

THE LUTHERAN FREE CHURCH

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The Lutheran Free Church was organized in Minneapolis, Minn., in June, 1897, at a meeting held by Norwegian Lutherans representing Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota., South Dakota, North Dakota and Washington. This new and peculiar organization was a result of the controversies within the United Church, which was organized in 1890 by merging of three older, separate organizations of Norwegian Lutherans. Said controversies were started in connection with the question of transferring Augsburg Seminary to the newly formed United Church. Augsburg Seminary, which is the oldest Norwegian theological seminary in America, and which until 1890 was supported by one church body, the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Conference, was organized in 1869 for the definite purpose of educating ministers who were more suitable for free congregations in a free people than clergymen educated either in the old state churches of Europe or among the German Lutherans in America, from whom the Norwegian Lutheran congregations in America had formerly obtained their ministers. Owing to this purpose and the manifest divergent views, Augsburg Seminary had certain characteristics which its founders and friends, who had made great sacrifices to keep it going during its first struggles for existence, considered essential and necessary for the work to be done. The Seminary was incorporated under the laws of Minnesota, and its management was in the hands of a Board of Trustees whose duty it was to keep the property of the school and defend the institution against all attempts to change its

purpose and the method of its work. The United Church demanded that Augsburg Seminary be transferred to it according to an agreement to that effect with said Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Conference, so that the United Church could keep and control the institution in every respect; but at the same time it became evident that the intention was to make such a change in the plan of the school that it would be something different from what it was originally. For this reason the Board of Trustees of the school refused to turn the property over to the new corporation, the United Church.

The result was that a considerable number of ministers and congregations either withdrew of their own accord or were expelled by the United Church, and decided to support and defend Augsburg Seminary. Therefore, from 1893 to 1897 these people became known as the Friends of Augsburg, and during that period, without any other organization than a voluntary annual meeting, they performed such church work as is carried on by organized associations, or synods. They had their theological seminary, their foreign mission, a deaconess hospital, a book and newspaper publishing house, etc.

The changes made in 1897, when the Friends of Augsburg assumed the name of the Lutheran Free Church, were insignificant. The same work was continued essentially along the same lines. The congregations are entirely free and independent of each other and of the general organization. The work that is carried on-the school, the mission, the charity work, the book and newspaper concern-is in the hands of special boards, who ask for financial aid in the form of voluntary contributions from congregations and individuals wherever they can find sympathy. To strengthen the feeling of brotherhood, and encourage co-operation, they hold a free, general annual meeting, where any member of any Lutheran congregation may become voting delegate by declaring that he or she unreservedly endorses the principles of the Lutheran Free Church and

promises to work for its objects. Besides this, numerous large and small meetings of a voluntary character are held during the year for the purpose of expending the movement, as well as making it more thorough-going.

Confession. The Lutheran Free Church, with its strong emphasis on the independence and autonomy of the individual congregation, puts the more stress on the Lutheran principle of the unity of the church-that it exists in the confession of the one common faith. The Lutheran Free Church, holding that Holy Writ is the only perfect, divine revelation of salvation, and therefore the absolute rule for the Christian faith, doctrine, and life, adheres with unflinching fidelity to the Lutheran confession because this agrees with Scripture. Hence it lays the greatest stress on practical Christian experience on the part of all church members and especially all teachers and ministers in the congregation. The Lutheran Free Church holds Lutheranism to be the correct and sound union of the most profound insight into the way of salvation, and of the most intense experience of the power of grace unto a new life in the hearts of men.

This fundamental view the Lutheran Free Church has endeavored to express both in its principles and in its work.

The aim of the work of the Lutheran Free Church is a regenerate membership and emancipation of all Norwegian Lutheran congregations. The Lutheran Free Church seeks to accomplish this purpose by its education of ministers and by an awakening evangelistic preaching of the word of God in the congregations, and by employing other means which may contribute towards obtaining the desired result. Therefore it lives in the hope that the more successful the work is and the larger the number of those converted to its principles, the more the justification of its existence will be acknowledged, and a true and free union and merging of all Norwegian Lutheran congregations in America will come of its own accord.

The Lutheran Free Church is still always conscious of its being only in the process of coming into existence, and this is the reason why it has not assumed a firmer organization than the one above defined. It does not wish that fixed boundaries and the rigid forms of an organization shall be in the way of that which it is desirous to obtain by means of a movement so vigorous and so abounding in life as that which we know by the name of the Lutheran Free Church.