

# WILHELM SIHLER

## Seminary and Synodical Founder

BORN: **NOVEMBER 12, 1801** *Bernstadt, Silesia (Bierutów, Poland)*

DIED: **OCTOBER 27, 1885** *Fort Wayne, Ind.*

**W**ILHELM SIHLER'S FATHER WAS an officer in the Prussian army, and initially the son followed the father, rising to the rank of lieutenant before he had a change of heart. Very intelligent and an excellent student, Sihler studied philosophy and philology at the University of Berlin and was awarded a doctorate by the University of Jena. He then became a teacher at a university preparatory school.

Though deeply interested in religion, Sihler was not much of a Christian. However, as Sihler explained later, God intervened dramatically to convert him. One day, Sihler lost his temper before his students and stormed back to his room. There, overwhelmed by shame and guilt, he realized the depth of his sinfulness. But he also found his consolation in the Christ of the Bible, true God as well as true man — and Sihler's Savior. His life was never the same.

Sihler began to associate with Lutherans who opposed the teaching and toleration of false doctrine so prevalent in the state Lutheran churches. He continued his teaching career as a private tutor, often serving in the homes of like-minded Lutherans. Then, in 1843, he chanced upon a printed appeal for help in the mission field of North America, written by F.C.D. Wyneken. Sihler decided to go himself.

With the encouragement of Wilhelm Löhe, who was active in recruiting missionaries, Sihler, now 42 years old, left for America, where he would serve the Lord for the next 42 years. He began his ministry in Pomeroy, Ohio, but by 1845, he had moved to Fort Wayne to succeed Wyneken as the pastor of the Lutheran church there.

Within a few months, he met with other pastors about establishing a new Lutheran church body in America that would be faithful to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. At one point, he traveled to St. Louis to meet with C.F.W. Walther; then he hosted a large conference in Fort Wayne to agree on a constitution. The result of these efforts was The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, founded in 1847. Sihler became its first vice-president.

At practically the same time, Sihler was also busy establishing a seminary in Fort Wayne. Recruited by Löhe, 11 students and an instructor arrived in the summer of 1846 and began studies in the fall. Sihler became the seminary's first president. Initially, classes met in the upper room of his parsonage. At Sihler's urging, Löhe turned the institution over to the new Synod. It was the Synod's first seminary.

Besides his pastoral and synodical responsibilities, Sihler wrote extensively, including a two-volume autobiography. He died in the parsonage of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne.

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

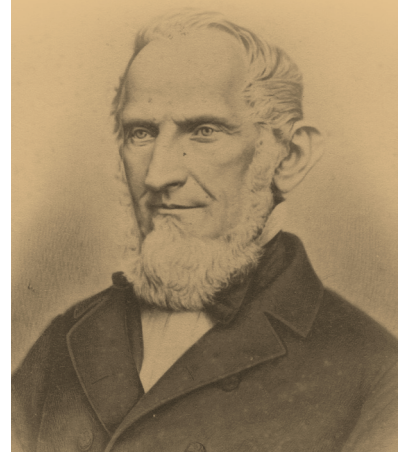
### DISCOVER MORE

Lewis W. Spitz, "Professor Wilhelm Sihler: Founding Father of Lutheranism in America and First President of Concordia Theological Seminary," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (April 1999): 83–96.

Lewis W. Spitz, *Life in Two Worlds: Biography of William Sihler* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1968).

E.G. Sihler, "Memories of Dr. William Sihler, (1801–1885)," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 5 (1932–1933): 50–57.

Wilhelm Sihler, "A View of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod: 1866," trans. Carl S. Meyer, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 99–102.



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– 175 YEARS –



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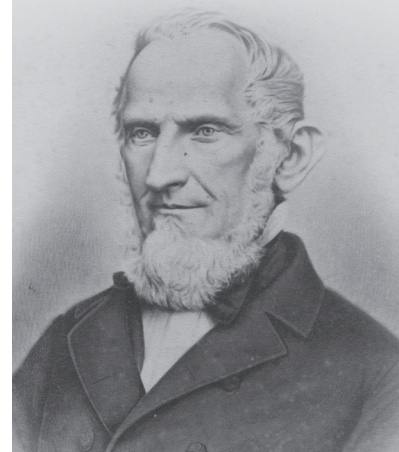
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