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# Faith and Loyalty under Fire: The Michigan Congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1914-20

*"Nothing is quite so difficult as changing the worship habits of a people."*[1]

The turn of the century brought with it many challenges and changes for the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. The group would change in name, eventually becoming known as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, or LCMS, as it is in the present-day. Besides name changes, the LCMS faced many battles during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the majority of which were fought during the "Great War" that would later become known as World War I.

Many states with heavy German-American immigrant populations experienced severe periods of anti-Germanism and even aroused suspicions of disloyalty during the Great War. Michigan, as one of the charter states of the LCMS, fought many controversies over the question of loyalty, the need for Lutheran chaplains in the war, and the purpose of the German language press. In this study, the question of what many LCMS congregations in Michigan had to overcome during the World War I period is addressed. Furthermore, deep inquiry will examine the struggles, hardships, and sacrifices that many LCMS churches had to endure from 1914-to the post-WWI period of the early nineteen-twenties. Many instances of anti-German or anti-German-American sentiment cannot be attributed to one state alone. Instead, numerous states with heavy German-American populations such as Nebraska, Missouri, and Illinois, felt the repercussions of the war, just as the state of Michigan had.

In 1845, the seeds for a conservative sect of Lutheranism were sown amongst a handful of churches scattered throughout the Midwest region and the Mississippi River Valley (see image 1). These churches were in such states as Ohio, Illinois, Missouri and Michigan. Much later, they would come to be known as the "Charter Congregations of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod." What these charter congregations brought with them had great importance; strong German heritage and culture, steadfast faith, as well as the desire to worship and preach what they believed to be pure, unadulterated, Lutheran doctrine.

These congregations were filled with hearty characters to be sure. Many of them were recent if not immediate immigrants from Europe, and most of the Lutherans who came to the United States did so to escape the pressures of the Evangelical church establishment of Prussia. "The founders of conservative American Lutheranism who came to this country in 1845, left their native land because they found that rationalism was stifling the true doctrine as proclaimed by Martin Luther. First, that the scripture is the only word of light, second, that Christ is the only mediator between God and the sinner."[2] These disputed doctrines had threatened to weaken or ruin the integrity of the

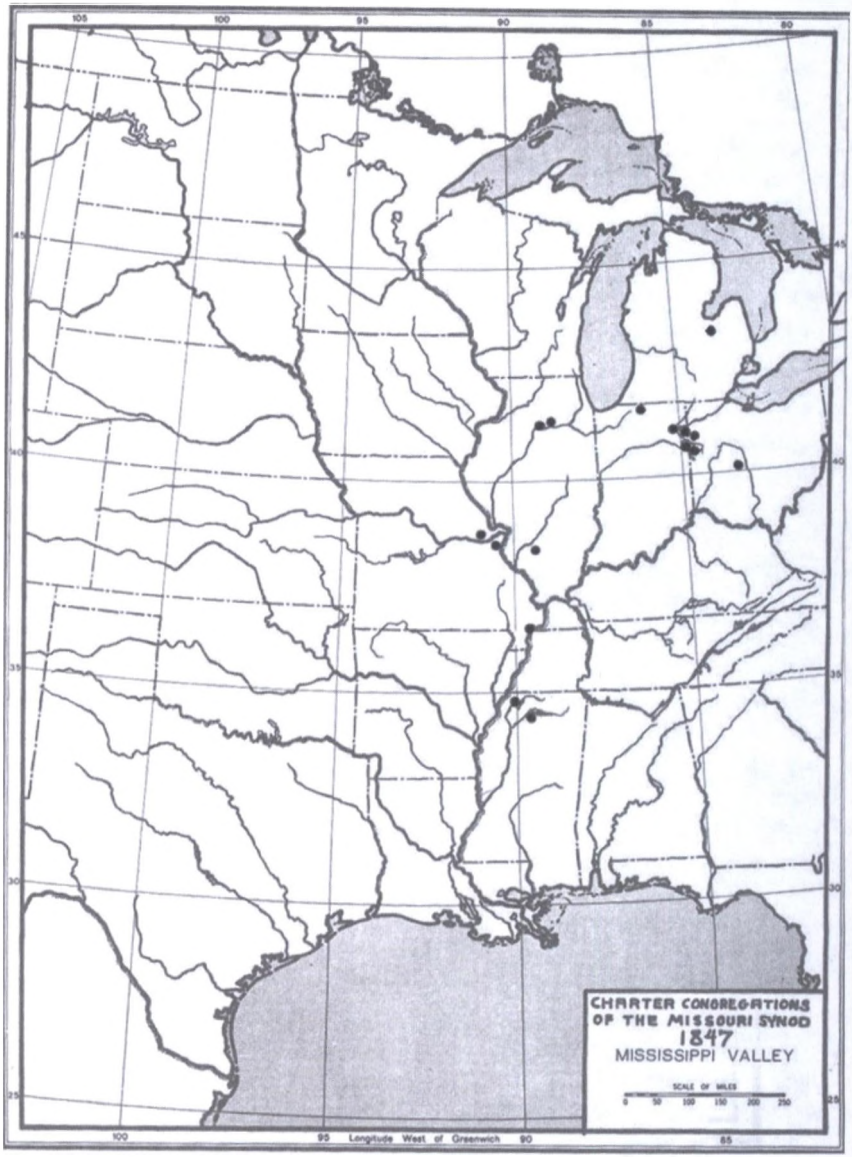


Fig. 1. The Charter Congregations of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, 1847.
Source: Meier, Everette. *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.* Edited by Carl S. Meyer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964. p. 502.

Lutheran faith, and due to such movements, there was a massive influx of Lutherans to the Midwestern region of the U.S. Many of these Lutheran immigrants were either of German or Scandinavian ancestry, and they settled into these farming regions of the United States—areas that often closely resembled their previous lands in both climate as well as aesthetics.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth and the beginnings of the twentieth centuries, the LCMS grew voraciously. Congregations within the new group of

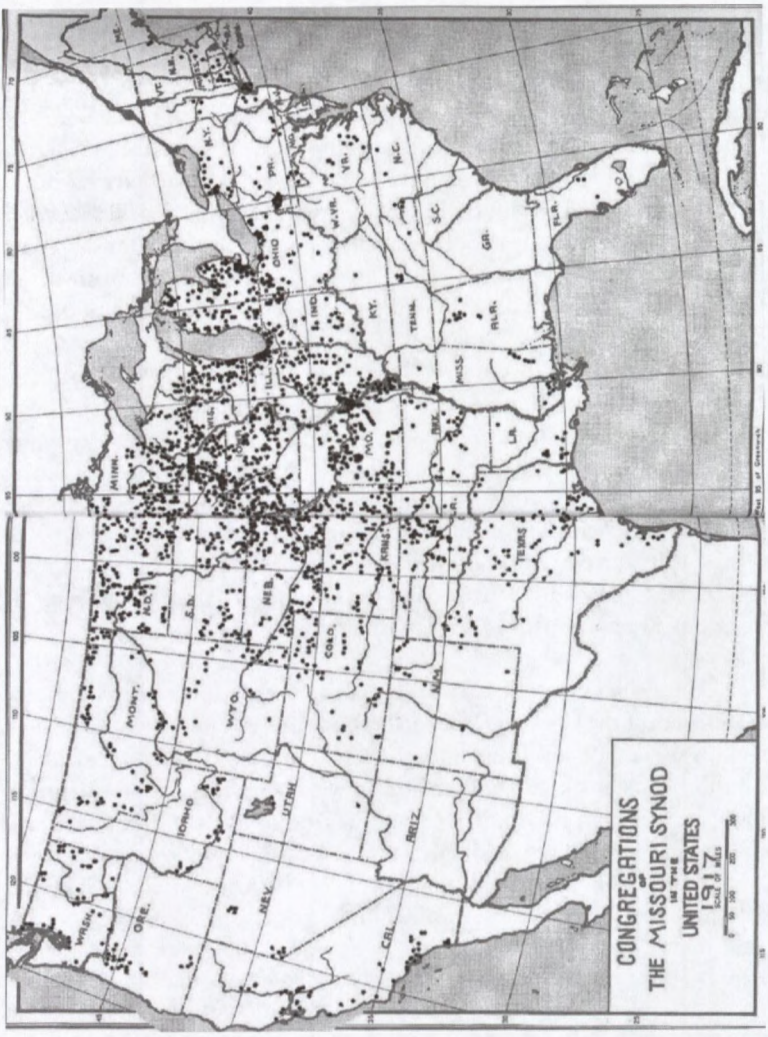


Fig. 2. The Congregations of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, 1914.
Source: Meier, Everette. *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.* Edited by Carl S. Meyer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964. pp. 507-508.

Lutheranism appeared all over the United States, and by the close of the nineteenth century, there were Lutheran Churches of the sort stretching from one coast to another (see image 2).[3]

The roots of the LCMS in Michigan are most notably attributed to the founders of the German village of Frankenmuth in 1845.[4] Located in the "Thumb" of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the German immigrant settlers founded what is today one of the largest churches of the Synod, St. Lorenz. At the time of the chartering of the LCMS, St. Lorenz was the only Lutheran church of its kind in all of Michigan. As a large focal point within the Saginaw River Valley, Frankenmuth literally boomed with population, as it became an ever-increasing haven for German immigrants. Frankenmuth would later prove to be a nestled German community, protected by its neighboring German villages and townships such as Frankenhilf, Frankenlust, and Frankentrost. With such a large German population in such a small area, it earned the nickname of "Michigan's Little Bavaria," which still stands today. St. Lorenz would later enjoy the secure feeling

that the heavily populated German community would give in the ensuing years of the early 1900s, most notably during the First World War.

On the opposite side of the state, in Southwest Michigan, the Grand River Valley saw its own share of German immigration in the late 1800s. Later known as the "Church on the Hill," Grand Rapidians erected the "Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Immanuels Kirche" at the end of the nineteenth century. Later known as Immanuel Lutheran Church, the downtown Grand Rapids LCMS sanctuary would grow just like her sister parish in Frankenmuth had initially done. Immanuel, over time, built and operated its own parochial school, and would be of a major importance to the German-American community of Grand Rapids, and the surrounding West Michigan communities.

Many other parishes would grow both in size, as well as importance to the LCMS. Churches in the Saginaw River Valley as well as the greater Detroit area would swell the overall ranks of Missouri Synod congregations in Michigan. Until the early 1910s, these churches held services, and preached the Gospel with the German language permeating the chancels, lecterns, pulpits and parochial schools. The immigrant communities settled into their respective congregations after the pioneering movement began to slow, and for a time, it seemed as if America truly was the haven that so many Lutheran immigrants had sought and prayed for. However, "the outbreak of hostilities in August of 1914, the start of the First World War, and the years that followed would affect for all time the former positive image of the German American community, both nationally and locally."[5]

When the United States first reacted to the explosion of the 1914 Balkan "powder keg," and the practices of the German Kaiser, many citizens were quick to point blame. "Some of English-speaking descent, harboring a long-dormant ethnic prejudice, felt that 'no good thing can come out of Germany, and what is more, no good thing ever did come out of her.' In some ways, they blamed their neighbors of German heritage for the troubles in Europe."[6] This would only prove to be the start of the anti-German sentiment that so many Lutherans would face not only in Michigan, but throughout the Synod. When the United States became involved in the war, the problems for German-Americans and their church became increasingly intense. At the time, there seemed to be a general hostility toward specific groups of immigrants in the U.S., and these immigrants became known as "hyphenates," referring to the title of their nationalities, be it "German-American," "Polish-American," "Irish-American," or otherwise. However, as a whole, the class of German-American immigrants would face the burden of hardships during the World War I period. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, and during the very war itself, German-Americans found themselves under fire for their culture and nationality. The United States was at war with Germany, and there were many people residing in the U.S. who had strong heritage ties to the German nation. They "composed the single largest group among foreign-born, as well as among immigrants of the previous generation." While the majority of these German-Americans had no outspoken opinions of the war, they were still considered by many to be potential enemies of the U.S. cause. German-American activities were scrutinized at every opportunity, and "the nation went through a vast guilt-by-association spasm directed against all persons and all things German."[7]

From the very beginning of the war, the Lutheran Church adopted a neutral stance on the war. Instead of placing blame, the LCMS declared that, "the war was the hand of God chastening a sinful world. Each nation was guilty of irreligion, jealousy, and

greed."[8] Soon, the United States would be guilty of such things as well, not just the countries of Europe.

As the United States entered the Great War in 1917, the LCMS was faced with ever-increasing tensions regarding how they handled services, operated parochial schools, utilized German as a dominant language, and dealt with the diplomatic question of loyalty. With a high percentage of a German immigrant population within its ranks, the LCMS became an object of suspicion in the minds of many. After all, Germany was the main country that the American Expeditionary Forces were fighting. Were these large groups of German Lutherans a threat to American society, not to mention liberty, and security? With frequent, and looming questions such as these, the LCMS found that responding truthfully and simply was not enough.

The LCMS, eventually would become one of the single most severely criticized bodies during World War I. When immigrant infusions began to slow, the Missouri Synod came to the rationalization that assimilation was inevitable. Whereas the church fathers had previously relied upon cultural norms such as language and customs, to promote loyalty and unified solidity, a nation at war loudly voiced its intolerance for the long-held cultural policies of the LCMS.[9]

Repeatedly, LCMS congregation members were forced to swear allegiance to the United States. Even measures such as letters to the War Department and President Wilson himself did little to alleviate the pressures of "potential disloyalty" that were placed upon the shoulders of the LCMS. In a letter to Dr. Theodore Graebner, LCMS minister, and editor of the LCMS magazine, *"The Lutheran Witness,"* Rev. E.C. Fackler, of St. Andrew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan, declared that this anti-Germanism and anti-Lutheran sentiment had seeped into the national culture of the day, continuing to harangue so many Lutherans, even those of his own congregation: "Stepping into the library a few weeks ago I picked up *Life* and read their 'list of fellows to watch.' I quote from memory: Watch the fellow who 1) criticizes the government, 2) carries a billy & 3) who always talks about the Quadricentennial of the Lutheran Reformation!" Fackler continued on to urge Graebner, who had "pull" with the church press, to have the publication *(Witness)* take a stand against anti-Lutheranism as it was occurring throughout the United States: "Enough said. We have no apologies to offer for the patriotism of our Lutheran citizenship as a whole. It defies unbiased criticism. Let's however slap facts in the face of Jesuitical slander, thereby strengthening ourselves and confirming the truth."[10] As editor of *The Lutheran Witness*, Graebner would later prove to be a frontrunner for the LCMS to declare the loyalty and patriotism of the faith, as representatives of the United States government, as well as citizens, were increasingly challenging it. On an opposing front, the German language counterpart of *The Lutheran Witness, Der Lutheraner* was an equally-favored church publication read in the homes of many German-American Lutherans at the time. While *The Lutheran Witness* dared to speak about this "language question," records from *Der Lutheraner* do not address it, perhaps speaking to the severity and hostile tensions surrounding the issue.

Anti-Germanism, and anti-Lutheranism continued to plague the LCMS. All sorts of German organizations, including churches, were labeled subversive and their members were assaulted with: paint and flagging raids, the banning of German language and music, the destruction of portraits of German poets. Missouri Synod Lutherans, among other supposedly "backward Germans," had the pleasure of reminding the nation about

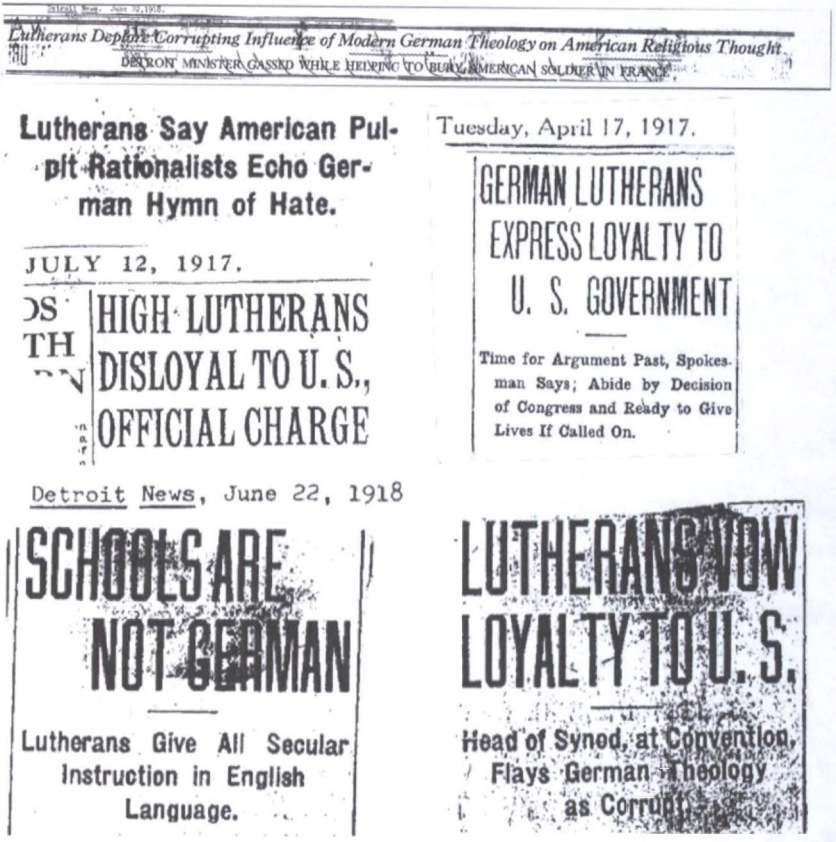


Fig. 3. Various newspaper headlines from 1917-1919 displaying anti-German/anti-Lutheran sentiment, and LCMS rebuttals.
Source: The Detroit News, The Saginaw News, and The St. Louis Republic 1917-1919.

civil liberties and the dangers of conformity, words they had been hearing from self-styled progressives for half a century (see image 3).[11]

Several key issues would come to the forefront when the topic of anti-Lutheranism and anti-Germanism was raised. Issues such as national loyalty, the use of the German language, the willingness of the LCMS as a whole to contribute financially to the war effort by purchasing war bonds, and the need for Lutheran chaplains in the war all would become hot topics that would be debated and criticized as the war pressed on in Europe.

This question of the necessity of the German language was an immediate one on the minds of loyalty critics. Most critics were under the assumption that even though these immigrants had only been in America for half of a generation or less, they should have assimilated and anglicized themselves enough to speak English. Nothing was further from the truth. In another letter to Dr. Graebner, Rev. R.H.C. Meyer spoke of his apprehension toward what appeared to be an inevitable language shift, fearing what would happen to his congregation in Detroit, if the change were deemed immediately necessary: "If I had to cease preaching in the German language, we would simply have to

close our doors. Ninety-five percent of my voting members immigrated to this country within the last 10-15 yrs, the majority of them are simply unable to understand the English language."[12]

This pressure to switch from German to English had a variety of "justifications" from critics. Most notably though, was the idea that speakers of German in America must somehow still have ties to the Fatherland. With this theory, the German speakers also were still assumed to be loyal to a government that the United States considered an enemy. It was believed that German-Americans themselves were intent upon *refusing* to assimilate and anglicize church services, schools, and the foreign-language press. This of course made it impossible for "Americanism" to be 100% present throughout the United States, and for this reason the "Pan-German consipiracy" came to light, whereby language itself was viewed as a loyal tie to the German Kaiser.[13] It was irrelevant to think that the language was retained simply because most citizens who still spoke German were relatively recent immigrants to the United States.

LCMS congregations and ministers however, still desired to hold onto their native tongue. For them, the German language held religious significance, as well as the obvious importance a language has upon a culture. It seemed as if the pros initially outweighed the cons when it came down to choosing German over English for many LCMS congregations. Many simply felt that a language shift within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregations would corrupt the original doctrines and dogmas of the church,[14] and that a language shift would compromise the integrity of the religion. The reformer Martin Luther had translated the Bible into German, and for the LCMS, this appeared to be the "true language" of the "true faith." By changing the language of services as well as religious education in parochial schools, it was believed that some purity would be lost in translation, and the true essence of the religious doctrines taught and practiced would not be the same. Without anglicizing the language of the Church, the LCMS would continue to appear suspect. This language shift from German to English throughout the United States LCMS congregations was inevitable. All LCMS churches would change the language of their church in time, but the majority of these changes were a result of the Great War, and the looming language question. It seemed as if the foreign tongue itself instilled fear, hatred and suspicion for many in the United States, and a religious organization like the LCMS became suspect simply because it held onto its original roots. In reality, "the Lutheran Church in America lost millions of its members to other denominations because of the language question."[15]

The language question affected not only church services, but the press and the schools (parochial and public), as well. The *Germania*, Grand Rapids' German language newspaper, was an enthusiastic supporter of the German and Austrian cause. Whereas other German papers in the state exercised caution, the *Germania* was not at all timid about which side it was on.[16] Other instruments of the foreign-language press also came under scrutiny by the U.S. Government. The Council for National Defense published an article explaining the "dangers" of the foreign-language press. "There were many instances of German newspapers edited by aliens apparently sent here for the sole purpose of misleading American opinion."[17] Since the foreign-language press was potentially threatening American values and swaying opinion toward that of sympathy for the wartime enemy, Congress passed what became known as the Trading With The Enemy Act on 6 October 1918. This required all foreign language press publications to submit translated copies of articles relating to any matter or any country involved

with the war, and that these articles be placed on file with the government before the very same items could be mass-published and distributed. In the article distributed by the Council for National Defense, it was approved that a foreign-language voice was needed in many communities throughout the United States, and that many would be allowed to stay and continue printing articles and newspapers. However, this would not come freely of course. The Council for National Defense also saw a need for censorship within the foreign-language press, stating that, "It is better to have accurate news and reading matter circulated among them under supervision than to leave them at the mercy of hostile liars."[18]

Although the *Germania* was secular, anti-Germanism only continued to fuel the hate in Grand Rapids. "The study of German was dropped from the local high schools. The local Ryerson Library proudly reported that "literature in the German language in the reading rooms . . . has been reduced to a single periodical."[19] *The Grand Rapids News* reported on 22 April 1918 of a local event in a Catholic high school where "Catholic Central high school pupils, aroused by portraits of two German poets, Goethe and Schiller, hanging on the school walls, took them down, opened the frames, and destroyed the pictures."[20]

Cultural life soon became a casualty of war. In the heart of Grand Rapids, the elders of Immanuel Lutheran felt strong societal pressures to remove all German lettering from the building's exterior. In addition to exterior changes, other changes would face the congregation of Immanuel. All services that had previously been in German were immediately terminated, and inside the church, members removed a large German

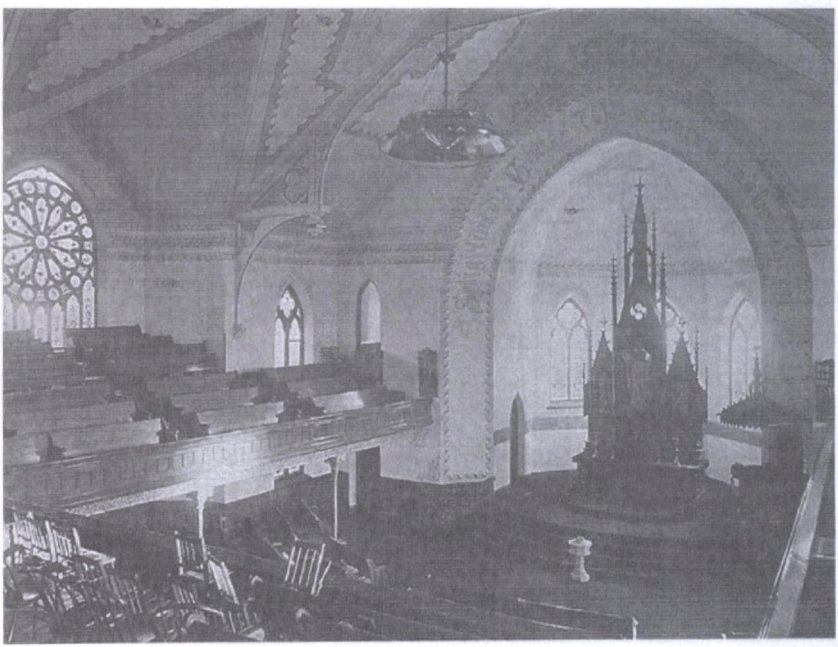

Fig. 4. The archway over the main chancel inside Immanuel Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan - circa 1917.
Source: James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, eds., *Gathered At The River: Grand Rapids, Michigan, And Its People Of Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: The Grand Rapids Area Council for the Humanities William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.), Figure 26.

passage that hung over the arch of the main chancel, which read: "*Selig sind die Gottes Wort hören und bewahren*" (see image 4). When translated, the passage was a simple, and innocent religious promise, akin to the promises of the Beatitudes, reading: "Blessed are those who hear and preserve the word of God."[21] This was removed simply because it was in German, written in German script, nothing more (see image 5).[22]

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids would continue to face other pressures from the language question. All outdoor bulletin boards and signs no longer included German wording, or any reference to German church services. Not wanting to be singled out, or to appear suspect, the Immanuel Lutheran parochial school also changed from teaching classes in German to teaching classes in English, literally overnight.[23] Like many Lutheran parochial schools in its day, this became quite common. The *Detroit News* ran an article in June of 1918, relating to the defense of the German language in Lutheran schools. The author, who appeared to be anonymous, declared that: "They are sometimes called German schools, but that is a misnomer. The German language is taught in them, only in connection with the instruction in religion. The object of these schools is not to perpetuate the German language."[24] He continued on to justify the rights of the teachers and administrators of these schools, saying that their actions were in line with their political rights, as they were described in the Bill of Rights of the State of Michigan. "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged . . . . The parochial schools truthfully claim that they foster true patriotism . . . . No more loyal and patriotic

Fig. 5. The interior of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan after removal of the German scipt.
Source: Immanuel Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

soldiers and citizens can be found anywhere than among the products of our Lutheran parochial schools."[25]

By simply changing the course of instruction to English, and practicing American patriotic rituals such as singing "The Star Spangled Banner," and pledging allegiance to the flag, many of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod parochial schools would have lost a lot of suspicion that had been placed upon them. Instead of being viewed as institutions for perpetuating German culture and loyalty to the Kaiser, there may not have been such a problem as had occurred during the latter years of the war. However, "perhaps fifty of approximately 1,500 institutions were closed because of anti-German hysteria."[26] Eventually, instruction in English became *law* in regards to parochial schools. In 1918, Congress passed the Smith-Towner Act, which provided that "no state could share in federal funds unless it enacted and enforced laws requiring that the chief language of instruction in all schools, public and private, be English."[27]

Even though the questions challenging the use of the German language in the LCMS parochial schools typically came from outside the LCMS community, there were contesting opinions on the matter within the Synod itself. Some pastors were dead-set against changing from German to English. Some pastors saw it as an absolute necessity, if the suspicions of Lutheran loyalty were to ever subside. Rev. H. Grueber, a minister of a LCMS congregation in Saginaw, Michigan, stressed the importance of this very language shift in the parochial schools in his correspondence to Rev. Theodore Graebner. "Of course I know that there are synodical authorities who seem to think: 'Remain German or die' which is heresy. We have suffered staggering losses through this mistaken policy. The public simply cannot see anything but pro-Germanisism in our schools when they are made instruments for maintaining German communities in America."[28]

Graebner, as editor of *The Lutheran Witness* during the World War I period, naturally received the majority of voiced concern over the anti-Lutheran sentiment. He also fielded a majority of his complaints from the various Michigan districts of the Synod, for that was where his own congregation was located. In addition, he entertained issues of concern from across the nation. Wielding what power he had, he utilized the Lutheran press in his own letters to journals and parishioners, as well as the pages of *The Lutheran Witness,* to profess what he called "Lutheran Loyalty." Graebner vocally spoke out on the war, wishing that Lutherans would attempt to distance themselves from it. "The Church is not in this war. It is here for an entirely different purpose. It is here to lift the people above the world's war and turmoil and misery, and to turn men's thoughts to things heavenly and divine. It is here to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, and not to foster the spirit of hatred with which the nations now seek to encompass each other's ruin."[29] Graebner saw a purpose for the war, but it was not necessarily a military venture, in the minds of Lutherans. To him, the war brought a strengthening of faith in a way, even though the news of turmoil and bloodshed seemed to be unrelenting. "The less the people hear of war when they come to the sanctuary, and the more they confess their sins and plead for peace, the nearer will the Church come to fulfilling the mission which Christ has charged her with. The newspapers are keeping hell before us seven days of the week; let the Church speak of heaven on Sunday."[30]

In arguably what would come to be the main article bearing proof of German-Lutheran loyalty to the United States, Graebner, in his article entitled, "Testimony and

Proof Bearing on Relation of the American Lutheran Church to the German Emperor," laid the clear truths down as to how Lutherans really stood in relation to the Kaiser:

> The Lutheran Church of North America, and more specifically the Synodical Conference, of which we are members, has never had connections of any kind with the United Church of Prussia, nor with any one of the State Churches of Germany. It must be clear to all that in a religious way the Kaiser and the Lutheran Church of North America are not on a friendly, but on an oppositional footing.[31]

Graebner asserted that the Lutheran Church of the present day would not be welcomed with open arms by any means in relation to Germany or the Kaiser. The *Detroit News* agreed: "For 50 years the Missouri Synod had been a thorn in the side of the Kaiser and the leaders of the Evangelical church establishment of Prussia. It has stood firm for the integrity of the faith while other churches have succumbed to the flood of false doctrine made in Germany."[32] Indeed, the religious practices of the Kaiser were some of the very reasons for the mass influx of German Lutherans to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century—the very same immigrants that chartered the original foundation congregations of what would come to be known as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Many Lutherans were unsure as how to go about answering the questions of loyalty, if they were brought about. Graebner asserted that answering the doubts of Lutheran loyalty was not only important, but also completely necessary to alleviate the claims of misrepresentation that so many LCMS congregations and individuals struggled with. Graebner asserted that is was a responsibility of the Lutheran church to stand up and explain their loyalty if questioned. Only the church itself could discredit any questions brought upon them. They were the source, it seemed, and only the church itself could truthfully explain where it stood in relation to American loyalty.[33] He concluded that, "We shall—only by plainly asserting that we are with our Government and against Germany . . . overcome such doubts as are in the mind of the public concerning our 'loyalty' in the war-time sense, the only sense which now counts. No one has a right to doubt our loyalty."[34]

Michigan LCMS congregations whole-heartedly agreed with the loyalty stance of Graebner. At the 1918 LCMS Michigan District convention, ministers spoke about the war, and the relation of the Michigan designation of the Synod. Rev. R. H. C. Meyer, of Concordia Lutheran Church in Detroit, emphasized that the war was not an unjust war. He "expressed his conviction that President Wilson sought to 'keep us out of war,' but was forced into it by the Junkers and militarists of Germany." Meyer continued that "true Lutherans" should not speak evil against the present government administration, be it Congress, President Wilson, or the like. He vehemently stressed the importance of not speaking out against the present governmental powers; presumably knowing what detrimental harm it would do to the church proper.[35] At the same synodical convention, leaders of various LCMS congregations and districts drafted a letter to President Wilson, articulating the concerns regarding Lutheran suspicion and the war (see appendix A).[36] The Committee on Public Information would later seize this letter, which was never published. It is uncertain as to whether President Wilson ever had the chance to read it.

The LCMS pastors continually felt unalleviated pressure about the Lutheran stance on the war, regardless of numerous confessions of loyalty. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was indeed a "red-flagged" faith, one that the government desired to watch carefully during World War I. A letter from Meyer to Graebner expressed disgust and tiresome emotion over pastors having to devote so much time away from church efforts, instead devoting time to diverting assumptions and criticisms brought to the church by the U.S. government. Meyer told Graebner, "Hoffentlich hat dieser leidige Krieg bald ein Ende; man ist jetzt mehr 'Government Agent' als Pastor" (Hopefully, there will soon come an end to this unfortunate war. One is now more of a Government Agent than a Pastor).[37]

Meyer's wish was one shared by many LCMS congregations. Over the few years that the war raged on in Europe, the tensions were unrelenting at home. Even more tensions would surface when the Lutheran Church wished to send chaplains into war, and the government's desire for the sale of war bonds came to light. Both of these issues could not shed the doubt of loyalty however. In *The St. Louis Republic*, an article relating to LCMS loyalty seemed to be linked solidly with the sale of war bonds, declaring that a "check upon the un-American activities" would ensue, depending wholly upon the American patriotism of the Lutheran Church. Accusing that the LCMS had "conspicuous representatives" showing "marked partiality for the German cause," the article suggested that LCMS congregations were scrutinized for every financial banking withdrawal, opposition to war bond sales, or failure to organize war-relief work.[38] There was no mention of how much effort had actually taken place on behalf of the church. In actuality, many churches held war-bond drives and supported Red Cross relief efforts to aid the war. This instance of LCMS war effort, or lack thereof (whichever the case may be), was a matter of immediate convenience, which seemed to have been blown out of proportion by a local St. Louis media outlet.

In a letter to Meyer, a fellow minister articulated disgust with the United States' Government's insistence that the church join the effort of selling war bonds, or else remain suspect. In the letter, another LCMS minister expressed his disgust with submitting an article to a national journal, and having it repeatedly refused for publication simply because he, as well as other pastors had not taken an aggressive interest in buying or setting up sales for Liberty Loans (see appendix B).[39] Following such accusations that the LCMS refused to sell war bonds, many congregations felt compelled to work what seemed like "double-duty" in terms of war effort, merely in the attempt to alleviate concerns of Lutheran loyalty. Michigan newspapers published information about congregational war-bond drives to raise funds for the overseas fighting boys.[40] In addition, LCMS Michigan congregations published their efforts relating to the appointment of committees to aid in Red Cross, Liberty Loan and War Thrift Stamp campaigns, as well as the amounts of money raised.[41] Without the outward appearance of efforts to aid the war, LCMS congregations would be considered anti-war, and even more suspect, given their history of "German ties," it was thought.

When the United Stated entered World War I in 1917, there was a call for Lutheran churches to supply chaplains to both training camps as well as to the fighting trenches overseas. The Lutheran Church Board for Army and Navy, U.S.A. (Under the Auspices of LCMS and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and other states) issued a letter to many district ministers saying that the overall chaplaincy requirement overseas had been increased from one chaplain to three per regiment, greatly increasing

the numbers of jobs to fill.[42] Naturally, Lutheran churches felt a competition with other denominations, and therefore desired to fill as many vacancies as possible, lest they be given to individuals representing the Roman church. The Board strongly cautioned the ministers however in making their chaplain recommendations. "Let us bear in mind, that none can enter our service that have been accused of any pro German activities or pro German expressions, either before the war or during the same. It is our aim to have none but truly loyal and in every way acceptable to the government enter our work. The near future may demand that we send a larger number of men into the service."[43] Even the *Lutheran Witness* received requests from Michigan pastors to include items in the magazine about "a call to chaplaincy."[44]

Although eager to serve, many LCMS ministers who applied to be war chaplains or training camp pastors were denied. Few religious posts in the United States military were ever filled by LCMS pastors, due to the history and doubt relating to U.S. loyalty among Missouri Synod Lutherans. Infuriated by these denials, the *Lutheran Witness* received numerous letters from ministers that were receiving pleading requests to send Lutheran ministers into war (see appendix C).[45] The United States Government answered few of these pleas for Lutheran chaplains. As records show, 5 LCMS chaplains served in France, and 8 LCMS chaplains served in the U.S., a far cry from the numbers of Lutheran clergymen who were willing to serve their flocks of fighting men overseas during the Great War.[46]

Due to the strong sense of German culture that pervaded the Missouri Synod, the church could appear nothing but suspect when it came to World War I, where the Kaiser and Germany itself were viewed as the enemy. One exception to the rule however, was St. Lorenz church in Frankenmuth. At the beginning of this study, it was noted that due to the strong German community in the Saginaw River Valley of Frankenmuth, St. Lorenz was more exempt than other parishes when it came to facing anti-Germanism and anti-Lutheran sentiments during the 1914-1920 period. Norman Krafft, a historian for St. Lorenz Lutheran church in Frankenmuth explained that "everything in and around Frankenmuth, during those years, was so thoroughly German that they were not affected nor intimidated by the pressure to be anglicized. Frankenmuth was a fairly isolated German community with other German communities in the region, and they were in a small German world of their own."[47] The language shift barely even seemed to affect the rather-large German-American community in Michigan. St. Lorenz church records show that the first regular English service was not even held until September 1931, nearly twelve years after World War I had ended. Even so, the English worship service did not completely eradicate the German services, which were still a mainstay. At first, the English services occurred once a month on Sunday evenings. It was not until 1939 that the regular Sunday morning services switched to English, two whole decades after the armistice that ended World War I. The German language service has even survived at St. Lorenz. Today, German language services still take place on the second Sunday of every month. [48]

Viewing St. Lorenz in Frankenmuth as an exception to the rule, the remainder of the LCMS churches in Michigan as well as throughout the United States felt pressured to prove their loyalties to the nation. One pre-World War I estimate held that about half of the approximately two million Lutherans in America at that time attended worship services in the German language.[49] However, the language shift was inevitable, and occurred almost immediately in many parishes. The *Statistical Yearbook* published by

the Missouri Synod reported that "services conducted in German had dropped from 62 percent in 1919 to 46 percent in 1926. Within 10 years after the close of the war, the language question was no longer generally an issue in synodical circles."[50]

In retrospect, the case study of Michigan LCMS churches during World War I, proved to be a trying time for the church as a whole. With the exception of one extraordinary congregation in a very large and supportive German community, all LCMS churches during World War I appeared suspect, either in a small, or large way. The heritage of the faith, with roots in German culture and tradition, made the church threatening to the outside world. Regardless of measures taken to aid the war effort, the LCMS ministers and congregations could not shed the negative connotations that their heritage had inscribed upon this collection of peoples. Their presses were censored, and chaplains discriminated against simply due to national origin, even if it had only been considered foreign over a generation earlier. The LCMS was denied chaplaincy service into the military, and congregations had to hide nearly all identities of heritage. These changes left a lasting impact upon the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, often casting by the wayside many elements of German culture that had initially created the church itself.

*Valley Lutheran High School*
Saginaw, Michigan

## Appendices

### Appendix A

**LCMS Michigan District 1918 Convention Letter to President Woodrow Wilson, Dr. Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Insitute, St. Louis.**

We, the undersigned, believing that the time has come for all Americans of German blood to stand forth and declare in unmistakable accents that faith that is in them, herewith beg to inform you that we have organized ourselves into a National Council of Americans of German origin with the following purposes:

1. To make unmistakably clear to the rest of the American people that the overwhelming majority of their fellow-citizens of German blood are emphatically and absolutely for America in this War and *against* Germany, for an American victory and for a German defeat.
2. To cooperate with the National government in rooting out disloyalty and sedition; and with local organizations and patriotic individuals in support of every good movement aimed to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.
3. To conduct an educational campaign among German-Americans who may yet be in doubt regarding the justice of America's cause, recognizing that in the great majority of cases, failure to support the government wholeheartedly is due not to malice or disloyalty but to ignorance of the issues involved.

We recognize that the world today has no room for straddlers or men who serve two masters. It has room only for men capable of heroic decisions. Mr. President, we have burnt our bridges. We who in the past dreamed that a man can have two countries to call his own, recognize now that he can have one and one only. We have made our irrevocable choice. We stand with and for America. We have no other country, we know no other allegiance.

## Appendix B

**Letter to R. "Rudi" H. C. Meyer to Theodore Graebner, Detroit, MI, 20 May 1918, Dr. Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.**

Early in 1917, before the war was declared I wrote an item for "Chronik", asking our people to guard their lips and to give no one cause for doubting our Americanism. This item was refused space. I submitted it again in June 1917 and in the fall of 1917 again asked that some expression on problems be given to our readers. Then I gave up. Soon I got reports proving that our people had taken a very moderate interest in the Second Liberty Loan. I realized at once what that meant. A little later I observed a tendency among many of our pastors to resent all requests from government as interference with the duties of the pastors and churches. It was quite plain what that would lead to. Pretty soon the word "disloyal" was used in the secular papers about the Lutheran ministers.

## Appendix C

**Letter from Rev. H.J. Riethmeier, Evangelical Zion Church, Tawas City, MI, to Rev. Theodore Graebner, 16 April 1919, Dr. Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.**

Each week appeals are reaching us from our Lutheran men abroad pleading, crying, for the ministrations of their Lutheran church, appeals growing more insistent as they approach the day when they may be called upon to pay the supreme sacrifice for Democracy and the principles of liberty which our country has espoused. Unless relief is provided, the situation is bound to arouse strong resentment of a condition which obviously curtails and at times even nullifies an American basic principle, the individual's right of religious liberty to worship God in the spirit and according to the order of the church of his choice. Thousands of our Patriotic American Lutheran men in the service are cut off from this privilege and are pleading for relief.

## Notes

[1] Rev. Ralph J. White, D.D., ed., *Golden Anniversary: Fifty Years of Spiritual Ministering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Trinity Evangelical English Lutheran Church Publishing, 1946).

[2] "Lutherans Deplore Corrupting Influence of Modern German Theology on American Religious Thought: More Haeckel Than Bible, Lutherans Say American Pulpit Rationalists Echo German Hymn of Hate," *The Detroit News*. 22 June 1918.

[3] Everette Meier, *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,* ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 506-7.

[4] Ibid., 105

[5] Wilhelm W. Seeger, "The German Americans in Grand Rapids, Michigan: An Historical Survey," (Presented at the Society for German American Studies Symposium, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), 10.

[6] Mark Smith, *Lifting High The Cross for 200 Years: St. John's Lutheran Church* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1998), 306-7.

[7] Wayne Moquin, "Makers of America—Hyphenated Americans 1914-1924" (Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1971), 107.

[8] Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 102.

[9] Ibid., 315.

[10] Letter from E.C. Fackler, Pastor of St. Andrews Ev. Lutheran Church, Detroit, MI to Rev. and Editor Dr. Theodore Graebner, 31 December 1917, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[11] James D. Bratt and Christopher H. Meehan, eds., *Gathered At The River: Grand Rapids, Michigan, And Its People Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Grand Rapids Area Council for the Humanities William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993).

[12] Letter from Rev. R. H. C. Meyer to Theodore Graebner, Detroit, MI, 25 Septemeber 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[13] Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 251.

[14] Meier, *Moving Frontiers*, 356.

[15] White, *Golden Anniversary*, 3.

[16] Seeger, "The German Americans in Grand Rapids," 11.

[17] "Foreign Language Newspapers," 5 June 1918, United States Council of National Defense, State Councils Section, Washington, D.C.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Seeger, "The German Americans in Grand Rapids," 11.

[20] "Catholic Pupils Destroy Pictures of German Poets," *Grand Rapids News*, 22 April1918.

[21] Matthew Goode, "Obey The Law And Keep Your Mouths Shut: German-Americans In Grand Rapids

During World War I," *Michigan History Magazine,* March/April 1994, 22.

[22] Carl Eschels, email to author regarding Immanuel Grand Rapids information, 13 November 2004.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "Schools Are Not German: Lutherans Give All Secular Instruction in English Language" *The Detroit News*, 22 June 1918.

[26] Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 288-89.

[27] Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 312.

[28] Letter from Rev. H. Grueber to Rev. Theodore Graebner, Saginaw, MI, September 27, 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[29] Theodore Graebner, "Lutheran Loyalty," *The Lutheran Witness* (the official organ of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states), St. Louis, MO, 7 August 1917, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Theodore Graebner, "Testimony and Proof Bearing on Relation of the American Lutheran Church To The German Emperor," Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[32] "More Haeckel than Bible," *The Detroit News,* 22 June 1918.

[33] Theodore Graebner, "Unjustified Aspersions," *The Lutheran Witness,* Vol. 37, 28 May 1918, 168.

[34] Ibid., 169.

[35] "Lutherans Vow Loyalty To U.S.: Head of Synod, at Convention, Flays German Theology as Corrupt," *The Detroit News,* 20 June 1918.

[36] LCMS Michigan District 1918 Convention to President Woodrow Wilson, 1918.

[37] Letter from Rev. R. "Rudi" H. C. Meyer to Theodore Graebner, Detroit, MI, May 20, 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[38] "High Lutherans disloyal to U. S., Official Charge," *The St. Louis Republic*, 12 July 1917.

[39] Letter to R."Rudi" H. C. Meyer, Detroit, MI, 27 September 1918.

[40] "Lutherans of Valley Pledge Government Aid: Pastors in Conference At Midland, Adopt Resolutions Pledging Every Assistance," *The Saginaw News,* 10 January 1918.

[41] Rev. L. A. Linn of Holy Cross Evangelical Church, Saginaw, MI, 31 December 1917, to Theodore Graebner, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[42] Letter to D. C. Brewer, War Department, Washington, D.C., June 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[43] Letter from the Lutheran Church Board for Army and Navy, U. S. A., (under the auspices of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and other states), 1918.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Letter from Rev. H. J. Riethmeier, Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church, Tawas City, MI, to Theodore Graebner, 16 April 1919, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[46] Letter, Detroit City Conference (F. A. Hertwig, W. Hagen, and E. C. Fackler) to Theodore Graebner (editor of *The Lutheran Witness)*, September 1918, Theodore Graebner Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[47] *Statistical Yearbook IV* (1916-1922), 111.

[48] Norman A. Krafft, letter to author, 28 September 2004, St. Lorenz Lutheran Church records, Frankenmuth, MI.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 38.

[51] Meier, *Moving Frontiers*, 380.