

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



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–President Philipp von Rohr at the dedication of the new pastoral-training seminary in Wauwatosa in 1893.

FEDERATION WITH MINNESOTA AND MICHIGAN

In the mid-1800s it seemed as if every state in the growing country had its own Lutheran synod. Founding Pastor Johannes Muehlhaeuser had come from the New York Synod, and the Wisconsin Synod had early connections with the Pennsylvania Synod. Yet Wisconsin’s closest neighbors would prove to be the deepest connections.

Wisconsin Synod exploratory missionaries served Lutherans in Minnesota along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. Several pastors established the Minnesota Synod in 1860. That same year, pastors from the Basel Mission Society formed the Michigan Synod. The Michigan Synod established its seminary in Saginaw in 1885, while the Minnesota Synod established a college and seminary in New Ulm in 1884.

As early as 1879, the dynamic Philipp von Rohr, a pastor in Winona, Minn., proposed a federation of the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods. Minnesota had continued to have close ties with Wisconsin, sharing, among other things, the use of the synodical publication the *Gemeinde-Blatt*. When von Rohr became the Wisconsin Synod president in 1889, plans to make a federation of confessional Lutheran synods in the upper Midwest began.

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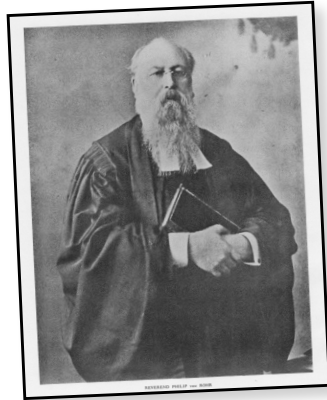
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Soon representatives from the Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Synods proposed a plan. While the three synods would remain distinct bodies, the federation would work as a unified entity—focusing on publications (sharing the *Gemeinde-Blatt* and establishing a theological journal and school paper); joint mission work; and ministerial education. The Minnesota Synod's institution in New Ulm would be the teacher college; Northwestern in Watertown, Wis., would provide preseminary training; and a new seminary in Wauwatosa, Wis., would train pastors for all three synods in the federation. The Michigan Synod's seminary eventually would become a preparatory high school in 1910.



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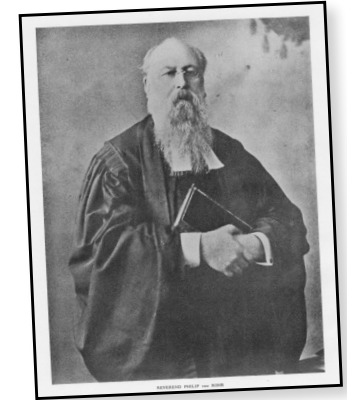
In the summer of 1892, the proposal was approved by each synod. At a special convention in October, the Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States was established. At the end of the convention, the delegates attended the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new seminary in Wauwatosa, which opened the following year.

In 1905, the Nebraska District Synod (mainly established through the Wisconsin Synod's help) became the federation's fourth synod. The federation would last until 1917, when all four synods merged into what is today known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Learn more about von Rohr and other synod presidents at welshistoricalinstitute.org/histories.



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