

J. WILHELM LÖHE

Pastor with a Heart — and Head — for Missions

BORN: FEBRUARY 21, 1808 Fürth, Bavaria, Germany

DIED: JANUARY 2, 1872 Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, Germany

WHEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD BEGAN IN APRIL 1847, several of its first clergy members had been trained and sent to America by J. Wilhelm Löhe, a Lutheran pastor in the village of Neuendettelsau. Löhe learned of the need for men to preach and teach the Gospel to German immigrants on the American frontier and then did something about it. He had read about the Germans in America in the reports of the Lutheran missionary/pastor F.C.D. Wyneken. Wyneken pulled no punches — without preachers, the immigrants were becoming heathen! So Löhe spread the word and people responded by sending money. Even better, J. Adam Ernst, a shoemaker's apprentice, showed up and volunteered for the mission — and Löhe sent him. He and a neighboring pastor first trained him along with a second volunteer, J. Georg Burger, in the subjects and skills that they would need for the mission field. After about a year the two men were on their way — the first of more than 80 that Löhe sent in just over a decade.

In addition to the Germans in America, Löhe was also concerned about the American Indians. They too needed the Gospel. So once more he decided to do something about it. His plan was to establish Lutheran congregations near Indian villages. The pastors would serve also as missionaries. Löhe's servant, Lorenz Lösel, volunteered to go to America and helped recruit six other men and five women to make up the first congregation. The missionary/pastor was August Crämer. In 1845, the little group made their way across the Atlantic and finally into the wilds of Michigan. They established their settlement and named it Frankenmuth. Soon Crämer was preaching to the Indians through a translator, and on Christmas Day, 1846, he baptized three native converts.

Löhe's next project for the American mission was a seminary. He thought that his missionaries should receive

at least some of their training where they would be serving. But the "Lutheran" seminaries already in existence here were not fully committed to the Lutheran Confessions. So Löhe and Pastor Wilhelm Sihler of Fort Wayne, Ind., decided to start one that would be so committed. Löhe recruited and sent eleven students along with a teacher to help Sihler. By the fall of 1846, the school was up and running. This was the beginning of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne.

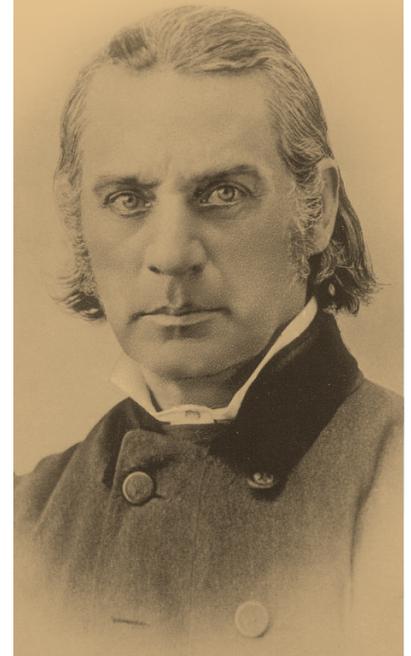
Unfortunately, Löhe embraced some false teachings, and his association with the Missouri Synod came to an end in the early 1850s. Nonetheless, it would be wrong not to give God thanks for his many contributions to establishing Lutheranism in America.

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

DISCOVER MORE

Erich H. Heintzen, *Love Leaves Home: Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973).

Erika Geiger, *The Life, Work, and Influence of Wilhelm Loehe, 1808–1872*, trans. Wolf Dietrich Knappe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).



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– 175 YEARS –



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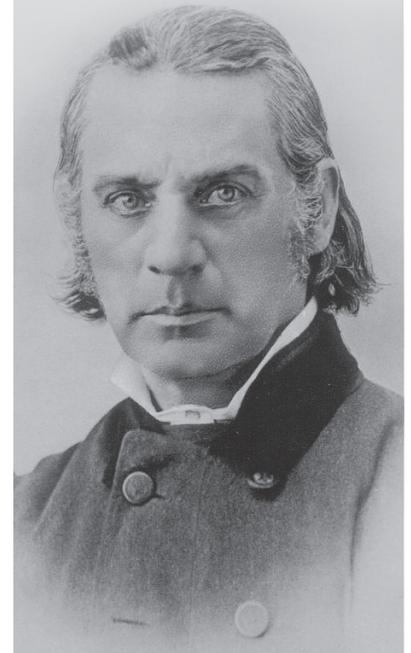
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