⁷

With fellowship declared, the controversy grew even more heated. Sharp attacks were pointed against the State Church of Finland by Pastor Patiala, who "called all true preachers of the Gospel to come out from amongst the unbelievers and from the false church."²⁸ He was supported in his contention that State Churches cannot be orthodox by Dr. Pfotenhauer and Prof. W. H. T. Dau of this seminary. At the other extreme, though, was a large segment of the National Church headed by Salonen which gave complete support to the State Church of Finland and the right of the Gospel Association to be part of it. The question of fellowship with the State Church proved to be a most perplexing problem in the National Church in 1923 and the years following.

To guide the N. E. L. C. during these years, Pastor M. Wiskari was chosen. Wiskari was an N. E. L. C. pastor, but as was often the case, he had been trained by the Gospel Association of Finland. This fact only added to the controversy that was now central in the thinking of the National Church.

There were now present within the National Church two camps, the "Missourians" who wished to sever all ties with the State Church because of its supposed false teaching, and the group that wished to retain relations. With such disunity in the church, it was imperative that a solution be found to re-

²⁷Walter Kukkonen, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, p. 127.

²⁸J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 27.

unite the factions. It was thought that a policy of isolation from both the Missouri Synod and the Gospel Association would solve the problem, but factors entered in which kept the controversy alive. One, Pastor Erkki Penttinen entered the N. E. L. C. He had severed all relations with the State Church, declaring that no orthodox Lutheran pastor could remain in such a church. He was supported by many, and anathematized by others in the National Church.²⁹ Two, the leader of the Gospel Association, K. V. Taminen, visited the United States on his way to Japan in 1925. The question that needed to be answered was whether or not he would accept the N. E. L. C. as a church. While no definitive answer was presented, the opposition between the groups was again evident--members of 14 of the 67 congregations of the National Church accepted him; those of the Missouri persuasion did not.³⁰

By the year 1927, the controversy had risen to such a fever pitch that there was a distinct possibility of an actual split in the National Church. However, the convention of 1927 lessened this possibility. While neither group was willing to ascribe wholeheartedly to the views of the other, a new confidence in possible reunion was generated. It remained for the 1928 convention to issue a workable, albeit questionable, solution to the controversy by advocating selective fellowship--altar and pulpit fellowship could be practised by pastors of the

²⁹Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰Ibid., p. 30.

N. E. L. C. with other orthodox Lutheran pastors, even if they were members of a church known to be tolerant of highly questionable doctrinal pronouncements.³¹ Even with this statement, there was still a definite movement of the National Church toward alignment with the Missouri Synod under Wiskari and a dissociation with the State Church of Finland and the Gospel Association.

1931 marked the year of visible movement toward the Missouri Synod in the National Church. Altar and pulpit fellowship had been declared in 1923, and had caused great problems in the N. E. L. C., but now in 1931, two factors showed the affinity the National Church had to the Missouri Synod. One, a new president of the National Church was elected, Gustaf A. Aho. The uniqueness of his election lay in the fact that he was the first American-born president of the N. E. L. C., and while he had been trained by Gospel Association pastors at Ironwood, he consistently advocated fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Two, the National Church began use of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, for the training and preparation of its own ministers. From the close of the Ironwood seminary in 1923 to 1931, the N. E. L. C. had been left without a seminary of its own. Some pastors had been secured from Finland, but by this time it was necessary for pastors of the National Church to have a working knowledge of both Finnish and English, and Finnish pastors were unprepared to meet this requirement.

³¹Ibid., p. 31.

Thus, under the direction of president Aho, training to prepare men for service in the N. E. L. C. began. The training program began with only two potential candidates, but by 1936, four men were enrolled in the program. A new step toward union with the Missouri Synod had been taken.

Despite periods of financial stress in the years following 1931, the National Church grew, both physically and in its relationship to the Missouri Synod, the latter being highlighted by the fact that the N. E. L. C. began to use the materials of the Missouri Synod, both in its worship and in its education programs. Yet "anti-Missouri" feeling was still present, though not to the degree of the 20's. Some of the older Finns wished to return to an alliance with the Gospel Association of Finland to avoid the "spiritual darkness of Missouri" they supposed had settled on the National Church, while others actually left the National Church and joined Suomi congregations.³² One point should be made here concerning the National Church and the Suomi Synod. Both sides had shelved the question of merger in 1915, but in 1935, the matter was once again taken up. Every effort was made to reach doctrinal agreement through a series of meetings, but it soon became evident that they were farther apart than ever--the N. E. L. C. was convinced the Suomi Synod was doctrinally disunited and the Suomi Synod accused the National Church of "impossible Missouri demands."³³

³²Ibid., p. 34.

³³Ibid., p. 51.

The training program at Concordia Seminary for National Church pastors was strengthened and implemented in 1938 with the addition of Alexander Monto to the faculty. Prior to his acceptance of the position at the seminary, he had served as superintendent of schools in the Philippines. Now he assumed directorship of the Finnish department of the seminary, a position for which he was indeed well qualified. For twenty years he served in his position with distinction, preparing a low number of three pastors in 1939 to a high of twenty in 1957.³⁴

The course of study, outlined in the 1962 Yearbook of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, but certainly in effect many years prior to this time, was a strenuous one for perspective N. E. L. C. pastors. It was arranged in two categories--classroom work and Luther League meetings. In the classroom, intensive study of the Finnish language, as well as the historical backgrounds of the State Church of Finland, was required in addition to the normal courses in the languages, humanities, public-speaking, psychology, and sociology. In the study of the historical backgrounds of the State Church, they were required to analyze the relationships between their own church and the Suomi Synod, the Gospel Association of Finland, and the Apostolic Lutheran Church, as well as study the lives of men, such as Paavo Ruotsalainen and F. G. Hedberg, who were leaders of movements influencing the State Church of Finland, and thus, the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. Practical

³⁴Ibid., p. 35

application of the Finnish language was gained through translation of Finnish sermons to English and vice versa. The Luther League meetings, held on the 2nd and 4th Sunday evening of each month, consisted of Finnish and English devotions under the direction of individual students, and a topic of discussion on the practical aspects of the ministry.³⁵

The importance of the Springfield seminary to the National Church is perhaps stated in one way in this following excerpt from a letter sent to the N. E. L. C. congregations in 1963 by J. A. O. Preus, then president of Concordia Seminary in Springfield:

"As most of you know, Concordia Seminary, Springfield, has been the official Seminary of the N. E. L. C. for nearly thirty years. All but two of your forty-two active pastors have graduated from Concordia, and several other pastors of your Church have also been trained there. The National Evangelical Lutheran Church through its Brotherhood has done a great deal to help the students of your Church receive an education, and the Missouri Synod has contributed a great deal in subsidizing the education of your students not only through the building of buildings but also through the payment of faculty members and other benefits involved in running an institution. It has been the mutual pleasure of the two churches to have Professor Alexander Monto and more recently Professor Gerhard Aho as members of the Concordia Seminary staff representing your Church. It is a conservative estimate the Missouri Synod has subsidized the N. E. L. C. by at least \$100,000 in the training of these forty pastors over the thirty years."³⁶

The publishing efforts of the National Church also grew

³⁵National Evangelical Lutheran Church. 1962 Yearbook. Ironwood:National Publishing Company, 1963, pp. 57-58.

³⁶National Evangelical Lutheran Church. Lutheran Voice, October, 1963, p. 7.

from its humble beginnings in 1907 under Wuori. Often the publishing house at Ironwood was called upon to operate at a deficit, but generous gifts by the members of the N. E. L. C. prevented it from not operating at all. Additional facilities were acquired in 1944 to further expand the printing operations of the National Church.

A primary need in the N. E. L. C. during the 30's was a publication directed specifically at youth. A youth publication had been tried in the years following 1923, but as the State Church controversy intensified, this publication was suspended. It was not until 1936 that another attempt was made, with the publication of The Lutheran Youth.³⁷ Its format was constructed in such a way as to satisfy the increasing number of English speaking youth in the N. E. L. C., and yet retain the Finnish language in some sections for the Finnish speaking youth. This publication continued until 1949.

Almost conjointly with the publication of The Lutheran Youth, the need was felt for an official publication of the church at large in the English language to supplement the publication of Auttaja, the Finnish language National Church organ. It took thirteen years, however, for this publication to be realized, and when it did appear, it was not an entirely new publication. The Lutheran Voice, which became the official publication of the National Church in 1949, was but The Lutheran Youth in a new guise--the Luther League, for whom The Lutheran

³⁷J. E. Nopola, Our Threescore Years, p. 44.

Youth had been written, offered their publication for full church use, and the offer was accepted.³⁸ From then on, youth program information was included in The Lutheran Voice. The editorship of The Lutheran Voice during its fourteen year existence was placed upon the shoulders of some of the most prominent men in the N. E. L. C.--J. E. Nopola, Emil A. Heino, Dr. G. A. Aho, R. W. Heikkinen, Vilho V. Latvala, H. K. Ranta, M. T. Ranta, H. P. Esala, J. W. Sippola, and Gerhard Aho among others.

In the area of missions, home-directed programs expanded in the period of the 40's and early 50's, with the result that by 1954, the N. E. L. C. had a membership of 8,785, a great increase from the all-time low membership level in the National Church in 1946. Foreign mission work played a minor role in the mission of the N. E. L. C., although it was expanded from mere support of Gospel Association work in Japan, which lasted only a few years, to include service to the Finns who were members of the Free Churches of Finland, as well as Finns in North Queensland, Australia, and natives in New Zealand and in New Guinea. Gerhard Aho was a prime example of the attempted mission work of the National Church having served both in Finland for three years and in Australia and New Zealand.³⁹ This mission work was carried on by his father, Dr. Gustaf A. Aho, after Dr. Aho had served as president of the National Church.

The youth program was expanded by the establishment of

³⁸Ibid., p. 44.

³⁹"Brotherhood News," The Lutheran Voice, December, 1957, p. 11.

Luther Leagues, following the publication of The Lutheran Youth in 1936. Eleven years later, in 1947, an innovation was introduced into the N. E. L. C. youth program: Luther League camps. The camps, lasting a week, were formulated to include both education and recreation for the youth.

The liturgical orientation of the National Church also underwent changes during the twenty-two year span of Dr. Gustaf A. Aho's presidency. Whereas before 1931, the National Church tended to be revivalistic in its preaching--perhaps a result of the early association with the Gospel Association of Finland--after 1931, as men entered the National Church from the Springfield seminary, revivalistic preaching was avoided.⁴⁰ There was also a change in the clerical vestments, from the frock coat with white bands commonly worn by the State Church ministers to use of the supplice and stole.⁴¹

In 1953, the presidency of Dr. Aho, the longest in the history of the N. E. L. C., ended. A new president was chosen to guide the National Church, Dr. J. E. Nopola. He served for two years before the actual merger process between the National Church and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod began.

⁴⁰ ⁴¹Ibid., p.47.

CHAPTER IV

MERGER--1956 TO 1964

The National Evangelical Lutheran Church had lived in fellowship with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod since 1923, having established altar and pulpit fellowship in that year; the National Church used Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, for the preparation of their pastors; they employed Missouri Synod religious materials in their education programs. Yet for a thirty-three year period, from 1923 to 1956, no closer relationship had ever been seriously discussed. Now in 1956, earnest efforts toward ultimate merger began. The entire process would cover eight years, and would result in the National Church's full incorporation into the Missouri Synod.

The preliminaries began at the 58th Annual Convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, held on June 22-23 in Port Arthur, Ontario, Canada. A resolution was put forth on motion by Rev. Emil A. Heino,

"that a committee be elected to study the question of further relationship with the Missouri Synod, which committee shall be authorized only to make a study of the question, to publicize their findings in the congregations and bring their findings to the next annual convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church."¹

The Committee on Intersynodical Relations, composed of Dr. J. E. Nopola, Dr. Gustaf A. Aho, and Rev. Emil A. Heino, undertook

¹"Minutes of the 58th Annual Convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church," The Lutheran Voice, September, 1956, p. 5.

the study, after news of the resolution adopted by the National Church was related to the Missouri Synod convention at St. Paul, Minnesota, by Dr. J. E. Nopola,

"It is a pleasure for me to bring to you the greetings of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church--a small church of Finnish origin which has been in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Missouri Synod since 1923. I am glad to report to you that at our convention held last week at Port Arthur, Canada, the National Church went on record, or it decided, that we elect a committee for the purpose of studying the possibility of merger or amalgamation into the Missouri Synod."²

In May of 1957, the first meeting between the two bodies was held in Chicago, Illinois. The Missouri Synod was represented by Dr. J. W. Behnken, president of the Missouri Synod; Dr. A. H. Grum, first vice-president; Mark J. Steege and A. Ulbrich of the Finnish Relations Committee of the Missouri Synod. The National Church was represented by Dr. J. E. Nopola and Pastors Emil A. Heino, R. W. Heikkinen, and R. J. L. Aho.³ Issues regarding merger were discussed, including the Missouri Synod's suggestion that the National Church join the Synodical Conference as evidence of the National Church's willingness to merge. However, no action was taken on this suggestion by the National Church, as had been the case back in 1923 when the Missouri Synod first suggested it to the N. E. L. C. This fact and the other findings of the meeting were related to the respective church bodies in the following months.

²"Greetings to the Missouri Synod Convention", The Lutheran Voice, July-August, 1956, p. 2.

³E. A. Heino, "The Church Convention--Intersynodical Relations", The Lutheran Voice, July-August, 1957, p. 7.

In 1958, the action toward merger came even more clearly into focus. Doctrinal unity, based on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, had been affirmed, but other practical matters had to be considered before union would be possible. First,

"In the field of practise there exists a difference between us and the Missouri Synod in church government. In the Missouri Synod the church is governed by adult male members, while in the National Church, since 1910, all adult members have participated in the government of the church by exercising the right to vote. The Missouri Synod asks that unity of practise be established also in this area by making their "time-tested and Scripture-sanctioned" policy of male suffrage in the congregation the "ultimate goal" in our congregations."⁴

Second, it needed to be determined what method for union should be employed--should the National Church indeed become a member of the Synodical Conference as an independent Synod, and thus not actually merge with the Missouri Synod, but rather work in conjunction with it or should it become a non-geographical district of the Missouri Synod or should it integrate itself into the existing districts of the Missouri Synod?⁵ While no definitive answer was forthcoming on this latter question, it was emphasized that consideration of these practical problems were necessary to insure a proper understanding within the National Church of what the concept of merger entailed--

"our people may be ready and willing to unite as a member synod of the Synodical Conference or even as a non-geographical district of the Missouri Synod. But it is doubtful whether we are now ready to accept a merger

⁴"Highlights of Our Church's Work", The Lutheran Voice, May, 1958, p. 3.

⁵G. A. Aho, "Our Proposed Merger with the Missouri Synod", The Lutheran Voice, June, 1958, p. 3.

in which our historical identity is completely obliterated."⁶

At the convention of 1958 in Ironwood, the matter continued to be discussed. It was decided however by an 82 to 5 vote not to act on the actual merger, but to place the matter on the agenda of the 1959 convention. Many delegates felt it was too soon to decide definitively, and the added year would give all congregations of the National Church adequate opportunity to discuss the matter with all its implications, vote on it in the congregations, and finally vote on the issue at the 1959 convention.

By 1959, the National Church had grown to 10,414 members, with 34 pastors serving 68 congregations and 11 preaching stations. A new president, Emil A. Heino, was chosen to replace J. E. Nopola, and the process toward merger continued. At the 1959 convention, the formal invitation of the Missouri Synod was extended to the National Church to join the 2,400,000 member body. The invitation was acknowledged, and the Committee on Doctrine and Practice of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church was instructed to prepare plans for actual merger at the 1960 convention. Congregations, which had been asked to prepare for the merger vote at the 1959 convention, were now asked to prepare for voting on the issue at the 1960 convention. However, by a 54 to 45 vote, even this motion was defeated. Thus, the action on the merger issue that was to have

⁶Ibid., p. 3.

been taken at the 1959 convention was postponed for at least another two years.⁷ The primary reason for the delay centered both in the fact that no plans had been laid as to how the merger was to be effected, and the people of the N. E. L. C. still did not feel sufficiently informed to make a decision of any kind in regard to merger. To remedy this lack of information, the Committee on Doctrine and Practice, according to the directive it had received at the 1959 convention, met in August of 1959 at Port Arthur, Ontario, and began to set down in concrete form the elements of and the considerations necessary for consummation of merger in the eyes of the National Church. The completed statement was first sent to all National Church congregations to provide the people with all possible information, in order that they might be better prepared to decide on the merger issue. This statement was then also taken to a meeting between the two churches in Chicago, in October of 1959, by G. A. Aho, E. A. Heino, and J. W. Sippola. There the statement was intensively studied by members of the Missouri Synod delegation, which included Dr. O. R. Harms, Dr. Mark Steege, Dr. Armand H. Ulbrich, Dr. Marin Franzmann and Professor Walter W. Stuenkel. Nothing was found in any of the statements or requests made by the Committee on Doctrine and Practice which would prevent merger. However, certain practical questions were again raised at this meeting concerning the problem of

⁷"A Review of the 61st Convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church", The Lutheran Voice, July-August, 1959, p. 9.

of women's suffrage in church government; lodge affiliation and membership in the National Church; the question of actual integration into the Missouri Synod--on this point, the alternative of joining the Synodical Conference was rejected; it was now a question of either entering as a non-geographical district of the Missouri Synod or individual congregations being integrated into the district of the Missouri Synod in which the congregation was situated; the question of how long the present officers of the National Church would continue to carry out the responsibilities of their offices.⁸ Yet each of these questions was in the process of being solved to the mutual satisfaction of each side, and thus it was decided unanimously by both delegations that none of the issues would prove to be a hindrance to merger.

In 1960, the statement of the Committee on Doctrine and Practice regarding merger was presented to the annual convention, but the only convention action taken on merger was a resolution to postpone for another year the actual vote--

"The Board of Directors of Synod recommends that the congregations of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church be instructed to decide at the 1960 convention to place the voting on the merger on the agenda of the 1961 convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. In voting on the proposal the vote was 107 for, 9 against, to place the voting on the merger on the agenda of the 1961 convention.....the pastoral conference voted approval of the recommendation of the Board of Directors to the 1960 Convention that the proposed merger be placed on the agenda of the 1961 Convention.

⁸G. A. Aho, "Committee Report on Proposed Merger", The Lutheran Voice, January, 1960, pp. 6-9.

The intention of this resolution is to give every congregation notice a year in advance that the proposed merger of our Church with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod will be voted on in the 1961 Convention of our Church."⁹

The 63rd Annual Convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, held at Ely, Minnesota, on June 28-29, 1961, made the historic decision. After debating the issue for several hours, the merger resolution, as drafted by the Committee on Doctrine and Practice composed of Dr. G. A. Aho, E. A. Heino, and J. W. Sippola, was adopted by a 112 to 49 vote. Herewith is the text of that merger proposal:

WHEREAS, the National Evangelical Lutheran Church is in doctrinal agreement with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and has practiced altar and pulpit fellowship with this church since 1923; and

WHEREAS, our Church has been considering a merger with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod since June 1956; and

WHEREAS, the advantages of such a merger have been discussed in our church publications, church conventions, conferences and meetings; and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in its convention at San Francisco, California, on June 18, 1959 has extended an invitation to the National Evangelical Lutheran Church to establish organic union; and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has through its representatives assured us that in the event of a merger suitable provisions would be made to safeguard and promote the interests and fellowship of the membership of the present National Evangelical Lutheran Church;

⁹"What Has Synod Decided About Merger?", The Lutheran Voice, January, 1962, p. 3.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Evangelical Lutheran Church accept the invitation to unite with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

provided that the delegate convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod approves the following conditions:

1. A Board for Finnish Affairs be established and that this board be appointed by the praesidium of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, with equal representation from the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the membership of the present National Evangelical Lutheran Church; and
2. Satisfactory arrangements be made for the training of pastors and theologians capable of using the Finnish language; and
3. The publication of the Auttaja, the Finnish religious periodical, be continued as long as necessary; and provision be made for publishing any other religious literature which may be deemed necessary; and
4. Permission be granted that the pastors and congregations of the present National Evangelical Lutheran Church may meet together to discuss their mutual problems under the direction of the Board for Finnish Affairs; and
5. Mutually satisfactory arrangements be made pertaining to pastors' pensions, church extension loans and funds, the National Luther League, the National Brotherhood, the National Women's League, properties of the present National Evangelical Lutheran Church and her congregations, before the merger is completed.

This proposal shall be considered adopted if it is supported by a 2/3 majority vote of the delegates at the convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, unless 1/3 of the congregations of Synod file a dissenting opinion with the secretary of Synod within six months after the decision.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the members of the Board of Directors and the Committee on Doctrine and Practice shall represent our Church in making the necessary arrangements for this merger, which will become effective two years after the adoption of this resolution, pro-

vided the conditions have been accepted.¹⁰

One of the practical questions was also decided definitively. Two alternatives had been tendered as means of integration into the Missouri Synod by the National Church--either enter as a non-geographical district of the Missouri Synod or integrate National Churches into the existing Missouri Synod districts. At a meeting of the Synodical Board and the Committee on Doctrine and Practice, held in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 19-20, the first alternative was completely rejected, when it was discovered that such an action would require a resolution by the Missouri Synod, which also saw great impracticality in such a method of integration. Thus the second alternative, which seemed to be the preferred method among most National Church congregations, was accepted.¹¹

As stipulated in the second last paragraph of the National Church resolution, its adoption could have been nullified if 1/3 of the N. E. L. C. congregations had filed a dissenting vote by January 1, 1962. If this had been the case, another vote on the merger resolution would have been required at the 1962 convention; this almost happened--20 congregations, one less than the necessary 1/3, filed a dissenting vote.¹² Despite the fact that those opposing merger were so near, and

¹⁰"Merger Resolution", The Lutheran Voice, November, 1961, p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4.

¹²"Merger Resolution Ratified", The Lutheran Voice, February, 1962, p. 2.

yet so far, the resolution was overtly ratified on January 1, 1962.

At the 1962 convention, the following resolution, submitted by the merger committee, was unanimously adopted:

Whereas, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in its convention in San Francisco, California, on June 18, 1959, extended an invitation to the National Evangelical Lutheran Church to unite with said Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod; and

Whereas, the National Evangelical Lutheran Church in its annual convention in 1961 has drawn up five points as bases for accepting this invitation; and

Whereas, this resolution to accept the invitation was passed by the required two-thirds majority of said convention; and

Whereas, less than one-third of the congregations of the N. E. L. C. filed a dissenting vote to this resolution by December 31, 1961; and

Whereas, the Boards on Missions and Evangelism, Church Extension, Pension and Disability, and the Printing House Board, in their meetings with the respective Boards of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod have found nothing contrary to our stated conditions of merger and that mutually satisfactory arrangements can be made between the two Churches,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That we urge all members of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church to give their whole-hearted support for the consummation of this merger.¹³

The committee also

"proposed that an abiding committee for "Finnish Affairs" be appointed by the merging N. E. L. C. and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, to be elected at the 19-63 convention when the merger will be consummated. The purpose of this committee shall be to guide and advise (1) in the recruitment and training of Finnish students;

¹³"64th Annual Convention", The Lutheran Voice, July-August, 1962, pp. 11-12.

(2) in the publication of Finnish religious literature and publications, and (3) in the establishment and maintenance of church work where the Finnish language is used and in the promotion of sound Lutheranism among Finnish people. (4) This Board shall have the right to call meetings of pastors and congregations of the present N. E. L. C. to discuss their mutual problems. (5) This Board shall convey their advice and recommendations for action to the proper officers of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod."¹⁴

At the 65th and final convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church as an individual church body, held in Esko, Minnesota, in June, 1963, definitive ratification of merger came with the acceptance of "The Agreement for Merger of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod" by a 105 to 6 vote:

We are deeply grateful that Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, has given the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the National Evangelical Lutheran Church doctrinal unity. This we have publicly affirmed as early as 1923.

Our unity of spirit has manifested itself through the years by an ever closer fellowship in the work of the kingdom. We are convinced that the time has come when we should be one church.

In order to consummate a merger of our churches, we agree to the following arrangements:

I

A Board for Finnish Affairs shall be appointed by the President of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in consultation with the Vice-Presidents. This Board shall consist of eight members who have clearly evidenced their interest in the promotion and extension of kingdom work among Finnish-speaking people.

1. The National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall name four members to this Board for the initial term. They shall be elected at the 1963 convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 12.

2. The purpose of this Board shall be to advise:
 - a. In the recruitment and training of Finnish students, including students from Finland;
 - b. In the publication of Finnish religious literature and publications;
 - c. In the establishment and maintenance of church work where the Finnish language is used; and
 - d. In the promotion of sound Lutheranism among Finnish people.
3. This Board shall have the right to call meetings of pastors and representatives of congregations of the former National Evangelical Lutheran Church to discuss mutual problems.
4. This Board shall convey its advice and recommendations for action to the proper officers and boards of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

II

1. The Finnish Department of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, shall be continued as long as deemed necessary by the Board for Finnish Affairs.
2. The Board for Finnish Affairs shall seek to provide support for the training of Finnish-speaking students at Synod's colleges and seminaries.

III

The publication of the Finnish language organ Auttaja shall be continued as long as deemed necessary by the Board. Finnish language tracts and other necessary literature shall be published.

IV

The congregations and pastors of the former National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall hold meetings in 1964 and 1965 under the sponsorship of the Board for Finnish Affairs. Further meetings may be called by the Board for Finnish Affairs if deemed necessary. Special meetings of pastors of the former National Evangelical Lutheran Church may be called by this Board if deemed necessary.

V

1. All congregations and pastors of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be accepted into the respective Districts of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Subsidies of mission congregations shall be continued.

2. All contracts and agreements made by the Extension Board of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be honored by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. The capital fund and all property of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church Extension Fund shall become the property of the Extension Fund of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.
3. All properties held by the National Evangelical Lutheran Church at the time of the consummation of the merger shall become the property of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.
4. Upon application, all pastors of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be accepted as participating members of the Pension Fund of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. All pastors shall be covered for at least the minimum pension as specified in the pension program of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. All assets of the Pension Fund of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church shall become the property of the Pension Fund of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

VI

The merger shall become effective six months after the acceptance of this agreement by the responsible representatives of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the convention of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹⁵

Six months later, on January 1, 1964, in fulfillment of section VI of the Agreement, the 12,560 member National Evangelical Lutheran Church officially became a part of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

The National Church per se no longer existed, but her memory could not be forgotten--The Lutheran Voice was discontinued, but Auttaja continued to be printed in Ironwood after the merger; a Finnish department is still maintained at Concordia Seminary in Springfield, headed by Gerhard Aho; J. E.

¹⁵"The Agreement for Merger", The Lutheran Voice, April, 1963, p. 4.

Nopola now holds an executive position at Concordia Publishing House here in St. Louis.

A statement made by President Heino in his last convention address would serve as a fitting conclusion to this paper,

"It is true that we are giving up our identity as the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, but not our membership in the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ...The merger should not mean the end, but rather the beginning of even greater service in the kingdom of God."¹⁶

¹⁶"President Heino's Annual Message to Convention", The Lutheran Voice, July-August, 1963, p. 5.

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