

THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN LAYMEN'S LEAGUE:
A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THE
UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD IN PRACTICE

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Everyone likes drama. For the ancient Greeks drama was a catharsis for purging the soul of its passions. Today people are equally absorbed in purging their lives of monotony by substituting their lives with the action of drama.

Historians have also discovered that history should be recounted with a bent toward the dramatic. This is necessary in order to gain readers. This does not require Herculean efforts, though, because history by itself is drama. History provides drama with the stage of events and heroes it needs for re-enactment and interpretation.

But drama is a cruel and subjective field with the last word on assessment being how well it appeals to its audience. Each person has his own preference for what he considers to be dramatic. This is a problem that every history teacher soon discovers. Subject matter that he thinks should automatically compel a student's interest may not always be so captivating. He finds that he needs to make history an urgent practicality. He does so by making events come alive in narration and in discriminating questions. Students may then capture the spirit of a particular people, time, and adversity and wonder how they would resolve similar struggles in their own time. They would then find the drama of history to be compelling. In order to let history captivate and teach, history teachers emphasize the dramatic events of history--the revolutions, the wars, the tension of foreign and internal affairs, etc.

Likewise, whether their philosophy of history be economic,

social, military, etc., historians still focus on the dramatic events and streams of their field. When a historian does a comprehensive survey of Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, a large section of his work will cover his military genius and career. His Italian campaigns, his first and second coalition battles, Austerlitz and Waterloo, his diplomatic struggles, among many other topics, will be traced in much detail because they are dramatic.

Yet while it is true that Napoleon's battles enabled him to stride continental Europe spreading the ideals and nationalism of the French Revolution, still it is not those battles that left a permanent legacy. History is more than battles and military strategy. More dramatic than Napoleon's bloody battles is the scene of villagers and farmers picking up the pieces afterwards. The unsung heroes of history are the families and the struggling individuals who do not give up their homes and move on. The drama of history is the picture of destroyed cities being rebuilt and torn-up fields being replanted. It is the common man that provides the machinery and the tools that allow the documented earth-shakers to make what is recorded as dramatic history. The histories of nations are not the annals of its heroes so much as they are the records of the character in their people who produce the dramatic heroes of history. The drama of history is to be seen more in the father instilling patriotism in his son, in the hopes and aspirations of a nation's people to leave their heritage intact, and in the industry of its workers.

Similarly, church history may be recorded by its chroniclers as dramatic confrontations over doctrines both in councils and in persecution. These are the equivalents of the Napoleonic battles that are viewed as the dramatic material of church history. But, again, the true drama of church history is to be found more in the underlying currents of the Christian community quietly flowing on after the waves of controversy have rolled past and dissipated. How much more dramatic it is to see doctrines of faith not only recorded on paper, confessed and defended, but also put into action by Christians in the normal events of their lives. Church history can reflect just as well the impetus of doctrine producing right action as it does in recording religious wars and heretical encroachments.

The dramatic events of church history are important, it is true. It is important to understand the Bible correctly, to confess and state doctrines correctly in the face of opposition, and to actively defend them. Yet history would teach that it is just as important that believers put doctrine into practice as it is to defend right doctrine against heretical error and persecution. Believers practicing doctrine aright is the true drama of church history. That is how right doctrine is preserved.

In our Lutheran heritage the drama of doctrine put into action reaches an especially lofty height in the exercising of the universal priesthood. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) has extended the heights of this doctrinal drama by

putting this doctrine into strong practice. LCMS laymen are very serious about bringing Christ to the nations through the efforts of their own organization called the International Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL). This organization is a dramatic example of laymen grouping together apart from pastoral direction to fulfill the privilege and responsibility of the universal priesthood. This is true to the Bible and their Lutheran heritage.

The doctrine of the universal priesthood is held dear by conservative Lutherans. Christ entrusted the ministry of the keys to all believers. Believers are the workers of the church whose responsibility and privilege it is to widen the gates of Zion so nations may enter in from afar. The LLL was pivotal to the growth of the LCMS as it brought Christ first to the country, then to the nations, in mass media communication. The LCMS blossomed in the 1930's and 1940's due much in part to the pioneering radio broadcasts of "The Lutheran Hour", sponsored by the LLL as it presented the pure gospel message and comfort of sins forgiven.

As evidenced by this activity, the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers may be characterized as a doctrine especially stressed by Lutherans. This is our history, and the LLL is a child of that history. This doctrine was held dear by Martin Luther and the Reformation. Martin Luther grew up under a pope and priestly hierarchy that completely dominated the laity. The common man was humbly subservient to the priest. The priest,

through the invented sacrament of ordination, was given higher status than the layman and by the placing of an indelible character by God himself became closer to God than the layman. The common Christian could approach God only through the mediation of the priest. The Roman Catholic Church, steeped in Old Testament precedent, said the church must have a priesthood to administer the means of grace, just as was needed in the Old Testament.

But they thereby limited the ministry of the keys entrusted to all believers by Christ himself in Mt. 16:18-19 and Jn. 20:22-23. In these two passages Luther said "it is clear that Christ is interpreting himself, explaining chapter 16:18..., that the keys are given to St. Peter in place of the entire community and to his person alone."¹ This was in reply to the Roman Catholic assertion that the keys were given to Peter alone as the first pope and then on to his successors in the papacy. The ministry of the keys is not entrusted to a church hierarchy but to the whole church and all its members. The re-discovery of this biblical teaching opened up the reformation of the church.

In 1520 Luther presented the doctrine of the universal priesthood in its full glory. He cited the priesthood in the Old Testament as a prefigurement of Christ. This priesthood he shared not only with an elitist regime of priests, but with all Christians. He referred to I Pet. 2:5,9: "You are being

¹ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Am. Ed., Vol. 39 "On the Papacy in Rome" (1520), p. 86.

built... to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." In relation to this, Luther quoted Ex. 19:5-6: "Then out of all nations you will be treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Not just a few priests, but the whole nation, was to be a kingdom of believer-priests. Luther commented further,

Here you see what Peter is speaking about.... For it is certainly clear and manifest enough that the apostle is addressing the whole multitude, all Christians, when he says, "you are a chosen race.... a holy nation.²

This doctrinal stance possesses the drama of a Napoleonic battle recorded by church historians, and rightly so. Luther trumpeted this rediscovered biblical truth abroad as one of the greatest doctrines that opened up the Reformation. Luther was challenging the whole basic doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. He learned from the Gospels and the Epistles that there was a new ordained priesthood different from the Old Testament priesthood where every Christian is a priest consecrated in holy baptism with authority and responsibility.

The first business of the Christian, both layman and public minister, is to teach the Gospel message of Jesus Christ dying for the sins of all. Luther stressed this in his commentary

² LW, Am. Ed., Vol. 36, "The Misuse of the Mass" (1521), p. 145.

again on I Peter 2:

"You must," says Peter, "exercise the chief function of a priest," that is to proclaim the wonderful deed God has performed for you to bring you out of darkness into such light.... Thus you should also teach other people how they, too, come into such light.³

The history of the International Lutheran Laymen's League shows its strong commitment and devout dedication toward carrying out this all-important mission of the church, as Luther also expressed it. What is admirable is that this organization is made up of laymen of the congregations with pastors only in advisory capacities, and that being very unobtrusive. It is living drama to see so many sincere Christian laymen rise to the call of Christ for evangelism. It is living drama to see layman work to support an outreach that brings Christ to the nations in so many ways through radio, television, the printed word, etc. Its motto, "Bringing Christ to the Nations," is not just an empty rally cry to them, but rather, a reminder for earnest endeavor.

The LLL consists of men's clubs at the local congregation level which band together in zones. The LCMS desired its men's clubs to be affiliated with a service organization. Purely social clubs eventually die out because of lack of purpose and self-centeredness. In Memorial 514 adopted by the Synod in the Proceedings (1929) the following is read:

... men's societies are encouraged to affiliate with the Lutheran Laymen's League in order to get the benefit of a widening vision in church work, increasing inspiration, the spirit of solidarity and united

³ LW, Am. Ed., Vol. 30, "Sermons on the First Epistle of Peter," p. 64.

effort, and extended Christian fellowship.

Young men in the church were to be "graduated" from the Walther League into the men's club of the Laymen's League and thus continue in fellowship and service.

I myself have enjoyed this exercising of the universal priesthood of believers. I have experienced through my Missouri Synod parents the "widening vision in church work, increasing inspiration, the spirit of solidarity and united effort, and extended Christian fellowship." I saw my parents prepare for the times they were to lead the Bible lesson for their couples' club meetings, which were under the aegis of the LLL. The pastors of what was then my home church generally did not attend the meetings. The meetings were under the initiative and direction of the lay members themselves.

I would look forward to the second Thursday of every July when the annual ice cream social would be held by my parents' club. Hundreds of people would come from miles around in my rural area to get that good home-made ice cream taste. All the proceeds would go to the Lutheran Laymen's League.

I was impressed with the regional rallies which were run, directed and attended by the whole regions's LLL laymen. The associate Lutheran Hour speaker, Rev. Wallace Schulz, spoke at one rally that I attended. I remember the thrill I felt at how clearly he presented the gospel message and how motivated the members were to spread that message.

Every summer the Nebraska District of the Laymen's League

would have the worship services on the two Sundays of the two weeks when the Nebraska State Fair would be held. At one of these services a young 4-H member, (an agricultural club), who was our Roman Catholic neighbor, happened to attend. His mother had told him to go to Mass, but he attended the LLL service by mistake. He came back to his mother with a lot of questions afterwards, wondering how "the priest, (the LLL speaker) could say that Jesus alone saves us from our sins" and not say anything about Mary. That one service led one family to look into their Bibles and focus their eyes of faith on Jesus alone.

All these and many other experiences, including the many Lutheran Hour programs I've heard, have left me with an especially strong affection for the Lutheran doctrine of the universal priesthood. Laymen are eager to serve in the work of the church. They do not need to be passive members directed by a dictatorial executive pastor. Relying on God's Word, the LLL summons all, laymen and pastors alike, to join hands in carrying out the priestly functions of teaching, witnessing and preaching Christ. The doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is a living drama that reminds believers of the fact that the keys to the kingdom of heaven are theirs to use.

This spirit may be seen in the "10 Good Reasons for Joining the LLL" brochure that came out in 1931. Among these reasons were the following for "Why You Should Join the Lutheran Laymen's League": 1) The LLL has as its purpose helpful services to the church; 2) The LLL aids the Church in business and financial

matters; 3) The LLL through its radio activities, the Lutheran Hour particularly, has become a most helpful agency in the Church's mission-endeavors; 4) The LLL is striving to stimulate greater interest and greater activity on the part of our laymen in all the work of the Church; 5) The LLL has as its goal a united laity of the Missouri Synod."4 These reasons have been fulfilled and have touched my life through the LLL branch in my former Missouri Synod congregation. Thus the LLL has impressed me to such an extent that I strongly revere the universal priesthood possibly more than the public ministry, which is itself clothed with authority by the congregation.

From its very beginning the LLL has been an expression of the initiative of laymen concerned for their Synod, although it did not always have its wide constituency or evangelism emphasis. Originally, it was a 12 man caucus formed pro tempore to remove the Synod deficit. The year was 1917, a Reformation Anniversary year. In June "The Lutheran Church of Missouri, Ohio and other States" met in convention in Milwaukee. Since it was an anniversary year, one would have expected an air of celebration. But there was instead a gloomy atmosphere. America had just entered into World War I. Furthermore, directly in front of the convention delegates, was a synodical debt of \$100,000.

During one break in the convention session, Albert G. Brauer, a St. Louis layman, was telling some friends about his

4 The Lutheran Layman, "Reflections on 50 Years," Vol. 50, No. 10, October 1979, p. 2.

earlier unsuccessful attempt to wipe out the debt. When New Yorker Theodore Lamprech suggested that another such effort be made, an informal gathering was scheduled at the Milwaukee home of Fred C. Pretzlaff. Twelve men attended this meeting on June 22, 1917.

By the time that meeting was over, these men had pledged \$26,000 to help do away with its debt... and another \$1,000 was pledge by one of them after making his way home through a severe thunderstorm.

In order to retire the rest of the debt, those twelve men formed a temporary organization called, as one of them suggested, the Lutheran Laymen's League. Lamprech was chosen president and Brauer secretary. Headquarters were established in Milwaukee. By December the league topped its \$100,000 goal by more than \$5,000. That month another meeting was held in Chicago and the league was permanently organized. A life of service to Jesus Christ is what motivated these men. This expressed itself in their desire to put the Synod back on an even keel so that mission work could carry on. It's constitution pledged the league to "aid the synod with word and deed in financial matters."

In one of the earliest forms of print outreach from this infant, issued by seven of its twelve officers, comes this comment: "Over \$100,00 has been turned over to synod to wipe out all indebtedness... on Dec. 31, 1917, and thus synod begins 1918

without the usual load of former years."⁵

It then went on to call for a wider membership, thinking that laymen could increase their role in activity within the church.

The LLL is now a permanent body. See what the limited membership of the temporary 1917 organization has done for synod! Think what a membership of thousands in the permanently organized body can do in the same direction! Women as well as men are eligible.⁶

Later on this was to change, though, as women were phased out into a different direction out of concern for the "headship" principle of Scripture.

Both the men and women recognized the need for the Christian message to be heard in their nation. This challenge presented itself in the face of a boiling pot of activity in this country. It happened in the face of war in Europe, a booming economy and marked changes in lifestyles. The industrial age was in full swing, society was becoming motorized, yet the continual need for the Gospel message to be heard never changed.

It was recognized that the fellowship of Christians could be strengthened by answering this need for spreading the Gospel. This spirit of service and fellowship is evident in a statement by C. J. Cramer, the league's executive secretary, in 1918:

The winning of a new friend and worker in this grand cause is ever a source of joy to us, showing that our good Lutheran men and women are one with us in the earnest endeavor to make our whole life a service to

⁵ Gerald Perschbacher, The Lutheran Layman, Oct. 1987, Vol. 58, no. 7, p. 7.

⁶ ibid.

Him who has given His life for us.⁷

This original spirit was to be limited, though, by practical consideration. Most of the original founders were wealthy men who supported their own churches too. But they expressed the fear that if every layman were to join and contribute, then the financial resources of the individual congregations would be undercut. Consequently, league membership dues were set at a minimum of \$5... quite a sum in 1917 to 1929, the sole purpose of the league was to gather funds for various projects. Having liquidated the synodical debt, the LLL looked around for another project. They decided

to accumulate a fund of \$3 million or more, to be given to Synod in 1920 as a permanent endowment fund for the support of retired and invalid professors, pastors and teachers, and to provide for the widows and orphans, of deceased servants of the Word.⁸

Partly due to competing synodical fund drives, the LLL fell short of its goal. However, in 1920 the LLL turned over to the synod about \$2.7 million. A more important result of the project was that it attracted many new members and began to establish a solid organization base.

As its third project the league gave a premonition of its huge radio ministry by assisting the youth league of the LCMS, the Walther League, in funding the establishment and operation of radio station set up in the attic of Concordia Seminary in St.

⁷ Gerald Perschbacher, The Lutheran Layman, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 1.

⁸ Undated pamphlet entitled A Brief History of the International Lutheran Laymen's League, p. 5.

Louis in 11923 and 1924. This became Concordia's own radio station with the call letters KFUO.

In 1929 the league underwent a complete reorganization and took on permanent official synodical backing and incorporation. League headquarters were moved from Milwaukee to the second floor of the Concordia Publishing House building in St. Louis, Mo. In 1930 T. G. Eggers was appointed the league's first full-time executive secretary.

L. H. Walthe, a former treasurer and a member of the LLL's Board of Governors in 1929, explained the reason for this expansion.

The old organization was very limited in its scope of activities, and it was regarded by many as a mere collection agency.... Under the original organization, only individuals could become members. But... our new purpose is to plan layman's work on a much broader scope and with much more extensive participation than ever before. 9

With reorganization, individual membership dues dropped to \$3 a year and men's clubs were allowed to join the league at a reduced rate of \$2 per man. Grace Lutheran Men's club of Fargo, N.D., has the distinction of being the first LLL club charter member on Dec. 13, 1929.

Provision was then made for making grassroots efforts to make LCMS members aware of this organization for service. An official publication was started to promote the reorganized league. On July 19, 1929, the league's "newspaper"

9 A Brief History, p. 6.

edition was published under the title Lutheran Laymen's League Bulletin in tabloid form. This was changed to The Lutheran Layman in its April 1, 1933, issue. The purpose of the paper, as set down in that issue, was "to serve the church by arousing its members and fellow laymen to a greater participation in all phases of church work, particularly in the work of the local congregation."¹⁰

In the Jan. 1, 1930 edition formation of a nationwide Lutheran Women's Organization was encouraged and six pages of the Bulletin were put at its disposal. This continued until June of 1931. The June 12, 1931 Bulletin printed two resolutions about this organization:

RESOLVED, that in accordance with the advice of the synodical representatives we postpone the organization of a National Women's Organization for the present," and "RESOLVED, that we encourage the women who are anxious to serve the church more effectively to work individually and collectively in their locality toward a better understanding of our object.¹¹

With these resolutions specific mention of women's activities were dropped by the LLL.

What the LLL is most well-known for, and deservedly so, is its radio broadcast program "The Lutheran Hour." The League pioneered the mass communication ministry. Unlike the electronic ministries that are creating scandals today, this program has been consistently a popular program without reproach. It's first

¹⁰ The Lutheran Layman, "Reflections on 50 Years," Vol. 50, No. 10, October 1979, p. 2.

¹¹ The Lutheran Layman, "Reflections on 50 Years," p. 2.

speaker, Dr. Walter A. Maier, seems to have anticipated this. He once said,

Radio, more than any other means at the church disposal, can help to speed the course of the kingdom in bringing Christ to the masses. The chain broadcast, **conservatively conducted**, proved to be one of the most effective and inexpensive means of fulfilling the ascended Savior's missionary command.¹²

The first indication that the League was about to enter into a radio ministry came in the May 15, 1930 issue of the Bulletin, which in announcing the upcoming LLL convention at the Palmer House in Chicago stated that a coast-to-coast radio network was to be considered at that convention.¹³ On May 31, 1930, at its 14th annual convention, it did adopt a resolution to "put the Gospel on the air, originating in the studios of WHK, Cleveland. The aforementioned Dr. Maier, professor of Old Testament Interpretation and History at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, delivered the sermon. This came just nine years after the first religious radio broadcast in 1921 by Edwin van Ellen, an Episcopal rector.¹⁴

That night Maier set the tone for future sermons with these words:

In the crisis of life and the pivotal hours of our existence, only the Christian, having God and with Him the assurance that no one can successfully prevail

12 Gerald Perschbacher, The Lutheran Layman, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 1.

13 The Lutheran Layman, Oct. 1979, p. 1

14 William A. Kramer, "The Walter A. Maier Study Dedicatory Address," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3, Fall 1981, p. 98.

against him, is able to carry the pressing burdens of sickness, death, financial reverses, family troubles, misfortunes of their almost innumerable kinds and degrees, and yet bear all this with the undaunted optimistic faith and Christian confidence that alone makes life worth living and death worth dying.¹⁵

This call to confidence gained by the message of free forgiveness was a much needed message for that time and any time. But the times then, especially in its earlier years, led to The Lutheran Hour being broadcast from coast to coast, and later on, from nation to nation. The people were needing and ready to hear the LLL's message of comfort in Christ.

The Great Depression lasted essentially through this period, but it was really World War II that returned men to full employment and prosperity. Plus

the first use of the atomic bomb came near the end of the war. The Depression, the War, and the knowledge of the destructive A-bomb tore at people's hearts, either because of worry about making ends meet, about loved ones in the military service, or about the future of the country and of the world. The catastrophic events of the Depression and the war intensified people's normal fears and tensions and presumably made them more receptive to the warnings of the Law and the comforts of the Gospel.¹⁶

Because of the times, the people were hungry for the words of Christ and the laymen of the LCMS proclaimed that word through its support of The Lutheran Hour. One would run the risk of focusing on the heroes of Napoleon's battles by focusing on the speakers of The Lutheran Hour. But it is the work of the laymen supporting this ministry that supports The Lutheran Hour. It is

15 The Lutheran Layman, March 1981, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 12

16 Kramer, p. 99.

the individual laymen studying God's Word in their own congregations and clubs that move them to support evangelism.

Dr. Maier proclaimed the Good News that these laymen wanted to be heard. By God's grace, The Lutheran Hour message moved many, either by bringing them to faith or by strengthening them in their faith. Dr. Maier was a man who could communicate in ways which the learned could respect and the unlearned could understand.

He proclaimed God's Word with vigor. In preaching, he poured out his words at the rate of 170 per minute. His rapid-fire delivery severely tested the skill of the radio engineers as they tried to adjust. When at one time his advisors got him to speak more calmly, the volume of mail fell off so noticeably that he returned to the same method that was natural to him.¹⁷

Every Lutheran Hour speaker is the voice of over a 130,000 laymen today. From its first program, The Lutheran Hour has reached out to share Christ, it initiated a sharing ministry. Through this program, members of the Int'l LLL have reached out to share the Gospel, to share their faith, to share their witness. From the beginning, The Lutheran Hour has asked the listeners to become a part of this outreach and witness. They have responded by the hundreds of thousands; they have made it their ministry, too.¹⁸

The Lutheran Layman magazine also used its pages to promote the LLL activities. In 1930 it offered miniature gold crosses to

¹⁷ Kramer, p. 99.

¹⁸ The Lutheran Layman, March 1981, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 12.

be worn on coat lapels as a symbol of men's faith in Christ. From the beginning the important thing to the LLL was not that they would advertise The Lutheran Hour, but rather that they would advertise Christ.¹⁹ The cross was intended as an attention-getting device to open conversations and, through personal witness, extend the Gospel outreach. Since then millions of listeners have sent for them to show that they want to share their Savior too.

The Dec. 5, 1938, The Layman issue carried the first promotion of Lutheran Hour Billboard Posters; the April 5, 1939, issue contained the first announcement that Lutheran Hour Chorus recordings were available; the Oct. 1, 1939 issue carried the first ad soliciting volunteers to promote and publicize The Lutheran Hour in various ways; and the Oct. 1940 issue carried the first ad for "The Church of the Lutheran Hour" signs. The Dec. 8, 1941 edition contains the first report of a county fair--Blue Earth County, Minn.--being used as a place to publicize The Lutheran Hour.²⁰

Other support systems have been developed. In 1947, the distribution of Lutheran Hour Easter seals was tried on a "test run" basis, and in 1948, the full scale distribution of the Easter seals was begun. Today there is the "Bringing Christ To The Nations" Support Plan which was introduced in 1978. Annual

19 The Lutheran Layman, March 1981, p. 12.

20 The Lutheran Layman, "Reflection On 50 Years," p. 2.

contributions of \$100 or more are divided into 40 per cent for "The Lutheran Hour," 40 per cent for Lutheran Television, and 20 per cent as an LLL membership contribution.

Another way of gaining recognition and support is through entering floats in public parades. On New Year's Day, 1951, the Southern California district entered the first Lutheran Hour float in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, Calif. New Year's Day, 1965, marked the first entry of a Lutheran Hour float in the Orange Bowl Parade in Miami, Fl. They have established a prize winning tradition. In my family we've always watched the Rose Bowl Parade on TV to see who can spot the float first.

The Lutheran Laymen's League has not always been floating on calm water, though. It did have its trials through which it continued for 36 weeks. On June 11, 1931, however, broadcasting of "The Lutheran Hour" was suspended, because financial support was lacking from the League member during the depression. Also the Columbia Broadcasting System had adopted a network policy restricting religious broadcasting to Sunday morning, a time unacceptable to the broadcast.

But the LLL kept on working to let their purpose be known. On Feb. 10, 1935, "The Lutheran Hour" returned to the air with a 13-week series of broadcasts supported by the Detroit Pastoral Conference. The programs were broadcast in Detroit and WLW, Cincinnati, then the world's most powerful radio station.

The third Lutheran Hour season began on Oct. 20, 1935. It was carried on eight stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System.

By 1937 it was able to use as its motto, "Bringing Christ To The Nation From Coast To Coast. In 1940, the motto became "Bringing Christ To The Nations" as its first foreign broadcasting was begun in English and Spanish in Ecuador and The Philippines.

Portuguese became the third language in 1943. Overseas offices were opened in 1945 in Australia, in 1947 in Argentina and Brazil, and in 1948 in France.

In 1947, through the efforts of these laymen blessed with God's promise of the mission call, The Lutheran Hour entered its 13th season with 682 stations. Then it emerged as the largest regularly scheduled broadcast of any kind in the world which led many people to ask, "Are you connected with the Lutheran Hour? What is your church?" Also that year, 403,367 letters were received from listeners in 70 countries.²¹

It is the letters which are received that reflect the ministry of the LLL and its desire to comfort with the words of Christ. One lady writes:

Dear friends in Christ: Just a note to let you know what a blessing your program has been to me. The Lord led me to Christian radio at a point in my life when I hit rock bottom and now, praise the Lord, I'm a new person in Christ. Free from the sins of tomorrow and the guilt of the past.

I've never known such peace and joy as I'm experiencing now and your program has been such a big part of all this..... I'll never forget that night--the pastor spoke a message on forgiveness that really touched my heart....²²

²¹ The Lutheran Layman, March 1981, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 13.

²² The Lutheran Layman, March 1981, p. 13.

Such hearts that are strengthened in faith make the League's work over the impersonal air waves very personal.

On Jan. 11, 1950, at age 56 Dr. Maier, the man whom that lady heard preaching over the radio, died after suffering five heart attacks. At the time of his death, The Lutheran Hour was being broadcast over 1,250 stations in 49 languages into 59 countries.

For the 1950-51 season, Rev. Acker, who had been serving as pastoral adviser for the LLL, was chosen as interim speaker. In 1951, Dr. Armin Oldsen, professor of religion at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind. (where the LLL also sends students on scholarships), was appointed the second full-time Lutheran Hour speaker. He served until 1953, when he resigned for health reasons.

In 1952 the last of the original twelve LLL founders, Fred Pretzlaff, died. At that time membership had reached 62,317.23 When Rev. Oldsen resigned in 1953, there was an enrollment of 70,000, and reports in the synod's triennial convention in Houston, TX show that a budget of \$8.1 million was adopted.²⁴

From 1953 until 1955, a variety of guest speakers were used on The Lutheran Hour. In 1955, Dr. Oswald Hoffman, then director of public relations for the LCMS, was appointed the third full-time Lutheran Hour speaker. He filled this position while

23 The Lutheran Layman, "Reflections on 50 Years," p. 3.

24 Ibid., p. 3.

remaining public relations director of the LCMS until 1963, when he resigned and moved to St. Louis from New York City.

During the 1950's overseas expansion of The Lutheran Hour increased at a phenomenal rate. From 1951 through 1959, Lutheran Hour offices were opened in Japan, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, Lebanon, Taiwan, Nigeria, Korea, Okinawa and Germany

In 1956 The Lutheran Hour broadcasts were made over NBC network. In 1957 the 100,000th LLL membership was granted. In 1960 membership was at 119,562. Growth has continued today where membership is over 130,000.²⁵

On April, 1977, Rev. Wallace Schulz was appointed associate Lutheran Hour speaker and was appointed to share preaching duties with Hoffman on the broadcasts. Schulz visits the rallies across the nation also. I met him in Norfolk, NE and was very impressed with his zeal to preach the Gospel. Both Hoffmann and Schulz contribute to a broadcast effort over more than 1,000 stations today in 31 languages into more than 110 countries.

The LLL pioneered in television mass communication also. The league had experimented in television as early as 1948, televising a Lutheran Hour broadcast with Dr. Maier on New Year's Day in St. Louis, to a local audience, and televising again that year on Good Friday. A filmed television pilot featuring Hoffmann and using an illustrated sermon technique was a highlight of the LLL convention in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1950. A brief series of Lutheran Hour broadcasts followed.

²⁵ The Lutheran Layman, Oct. 1979, p. 3.

In January, 1951, representatives of the league and the LCMS met to discuss the future thrust of the church in television. The league was asked not to enter television, and the LCMS organized its own Television Productions Board. Its program was simply called "Lutheran Television."

With the guidance of Dr. Herman Gockel, who served as script consultant and executive producer for Lutheran Television from 1952 through 1971, a dramatic format was adopted. On August 31, 1952, "This Is The Life" premiered over two stations---one in Lancaster, Pa; the other in Wilmington, Del. One week later, St. Louis became the first major city to air the program, which was telecast on Sunday morning at 4:30 a.m.!

Recognizing the LLL's capability, in 1975 the LCMS asked the Lutheran Laymen's League to accept sole responsibility for Lutheran Television, and in 1979 the transition was made. This television ministry is not dominated by one man or family, but is the network set up by all the laymen of the LLL.

Over the years, Lutheran Television has received almost 100 awards for technical excellence. Lutheran Television programs have won six national Emmys (TV's annual award for excellence), including an unprecedented three Emmys won in 1980.

Today Lutheran Television's "This Is The Life" series is seen on more than 150 broadcast stations and on many cable channels. Three Christmas specials, "Christmas Is", "The City That Forgot About Christmas," and "The Stableboy's Christmas", produced by Lutheran Television, are being telecast annually in

English and Spanish, and are setting new records each year for the number of stations carrying the programs. Many children, together with their family watching TV, are thus led to see a Christ centered Christmas presentation apart from the trappings of Santa Claus and gifts.

Overseas "This Is The Life" programs are seen regularly in about 10 countries, carried periodically in many other countries, and used in about a dozen countries in off-television evangelism outreach programs.²⁶

For 36 years Lutheran television, sponsored by the LLL, has presented Christ on "This Is The Life." For 56 years of continuous broadcast, "The Lutheran Hour" has been sharing the Gospel around the world. And from its very beginning over 70 years ago, the League has been reaching out with the printed news of salvation in its newspaper and devotional material duplicated and distributed to tens of thousands throughout North America and overseas. This outreach continues through the efforts of the lay priests of LLL, as God blesses them and moves His people to support their efforts.

I am now a member of the Wisconsin Synod who can now only be a prayerful onlooker to the activities of the LLL. But I bring with me into this Synod a lasting appreciation of the zeal and concern for the Gospel that I saw in the actions and lives of my parent's fellow LLL members. I ask myself, then, why the lay members of the Wisconsin Synod do not have their own laymen's

²⁶ A Brief History, pp. 17-18.

organization to exercise the universal priesthood of all believers. Maybe such a question has been asked already. Or maybe such questions will lead to our Synod growing into a laymen's organization similar to the LLL. There's where all the drama is--in evangelism moved by God through His individual believer-priests.

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