

# THEODORE CONRAD GRAEBNER

## *Lutheran Educator and Prolific Author*

BORN: **NOVEMBER 23, 1876** Watertown, Wis.

DIED: **NOVEMBER 14, 1950** St. Louis, Mo.

**A**T ONE POINT IN HIS long and distinguished career, Theodore Graebner was reported to have been in correspondence with about 25% of the pastors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In one year he was in contact with one in four of the LCMS pastors! And while that is a remarkable accomplishment in itself, he did this while also serving as a seminary professor and an editor of *The Lutheran Witness*. How was it possible for one man to be so productive? His son, Alan, believed it was captured in his life's motto: "Do everything just once, for life is too short to do everything twice."

Born into a clergy and professorial family [his father, A.L. Graebner (1849–1904), taught at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis], Theodore learned efficiency as a youth. This characteristic allowed him to speak with influence on every significant topic that confronted the LCMS during his lifetime. He was involved in the discussions within the Norwegian Synod that ultimately led to the formation of two church bodies, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He wrote extensively on unionism. He commented on the mergers that resulted in the formation of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA 1918) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC 1930). He served on the Synodical Conference board for missions among African Americans, and he regularly participated in informal Round Tables called by Synod Presidents Pfotenhauer and Behnken. Beyond the LCMS he was regularly involved with the Lutheran Editors Association and participated in a whole series of community and political concerns. In short, he was known

throughout the Missouri Synod, the larger American Lutheran community and the secular community as well.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that he worried that the LCMS would fall prey to separatistic temptations. As a signer of "A Statement" (September 1945), he worried that the LCMS might lose its voice in the larger Lutheran world, opening the way for more liberal Lutherans to triumph. He worked toward Lutheran unity, convinced that Lutherans in America and worldwide were becoming more conservative rather than less.

Graebner did not live to see his hope for fellowship with the American Lutheran Church realized (it was declared in 1969). By the time of his death on November 14, 1950, a new generation was emerging with new emphases and concerns. Still, more than 70 years after his death, the impact of Theodore Graebner remains evident in the LCMS.

**For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit [lcms.org/175](http://lcms.org/175).**

### DISCOVER MORE

Paul M. Bretscher, "Theodore Conrad Graebner: 1876–1950," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22, no. 1 (January 1951): 1–8.



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Paul M. Bretscher,  
"Theodore Conrad Graebner:  
1876–1950," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22, no. 1 (January 1951): 1–8.



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NO OTHER NAME

– 175 YEARS –

