

ERNST OTTOMAR CLOETER

Pioneer Missionary who served the Ojibwe people

BORN: **APRIL 25, 1825** Bayreuth, Bavaria, Germany

DIED: **MARCH 17, 1897** Valley Creek, Minn

ERNST OTTOMAR CLOETER WAS A PIONEER MISSIONARY among the Ojibwe people in Minnesota. While his efforts bore fruit, he also endured great hardships. He is remembered as a fearless missionary and pastor.

Growing up in Bavaria, Cloeter wanted to be a pastor. Attending the universities of Leipzig and Erlangen, he continued his theological studies with Rev. Wilhelm Löhe in Neuendettelsau. With Löhe's help, Cloeter came to America in 1849 and was called as a pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Mich. While there, Cloeter served as secretary to the Synod's Commission on Missions. The Commission issued calls to work among the Ojibwe people in Minnesota. When all were declined, Cloeter volunteered to go.

Cloeter, his pregnant wife, Margarethe, and their two young children arrived at Gabitawigama, in north-central Minnesota, in the summer 1857. He started work clearing land and building a mission settlement, complete with a home, barn and garden.

He quickly learned the language of the Ojibwe people, eventually writing a grammar and wordbook to aid translation, the first book of its kind for the Ojibwe language. Cloeter frequently traveled by birchbark canoe, following waterways as he made his rounds visiting the Ojibwe, bringing them the message of God's love for them in Jesus Christ.

He wrote letters and reports to the Synod detailing his mission activity. In one report, Cloeter recounted that he offered this message to an Ojibwe visitor: "For us [Christ] died and was

raised again and has brought complete forgiveness of sins and eternal life to us. Now God causes these Glad Tidings to be proclaimed in all the world, also to the Indians, that all men should rejoice in the fact that their sins have been forgiven, and that God is gracious to them" (Stevens 124).

The work was difficult and Cloeter faced unexpected setbacks. His home and mission station were destroyed during the Dakota War in 1862. The family narrowly escaped, but they lost all their possessions. Undaunted, Cloeter returned at the end of the conflict, establishing a new mission settlement at Crow Wing.

After 1868, Cloeter served as a pastor at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Afton, Minn. While he served and founded other congregations in the area, he remained pastor in Afton for 29 years. He was elected the first president of the Minnesota-Dakota District of the Missouri Synod when it was founded in 1882.

Cloeter served as a pastor until his death in 1897. With nearly fifty years of service to the Church and its mission, he was a man courageous in his calling and faithful to his Savior.

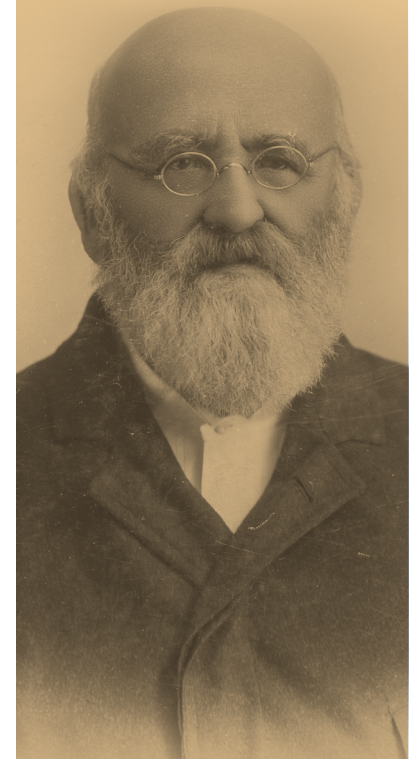
For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.



DISCOVER MORE

Leland R. Stevens, "Mission to the Chippewa, 1857–1868," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 117–135.

Martin R. Cloeter, "An Early Lutheran Indian Mission 1856–1868," (B.S. thesis, Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Neb., 1948).



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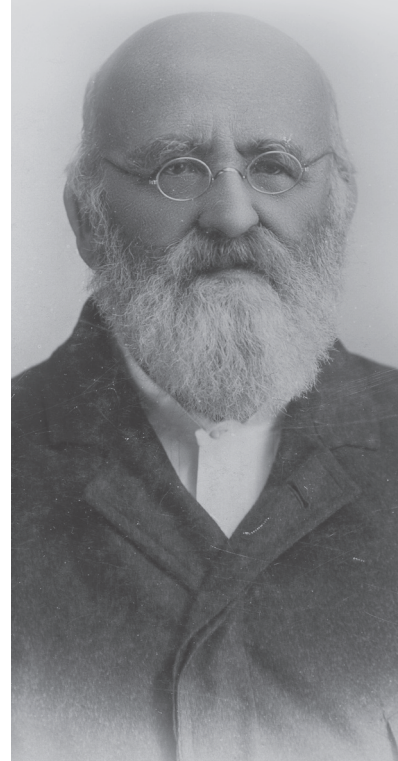
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