

# J.A.O. “JACK” PREUS II

## *President of a Synod in Crisis*

BORN: JANUARY 8, 1920 *St. Paul, Minn.*

DIED: AUGUST 13, 1994 *Burnsville, Minn.*

**A** GIFTED SCHOLAR, a gregarious and effective leader and a committed Lutheran, J.A.O. Preus became president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod when it was on the verge of the most serious theological crisis in its history. Would the LCMS remain faithful to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God? Under Preus’ determined leadership, it did.

The Preus family was especially prominent in Norwegian Lutheranism, so Preus prepared for the ministry in the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. But his experience at the seminary exposed him to such doctrinal compromise and indifference that he joined the much smaller but more conservative “little Norwegian Synod” (today’s Evangelical Lutheran Synod), at that time in fellowship with the LCMS. He served parishes in Minnesota and on the staff of his synod’s Bethany College. He also earned a Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Minnesota in 1951.

In 1958, he received and accepted a call to teach Greek and New Testament at the LCMS seminary located in Springfield, Ill. (now Fort Wayne, Ind.). Preus’ gift for leadership was so evident that when the seminary presidency fell vacant in 1962, he was called to that position. During the 1960s, it became more and more evident that some in the Missouri Synod (especially at the St. Louis seminary) were rejecting what the Bible taught regarding creation, biblical authorship and miracles. Some were even questioning the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of our Lord. For his part, Preus consistently opposed such views. Christianity was based

upon God’s intervention into human history, especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation. This was what God had revealed in the Scriptures, His Word, a Word that is reliable in every respect.

Because of his position on these issues, Preus was elected to the presidency of the Synod in 1969. He remained in that office until 1981, and led the Synod to face honestly the theological issues and to affirm what the Synod had taught about the Bible from its very beginning. Not everyone agreed, including a majority of the faculty at the Synod’s St. Louis seminary. Pastors and churches also left the Synod — about 250 congregations with 100,000 members and 675 clergy. It could have been much worse, but Preus was successful in keeping the vast majority of its members within the LCMS.

Besides providing skilled and principled leadership for the Synod, J.A.O. Preus also left the Church a legacy of scholarship, including a biography of Martin Chemnitz and English translations of works by both Chemnitz and Philip Melancthon.

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

### DISCOVER MORE

Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., “J. A. O. Preus: Theologian, Churchman, or Both?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2010): 57–72.

Leigh Jordahl, “J. A. O. Preus,” *Logia* 5, no. 2 (Eastertide 1996): 45–49.

Jacob A. O. Preus, *It Is Written* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).

“Doctrine — A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles,” The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, accessed April 1, 2022, [lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles](https://lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles).



# J.A.O. “JACK” PREUS II

## *President of a Synod in Crisis*

BORN: JANUARY 8, 1920 *St. Paul, Minn.*

DIED: AUGUST 13, 1994 *Burnsville, Minn.*

**A** GIFTED SCHOLAR, a gregarious and effective leader and a committed Lutheran, J.A.O. Preus became president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod when it was on the verge of the most serious theological crisis in its history. Would the LCMS remain faithful to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God? Under Preus’ determined leadership, it did.

The Preus family was especially prominent in Norwegian Lutheranism, so Preus prepared for the ministry in the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. But his experience at the seminary exposed him to such doctrinal compromise and indifference that he joined the much smaller but more conservative “little Norwegian Synod” (today’s Evangelical Lutheran Synod), at that time in fellowship with the LCMS. He served parishes in Minnesota and on the staff of his synod’s Bethany College. He also earned a Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Minnesota in 1951.

In 1958, he received and accepted a call to teach Greek and New Testament at the LCMS seminary located in Springfield, Ill. (now Fort Wayne, Ind.). Preus’ gift for leadership was so evident that when the seminary presidency fell vacant in 1962, he was called to that position. During the 1960s, it became more and more evident that some in the Missouri Synod (especially at the St. Louis seminary) were rejecting what the Bible taught regarding creation, biblical authorship and miracles. Some were even questioning the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of our Lord. For his part, Preus consistently opposed such views. Christianity was based

upon God’s intervention into human history, especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation. This was what God had revealed in the Scriptures, His Word, a Word that is reliable in every respect.

Because of his position on these issues, Preus was elected to the presidency of the Synod in 1969. He remained in that office until 1981, and led the Synod to face honestly the theological issues and to affirm what the Synod had taught about the Bible from its very beginning. Not everyone agreed, including a majority of the faculty at the Synod’s St. Louis seminary. Pastors and churches also left the Synod — about 250 congregations with 100,000 members and 675 clergy. It could have been much worse, but Preus was successful in keeping the vast majority of its members within the LCMS.

Besides providing skilled and principled leadership for the Synod, J.A.O. Preus also left the Church a legacy of scholarship, including a biography of Martin Chemnitz and English translations of works by both Chemnitz and Philip Melancthon.

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

### DISCOVER MORE

Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., “J. A. O. Preus: Theologian, Churchman, or Both?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2010): 57–72.

Leigh Jordahl, “J. A. O. Preus,” *Logia* 5, no. 2 (Eastertide 1996): 45–49.

Jacob A. O. Preus, *It Is Written* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).

“Doctrine — A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles,” The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, accessed April 1, 2022, [lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles](https://lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles).

