

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



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– J. Muehlhaeuser

A SYNOD IS BORN

On Dec. 8, 1849, three Lutheran pastors, led by Johannes Muehlhaeuser, met at Grace Downtown in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and “recognized the need of a joint effort to spread the kingdom of God for the Lutheran Church in Wisconsin.” Muehlhaeuser recalled, “Just as the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, so also was the very small beginning of our synod.” The synod adopted its constitution at its first official meeting on May 26, 1850, in Granville, Wisconsin.

The very first resolution in the synod’s history, made at the Dec. 8, 1849, meeting, stated: “That the synod which is to be founded bear the name ‘The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin’ and that this



Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee was constructed in 1851. Incorporated in 1849, Grace was where three Lutheran pastors met to discuss founding a synod that would eventually be known as WELS.

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- The synod was technically not “The First” since two other German Lutheran synods were already present in Wisconsin.
- The synod was “German” because its ministers came from Germany, spoke German, and sought to serve the large population of German immigrants who had no spiritual shepherds.
- The synod was “Evangelical” since it sought to make the proclamation of the gospel its chief endeavor.
- The synod was “Lutheran” because it sought primarily to serve churchless Lutherans and it followed the teachings of the Reformer Martin Luther.
- The synod was a “Synod” (a Greek word that literally means “coming together”) because the pastors wanted to work together to accomplish more gospel ministry.
- The synod was “of Wisconsin” because all its leaders served people in Wisconsin. At that time, most states had Lutheran synods of their own, so the first generation primarily focused on one region within their means.

Much has changed since the synod’s mustard seed-like beginnings 175 years ago—including its name. Yet one thing remains clear: the Word of the Lord endures forever.

An anniversary prayer

God of mercy, God of truth, we praise you because you have given your grace in Christ to us. We humbly honor you for placing your gift of Christ in us, and we boldly pray that you keep us faithful to your truth and bless your message of Christ through us. In his gracious name. Amen.

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