

1-1-1967

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### Recommended Citation

Gaertner, Carl A. (1967) "The Lutheran World Federation," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 38, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol38/iss1/3>

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# The Lutheran World Federation

CARL A. GAERTNER

As a church body of Lutheran Christians, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod is properly interested in all of Christendom and naturally, therefore, also in all of Lutheranism.

This interest is necessarily extended to The Lutheran World Federation, the worldwide Lutheran federation that involves member churches of more than 50 million Lutheran Christians. Such interest has been manifested by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in various ways: by receiving official reports from special synodical committees, as well as its Doctrinal

Unity Committee, and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations; also by convention resolutions (see synodical *Proceedings* from 1953 through 1965); and, in response to invitation, by sending official observers to the assemblies of The Lutheran World Federation. In addition, theologians and church administrators have from time to time collaborated, by invitation, with commissions and committees of The Lutheran World Federation in service, research, and study projects and have published articles in the Federation's quarterly, *The Lutheran World*.

*The Rev. Dr. Carl A. Gaertner, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Dallas, Texas, serves as chairman of the Sub-Committee on Church Relations of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. In 1963 he attended the World Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki as a member of the delegation of observers from The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. In June 1966 he served as a member of the CTCR committee that met with the LWF's general secretary, Dr. André Appel, to initiate the implementation of the Missouri Synod's Detroit convention resolution (No. 3-14) relative to preparing a report and recommendations regarding the Synod's future relations with the LWF. At the close of the meeting with Dr. Appel the committee requested both Dr. Gaertner and Dr. Appel to write articles for CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY with a view toward clarifying some of the factors that the Synod will need to take into consideration as it charts its future relations with the LWF. Dr. Gaertner has responded with the following article, which comments on certain features of the LWF constitution.*

It is not surprising therefore that the question of membership of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in The Lutheran World Federation is a live issue in the Synod. Reports that have been submitted to synodical conventions, and the response to such reports, make it clear that the question of membership has been given prayerful consideration. Though past invitations to membership have been declined, the Synod nevertheless has always made provisions that further study be given to this question by authorized personnel and that the constituency of the Synod be kept informed of all important matters relating to The Lutheran World Federation. In the forty-sixth regular convention in Detroit, Mich., in 1965, the Synod (in Resolution 3-14) requested its Commission on Theology and Church Relations "to make a thorough and critical exploration of future relations with The Lutheran World Federation, this exploration to be made to-

gether with The Lutheran World Federation secretariat." It was further resolved to have intensive conversations with sister churches regarding future relations with The Lutheran World Federation. The resolution also stipulated that "a full report and specific recommendations be made to the Synod and, if possible, to the 1967 convention."

In response to Resolution 3-14, this ar-

ticle is intended to supply information concerning The Lutheran World Federation. We present the constitution of The Lutheran World Federation as basic information to all pastors of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. They in turn are requested to bring it to the attention of their respective congregations. We also append some notes and explanations that we trust will be helpful.

## THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

### I. NAME

The name and title of the body organized under this Constitution shall be The Lutheran World Federation.

### II. DOCTRINAL BASIS

The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God.

### III. NATURE, FUNCTIONS AND SCOPE

#### 1. *Nature*

The Lutheran World Federation shall be a free association of Lutheran Churches. It shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it. It shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority, nor shall it have power to legislate for the Churches belonging to it or to limit the autonomy of any Member Church.

#### 2. *Functions*

In accordance with the preceding paragraphs, The Lutheran World Federation shall:

- (a) Further a united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation.
- (b) Cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran Churches of the world.
- (c) Develop fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans.
- (d) Foster Lutheran interest in, concern for, and participation in ecumenical movements.
- (e) Support Lutheran Churches and groups as they endeavor to meet the spiritual needs of other Lutherans and to extend the Gospel.
- (f) Provide a channel for Lutheran Churches and groups to help meet physical needs.

#### 3. *Scope of Authority*

In accordance with its nature, function and structure, The Lutheran World Federation may take action on behalf of one or more Member Churches in such matters as they may commit to it.

### IV. MEMBERSHIP

The Lutheran World Federation consists of Churches which accept the doctrinal basis set forth in Article II of this Constitution. Each Church which applies for membership in

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the Federation shall declare its acceptance of this Constitution. Its reception into membership shall be decided by The Lutheran World Federation in Assembly, or in the interim, if not more than one-third of the Member Churches raise an objection within one year, by the Executive Committee.

Membership in the Federation may be terminated by vote of the Assembly or by withdrawal.

### V. ORGANIZATION

The Lutheran World Federation shall exercise its functions through the following: 1) The Assembly; 2) The Executive Committee; 3) National Committees; 4) Commissions. In all the functions of the Federation, both clerical and lay persons shall be eligible to participate.

### VI. THE ASSEMBLY

1. An Assembly of the Federation shall normally be held every six years at the call of the President. The time and place and program of each Assembly shall be determined by the Executive Committee. Special Meetings of the Assembly may be called by the Executive Committee.
2. The Assembly shall consist of chosen representatives of the Member Churches of the Federation. The number of the representatives shall be determined by the Executive Committee.

The allocation of the representatives in the Assembly shall be made to the Member Churches by the Executive Committee with the advice of the National Committees, and due regard shall be given to such factors as numerical size of churches, geographical distribution by continents and countries, adequate representation of the Younger Churches and the Minority Churches, and the right of each completely independent Member Church to have at least one representative in the Assembly. Suggestions for readjustments in the allocation of representatives in the Assembly may be made to the Executive Committee by Member Churches or groups of Member Churches, national or regional, and these readjustments shall become effective if approved by the Executive Committee and by the Member Churches concerned.

The representatives in the Assembly shall be chosen by the Member Churches themselves.

Whenever Lutheran congregations in union church bodies combine to ask for representation in the Assembly, the Executive Committee may invite them to send representatives to the Assembly in a consultative capacity. Lutheran associations and organizations designated by the Executive Committee may be invited to send representatives to the Assembly in a consultative capacity in such numbers as the Executive Committee may determine.

3. The Assembly shall be the principal authority in the Federation. It shall elect the President of the Federation and the other members of the Executive Committee, shall receive reports from National Committees, shall appoint Commissions, and shall determine the fundamental lines of the Federation's work.

### VII. OFFICERS

The President of the Federation shall be chosen by ballot of the Assembly and a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for an election. He shall assume office immediately after the close of the Assembly which has elected him and before the organization of the new Executive Committee. He shall be the chief official representative of the Federation. He shall hold office until the close of the following Assembly, and he shall be ineligible to succeed himself. Other officers of the Federation shall be chosen by the Executive Committee.

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VIII. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. Each Assembly shall elect nineteen persons who with the President shall constitute the Executive Committee of the Federation. At least four members of the Executive Committee shall be lay persons. Membership in the Executive Committee shall be allocated with due regard to such factors as numerical size of churches, geographical distribution by continents and countries, and adequate representation of the Younger Churches and the Minority Churches. In the choice of members from the Younger Churches and the Minority Churches, an effort shall be made to effect changes at each Assembly in order to make possible a rotation among all of them.
2. The Executive Committee shall meet at least once annually. It shall choose from its own membership three Vice-Presidents as officers of the Federation. It shall also elect a Treasurer of the Federation. The duties of these officers shall be those usually assigned to those offices.
3. The Executive Committee shall conduct the business of the Lutheran World Federation in the interim between Assemblies, shall supervise the appointment of National Committees and receive annual reports from them, shall elect a General Secretary and assign him his duties, shall make a full annual report (including complete financial statements) to all Member Churches, shall appoint all Committees and Commissions not otherwise provided for, and shall represent the Federation in all external relations.
4. Vacancies in the Executive Committee ad interim shall be filled by that Committee.
5. Normally, chairmen of Commissions shall attend the regular meetings of the Executive Committee as consultants.

IX. GENERAL SECRETARY

Immediately following the close of each Assembly the Executive Committee shall elect a General Secretary who shall devote his full time to this office and who shall serve until the close of the next Assembly. The General Secretary shall be responsible to the Executive Committee for his work. It shall be his duty to carry out the decisions of the Assembly and of the Executive Committee under the general supervision of the President. He shall report through the Executive Committee to the Assembly of the Federation.

X. NATIONAL COMMITTEES

The Member Churches in each country shall select a group of persons who, together with the member or members of the Executive Committee in that country, shall constitute a National Committee for the Lutheran World Federation. Each National Committee shall be asked to present to the Executive Committee an annual statement concerning the interests of the Lutheran World Federation in its country.

XI. COMMISSIONS

Commissions shall be established under the authority of the Federation and shall be appointed either by the Assembly or by the Executive Committee. It shall be the purpose of these Commissions to discharge designated functions of the Federation. They shall report annually to the Executive Committee, which shall exercise general supervision over them.

XII. FINANCE

The Executive Committee shall prepare annually a detailed budget for the Federation, designate the allocation of funds to particular needs, and assign to each National Committee its responsibility for specific portions of the budget. The Treasurer shall be authorized to establish depositories in various countries.

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## XIII. AMENDMENTS

Amendments to this Constitution may be made by a two-thirds vote of those present at any regularly called Assembly, provided notice of intention to amend shall have been given the preceding day. Amendments so made shall become effective one year after their adoption by the Assembly unless objection has been filed with the Executive Committee by Churches embracing in aggregate one-third of the constituency of the Federation.

As this constitution is studied, it is important to take seriously the fact that this religious organization is called a federation (Article I). It is constituted not by individual people nor by individual congregations as members but by member churches. It is a "free association of Lutheran Churches" and "it shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority" (Article III, 1). In this connection it is necessary to distinguish properly between a church body and a federation and even between a "conference," or association, of church bodies in altar and pulpit fellowship and a federation. As a member of a federation of churches, a church body assumes a degree of responsibility for the work, program, and official pronouncement of the federation; but such membership does not in itself involve the member churches in altar and pulpit fellowship with other member churches, nor does it make each member church responsible for the theological teaching and church practice of other member churches.

Theologically, therefore, all things being equal, it may be perfectly legitimate for a church body to join a federation of churches, even though that church could not for confessional reasons establish altar and pulpit fellowship with the other member churches constituting the federation. At the same time, it is a proper function of a church federation to strive for confessional unity that will promote and eventually, under God's blessing, establish altar

and pulpit fellowship among all member churches. (Article III, 2 a, b, c)

It will be noted that The Lutheran World Federation has a doctrinal basis (Article II). Lutherans will find it difficult to be critical of this doctrinal basis of the Federation. The emphasis on the Holy Scriptures as "the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice" and the acceptance of the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols as "a pure exposition of the Word of God" must surely thrill the hearts of all concerned Lutherans.

It is generally known that some critical questions have been raised in connection with the doctrinal basis, not as to formulation, but as to its practical validity in some member churches of The Lutheran World Federation. It is alleged that the church practice of a number of member churches makes their subscription to the Lutheran Symbols meaningless. It is asserted that their theology and their church practice are not in conformity with the doctrinal basis stated in Article II. The question of enforcing the doctrinal standards of Article II in The Lutheran World Federation is raised by some, both as it pertains to receiving new member churches and as it pertains to continuing membership for such member churches as apparently do not take seriously their commitment to the Lutheran Confessions.

The writer does not intend to speak for The Lutheran World Federation in this

matter. A few observations may, however, be in place. It should be remembered that we are dealing here with a federation of churches and not with a church body. A federation cannot act like a church and instigate doctrinal discipline for a member church. It must take as valid a church's subscription to the Lutheran Confessions as a church is received into the membership of the federation. Fidelity to the Lutheran Symbols, unquestionably, varies from one Lutheran Church to the other. It would seem difficult in a federation to establish an absolute standard of degree of fidelity to the Lutheran Symbols for member churches, even though the difference between a *de jure* and a *de facto* confessional subscription must be maintained.

This does not mean that The Lutheran World Federation necessarily remains indifferent to an inadequate subscription to the Confessions. The assemblies of The Lutheran World Federation provide some of the finest forums for Lutheran theological discussions and fraternal admonitions. A great deal of theological study and research is being done in the ongoing work of the commissions and special committees, as well as through the Inter-Confessional Research Center established in 1963 as an independent "Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research." The question may well be asked in this connection whether, perhaps, The Lutheran World Federation affords Lutheran churches one of the better means of being "Christ's mission to the church" by bringing to member churches in the Federation mutual instruction and admonition to strengthen all and thereby to help make the Lutheran Symbols a greater and more effective power in the life and practice of the member churches. (See *Proceedings of the Forty-*

*Sixth Regular Convention, 1965, p. 80, Resolution 1-01 C.*)

A closer look at the stated functions of The Lutheran World Federation (Article III, 2) will be helpful at this time. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has in the past expressed concern about the nature and function of The Lutheran World Federation. These concerns were conveyed to the officials of The Lutheran World Federation and received careful consideration. Conferences were held between officials of the Federation and representatives of the Synod. After such discussions in 1959, officials of The Lutheran World Federation addressed five questions to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod related to the concerns that had been expressed. The Committee on Doctrinal Unity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod gave careful attention to these questions. The answers in response to these questions are printed in *Reports and Memorials* for the forty-fifth convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1962, pages 144 and 145. These exchanges between the Federation and the Synod undoubtedly influenced to some extent the revisions made in Article III of the Federation constitution in the Helsinki Assembly. It should be stated in this connection that these changes were made on the recommendations of a special committee that was in consultation with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod observers in Helsinki. The observers agreed that the revisions were constructive and that they removed in substance the most serious concerns of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with respect to this part of the constitution.

The preceding paragraph has referred to revisions introduced into Article III, Part 1, dealing with the nature of The Lutheran

World Federation. It is clearly stated in this revised paragraph that the Federation "shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority." This change, it would seem, indicates a determination on the part of the Federation not to function as a church body, even though as a religious organization its interests have to do with churchly affairs and activities.

A number of changes were made also in the statements on the functions of The Lutheran World Federation (Article III, 2). The first change here noted is the substitution in statement (a) of the verb "further" for the verb "bear." The thought involved in this change is that though the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ may not in all instances be a united witness in all member churches of the Federation, it is a proper function of The Lutheran World Federation to work toward such a "united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation."

The second function of the Federation is stated in paragraph (b) of Article III, 2. This statement, unchanged from the original version of the constitution, expresses an important purpose, namely, to "cultivate unity of faith and confession among the Lutheran Churches of the world." As the Federation seriously pursues this objective through its theological studies, in which representatives of many member churches are involved and which are shared with all member churches, a more meaningful subscription to the Lutheran Symbols should become a reality for all member churches. Under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit, such studies should serve to develop a greater unity of faith on the basis of the Holy Scriptures.

The statement of the Federation's third

function in Article III, 2 (c) has also undergone a one-word revision. Instead of the word "promote," the word "develop" is now used. Accordingly, the Federation is to "develop fellowship and cooperation in study among Lutherans." If a theological consensus is to be achieved among all Lutherans in the world, this function of The Lutheran World Federation needs to be pursued earnestly by Lutherans everywhere.

The fourth function given expression in Article III, 2(d) is related to ecumenism which is an inescapable phenomenon for all of 20th-century Christendom. The changes made in this statement emphasize that The Lutheran World Federation is to foster not only Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements but Lutheran interest in, and concern for, such ecumenical movements. In this manner, member churches in the Federation are challenged to add a Lutheran dimension to ecumenism and to assume a responsibility for directing the ecumenical movement into God-pleasing achievements.

The Lutheran World Federation is in its own right an ecumenical movement among Lutheran churches. In unique manner it also represents Lutheranism on many ecumenical fronts. Its Inter-Confessional Research Program has enabled it to function effectively in ecumenical dialogs, as has become evident especially in Lutheran-Roman Catholic international theological conferences held since Vatican II. This function of The Lutheran World Federation is strategic, involving heavy responsibilities in this age of ecumenical challenge.

Section (e) of Article III, 2 underwent considerable change in the revision of the constitution at Helsinki. Originally it read: "To develop a united Lutheran approach to responsibilities in missions and education."



The revised statement reads: "Support Lutheran Churches and groups as they endeavor to meet the spiritual needs of other Lutherans and to extend the Gospel." This new wording emphasizes that the Federation is not a church body but rather a federation of churches that seeks to give support and encouragement to Lutheran churches, as well as to groups within these churches, as they seek to meet the spiritual needs of fellow Lutherans in extending the Gospel of our Savior. The historical background of this stated function reaches back to the days of World War II, when many Lutheran missions became orphans after their supporting bodies had been disorganized, disabled, and even destroyed by the terrible ravages of war. The Lutheran World Federation came to the rescue of these orphaned mission churches and helped supply them with material and with manpower support. This prompt and heroic action of The Lutheran World Federation is a noble chapter in the contemporary history of Lutheran missionary work. This statement of function (c) in the constitution gives authority to the Federation in its general scope of work also for future emergencies wherever and whenever they may arise.

Perhaps at this point something should be said about The Lutheran World Federation's being involved in actual work as a church. In a recent meeting with Dr. André Appel, the general secretary of The Lutheran World Federation, representatives of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod questioned him about this matter. He reported that at the present time The Lutheran World Federation supplies and subsidizes approximately 20 pastors in Latin America and other places. He

stated that the officials of The Lutheran World Federation were aware of the fact that this was not a proper function of the Federation except under emergency situations and that efforts were being made to effect the gradual attachment of these pastors and their congregations to churches in their areas and thus to eliminate this activity from the normal work of the Federation. To do this in an orderly manner requires time.

Of significance in this connection is the constitution's statement under the heading "Scope of Authority" (Article III, 3): "The Lutheran World Federation may take action on behalf of one or more Member Churches in such matters as they may commit to it." This makes provision for younger member churches and others to ask for the help of the Federation in such areas as missions, education, stewardship, and others. The Federation would be helping these churches in actual work only insofar as it is asked to supply specific help for specific needs confronting a member church.

In giving attention to the question of whether or not The Lutheran World Federation engages in actual church work and activities, it is interesting to note that the Federation as such in its assemblies does not conduct worship and Communion services. The responsibility for conducting such services is exercised by the host church body or congregation as a service to the assembly of the Federation.

The final function of The Lutheran World Federation, listed in Article III, 2 (f), also underwent some revision by resolution of the Helsinki Assembly. In the old constitution it read: "To support Lutheran groups in need of spiritual or material aid." The revision reads: "Provide

a channel for Lutheran Churches and groups to help meet physical needs." This is the authorization for the Federation to carry on its great work of love known as Lutheran World Relief. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has in many areas of the world joined forces with the Federation in its world relief program to bring help and relief in the physical needs of humanity in many tragic situations.

In discussing the "Doctrinal Basis" (Article II) and the "Nature, Functions and Scope" (Article III) of The Lutheran World Federation Constitution, we have called attention to the vital elements under consideration by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The rest of the constitution has to do with administration and is quite routine.

As The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod gives prayerful thought to the matter of membership in The Lutheran World Federation, a number of questions will be brought up for special consideration. One question is: Can the Synod's witness to God's revealed truth in the Holy Scriptures and its encouragement to fidelity to the Lutheran Symbols be best made to its fellow Lutherans from without, as a non-member of the Federation, or from within, as a member? The answer to that question must be finally made on the basis of honest Christian judgment. In giving consideration to this question, it will be helpful to bear in mind that the real theological work in The Lutheran World Federation is done in its commissions and special study committees, which carry out their tasks in the six-year intervals between assemblies of the Federation. It should also be noted that theological pronouncements of the individual assemblies, as well as decisions that shape the program and work of The Lu-

theran World Federation, are considered, formulated, and accepted in the plenary sessions of the assemblies, where visitors and observers have no voice and no opportunity to exercise an influence. We should also recognize that The Lutheran World Federation is under no obligation to continue its courtesy of inviting The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to send official observers to its assemblies.

A further area of concern to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod involves its sister churches—in Europe and in other areas of the world—and their attitudes and relations to The Lutheran World Federation. It will interest our readers to know that in June of 1966 representatives of the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations met in a theological conference at Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, with representatives of many of the Synod's sister churches. The conference devoted much time to the subject of Lutheran World Federation membership. Further consideration will be given to this question by all churches in altar and pulpit fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

This article was written to bring some preliminary information on The Lutheran World Federation specifically to the pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Much more could be written, both pro and con, on this subject. A fuller report may be looked for when the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations completes the task assigned to it by the 1965 convention, namely "that a full report and specific recommendations be made to the Synod, and, if possible, to the 1967 convention."

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