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Theological Observer

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES JOINS COUNCIL

By the Rev. David Schneider

The Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) was accepted as a member of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), and the Rev. Alvaro Carino, current president of the LCP, was elected by the NCCP as one of its three vice-chairmen in separate actions taken at the National Council of Churches' biennial convention held at the Philippines Independent Church's Cathedral of the Holy Child from Nov. 28 to 30, 1969, in Manila.

The National Council took up LCP membership as one of its first items of business in order to be able to seat as official delegates the Rev. Alvaro Carino and the Rev. David Schneider, chairman of the LCP's Commission for Ecumenical Affairs. President Carino in a 10-minute speech of response to the NCCP acceptance outlined the history of Lutheran contacts with Protestants in the Philippines and expressed the willingness of the LCP to do its best to make a positive contribution to meeting the theological challenges and the opportunities for Christian service which face the council.

The council took note of the statement "Christian Unity, the Lord's Supper, and the Lutheran Church," which the LCP had appended to its application for membership in order to inform NCCP members of the position it would take if accepted as a member of the NCCP. The council referred the LCP statement to its Commission on Studies, Civic Affairs, and Ecumenical Relations (SCAER) for study and recommendation to be presented at the next biennial NCCP convention. The LCP's application for membership, with the statement included, had been mimeographed by the NCCP general

secretary and distributed to all the delegates to the convention.

The bulk of the convention time and attention was given to six "Statements of Social Concern" in which the NCCP tried to express Christian positions on questions of population and family planning, political responsibility, cultural minorities, employment and manpower development, urbanization and industrialization, and agricultural development.

The Lutheran Church began working in the Philippines, whose population is listed as 85 percent Roman Catholic, in 1946, with the Rev. Alvaro Carino as its first missionary. Protestant work had begun in the Philippines in 1898, and the Protestant groups at work in the country have a history of mutual respect and cooperation, as far as possible without compromising their basic convictions.

The Lutherans in the Philippines, related to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the U.S.A., began to discuss possible membership in the NCCP as a result of a study paper submitted by the Rev. Robert Plagens at the LCP's 1963 general conference. In 1965 an LCP committee actually suggested membership, but the church decided that the matter should be more thoroughly discussed. The LCP's Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, formed in 1967, undertook the task of further study and recommended to the church's 1968 general convention that the LCP take up membership and inform the NCCP of some of the implications which LCP's confessional stand might have within the council.

The reasons for joining the NCCP were expressed by the 1968 LCP convention as follows:

1. The LCP needs involvement with other churches in order to demonstrate the existing unity we have with them, to the extent that such unity already exists.

2. Joining the NCCP is a natural expression of our confessional position. The Lutheran Confessions are to be confessed, not hidden.
3. There is need for mutual growth through greater sharing and fellowship.
4. The LCP can have a greater opportunity to learn valuable lessons for God's mission in the Philippines through the experience of the churches which have a longer history in the Philippines than it does.
5. By taking up NCCP membership, the LCP will have a greater opportunity to be involved in community, national, and world affairs.

The commission based its recommendation for membership on the conviction that the NCCP is indeed a council of churches which does not claim to have achieved full unity among its members, nor demand from them any obedience to any of the council's actions. Commission members felt, and the LCP ratified the feeling, that the LCP could both give and gain much from membership in this council, which represents the great numerical majority of all Protestants in the Philippines.

The chief obstacle to the membership of the Philippine Lutherans in the NCCP was the council's official joint service of Holy

Communion, held at the beginning of each NCCP convention. LCP leaders felt that the Communion service was inconsistent with the conciliar nature of the NCCP and decided to express themselves about it to the council. The decision was made by the 1968 LCP convention "to apply for NCCP membership and to submit, with the application, a statement of the Lutheran position on Holy Communion; a statement of the LCP's intention to refrain from joining in the NCCP's convention Communion service, and a statement of the LCP's intention to suggest and work for amendment of the NCCP By-Laws which would no longer specify an official Communion service as a part of the biennial convention."

Recognizing the limited financial and manpower resources of the small, 9,000-member Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs recommended limited participation by the LCP in the work of the council. Under the operational system of the NCCP, any member church is allowed to limit its participation to whatever areas it desires. Each member church decides for itself what financial contribution it can make to the work of the council.