

NILS J. BAKKE

Dedicated Lutheran Missionary

BORN: **SEPTEMBER 8, 1853** *Drontheim, Norway*

DIED: **MAY 8, 1921** *Milwaukee, Wis.*

NILS BAKKE IMMIGRATED TO America from Norway with his parents at the age of 13. The year was 1866, just after the end of the U.S. Civil War. Little did Bakke know at the time, but he would become one of the most important Lutheran missionaries to former slaves in the South.

In America, Bakke's family was part of the Norwegian Synod. He attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, graduating in 1877. Believing he was called to serve the Lord's Church and to proclaim the Gospel, he came to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, graduating in 1880.

His first call was to serve as a pastor at Mount Zion Lutheran Church, New Orleans. There he also did mission work in the African American community and later founded St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Despite challenges, the congregations grew and established day-schools for children.

As the Lutheran Synodical Conference began expanding its outreach to African Americans in the South, Bakke became involved and soon was playing a leading role.

In 1891, he was called to Grace Lutheran Church, Concord, N.C. Seven years later, he was called to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Charlotte. In addition to pastoring these congregations, Bakke served 15 additional congregations and preaching stations during a 20-year period. The mission work in North Carolina was growing!

The Synodical Conference emphasized the importance of education for African Americans. In 1903, Bakke was instrumental in the founding of Immanuel Lutheran College in Greensboro, N.C., and served as professor there until 1911. The

school had three divisions: high school, teachers' college and seminary. A similar school was established the same year in New Orleans, named Luther College.

Bakke was named field secretary for mission work among African Americans for the Synodical Conference in 1911. Along the way, he also served African American congregations in Cincinnati (1911–1913); St. Louis (1913–1916); Oak Hill, Ala. (1916–1920) and Milwaukee (1920–1921). In Alabama, Bakke worked with Rosa Young and others to found schools and preaching stations, eventually making Alabama the largest mission field of the Synodical Conference.

Bakke was a missionary among African Americans for 40 years (1880–1920), dedicated to the Lutheran teaching and bold in stressing the importance of mission work within the Missouri Synod. Early in his career, Bakke wrote words that still ring true today with the challenge they offer: "Should not those who value the word of salvation themselves endeavor to send it to others?" Bakke's life's goal was to proclaim faithfully the biblical witness of salvation in Christ to African Americans. For fidelity in his calling, he will be long remembered.

For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.



DISCOVER MORE

Nils J. Bakke, *Illustrated Historical Sketch of Our Colored Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1914).

Jeff. G. Johnson, *Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991).

Rosa Young, *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young as Told by Herself* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1930).



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NO OTHER NAME

– 175 YEARS –

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