

HISTORY OF THE LUTHERAN  
CHILDREN'S FRIEND SOCIETY  
OF WISCONSIN

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Every human being has certain needs. When the needs are not met or fulfilled the individual is usually adversely affected. For example, a physical need common to every human being is the need for nourishment. When this need, for whatever reason, is not met the person will eventually die from starvation. All of us have certain emotional needs which also must be met. We have the need to feel wanted or loved. We have the need for the feeling of security which a home or family can offer. A child needs the support and protection of mother and father. A husband or wife, after a hard day, perhaps feels the need for a hug or kiss from his or her spouse when he walks into the house. When any of our emotional needs are not met, we find ourselves going through several changes in mood, finally resulting in anger. Our anger finds an outlet in many different ways. Anger can prompt children to leave home. Struggling to meet their needs on their own, these children become involved in all kinds of trouble. Husbands and wives sometimes express their anger in adulterous relationships which more often than not, end in divorce.

These are only a handful, a small sampling of the needs which people have. All of us have many, many different needs. Many people have been blessed by the Lord with the ability to adapt and change in accordance with God's will as their needs demand. Many others, however, whether due to their own level of maturity, their emotional instability, or whatever, need

help in meeting their needs.

The question now arises as to where this help should come from. Traditionally, it seems that those in need, whether that need be physical, emotional, or both, turned or were turned over to the state--to the government. The state however could not and does not provide for the spiritual needs of those in its care. Ideally, help for those in need should come from the church.

Many in our Lutheran circles have said and sometimes are still heard to say that the purpose of the church is to preach the gospel. They indicate that there is little or no room in the church for social and welfare services. It is true that the purpose of the church is to preach the gospel, but our Lord did not intend for it to be preached just from a pulpit on Sunday morning, just to those who were fortunate enough to find it within their means to attend the services. The gospel can also be preached through our acts of love. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (Jn 13:34,35).

The gospel is there for the unwed mother, for the alcoholic husband and adulterous wife, for the illegitimate child abandoned by his parents. The gospel is there for all of these people. They too need to be assured of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. Through the assurance of God's saving grace these people are enabled to grow and develop in self-worth.

Social welfare work within conservative Lutheran circles really began with the ministry of Johann Friedrich Buenger.

A pastor in the Missouri Synod, Buenger began work in 1859, for the establishment of a hospital in St. Louis. In 1867, Rev. Buenger was elected president of the Des Peres Orphanage which he had played a major role in organizing. It's been said of Johann Buenger that he left a profound influence upon the benevolence ministry of the young Missouri Synod.

F. Dean Lueking writes in A Century of Caring,

His work in founding the Lutheran Hospital and the Lutheran Orphanage set a pattern in theory and practice of social ministry that continued long after his death. First, the man had a great heart for people in need. His own losses prepared him to do something in behalf of others in need, both fellow Lutherans and non-Lutherans. He possessed rare talents for recruiting the active concerns of lay Christians, whose voluntary support of the hospital and orphanage kept them in close and personal contact with the ministries of mercy carried out in these institutions. During the twenty-five years following the beginning of the Des Peres Orphanage eleven other orphanages were established by Missouri Synod Lutherans in the mid-west and eastern sections of the United States. Over the same period of time, twenty-five Lutheran hospitals were founded by Lutherans of all synods in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The history of the social welfare ministry of the Missouri Synod is long and involved. Our intent is not to write on every facet of this history but rather to deal with one small yet important part of it--the history of the Lutheran Children's Friend Society of Wisconsin. It's interesting to note that the Lutheran Encyclopedia calls the founding of the Children's Friend Society of Wisconsin "a significant development."<sup>2</sup> Yet, an actual history of the important work carried on in Wauwatosa has apparently never been written. Our purpose in this paper is to bring together in an accurate but concise manner the historical facts of the social welfare ministry of the Lutheran Children's Friend Society of Wisconsin.

Turning again to the book A Century of Caring, we read, "Although the first Lutheran Home Finding Society associated with the Missouri Synod was the Lutheran Children's Friend Society of California in 1887, the work begun in Wisconsin nine years later was determined to carry a more decisive influence among the Lutherans whose constituency was concentrated in the midwestern states."<sup>3</sup>

For some time before 1896, many pastors and laymen in the Milwaukee area had thought of establishing a society which would offer foster home care and placement of homeless, neglected and dependent children. Such an idea was, of course, in direct contrast to the practice of caring for such children in existing orphanages. After being discussed and debated in smaller groups, the matter finally was brought to the attention of the Mixed Pastoral Conference of Milwaukee in the early spring of 1896. At this conference, two clergymen of the Missouri Synod, J.F. Rubel and John Schlerf presented to their colleagues the proposal of an organized way of placing homeless, neglected and dependent children in foster homes. The reaction was favorable and a committee was appointed to proceed with plans for the organization of such a society. The committee took the next step of calling a meeting of representatives from all Synodical Conference congregations in the Milwaukee area. The meeting was held on March 9 in the school auditorium of Trinity Lutheran Church, at 9th and Highland in Milwaukee. The meeting was apparently very well attended which encouraged thorough discussion of the proposal along with the useful sharing of ideas. The need for a home-finding society, and the advisability of its organization at

that time, were both discussed. Several reasons were given for the need to organize such a society immediately. Among them was the fact that all existing orphanages were overcrowded so that many homeless and dependent children could not even be cared for. There was great concern over both the physical and spiritual harm which these uncared for children were in danger of suffering. Emphasis was also laid on the fact that it would be far better and more natural for these children to be cared for in Christian families, rather than in public institutions where they would grow up without any instruction in the Christian faith. It was generally decided by those at the meeting that the proposed home-finding society should not only care for orphaned children, but also for neglected and dependent children. The decision to organize such a society was unanimous and so the Evangelical Lutheran Kinderfreund Society of Wisconsin (Evangelische Lutherische Kinderfreundgesellschaft) came into being.

The organizing meeting was called for June 8, 1896. An interim committee had prepared a constitution, which was presented and formally adopted. As set forth in the constitution, the objectives of the Society were "...to receive homeless, dependent and neglected children, and to care for them by placing them in suitable family homes, either for adoption or for care and training until they become of age; to cooperate with other Societies having the same objectives and purposes, and being governed by the same principles."<sup>4</sup> An eighteen man board of directors consisting of clergy and laity of area Lutheran congregations of the Synodical Conference was placed in control of the new Society.

Three days later, on June 11, the first meeting of the board of directors was held. The following were elected to offices: W.H. Graebner, President; Rev. J.F. Rubel, Vice-President; F.H. Hoeck, Secretary; Jobst Buening, Treasurer; H. Wallschlaeger, Financial Secretary.

On July 2, 1896, the Lutheran Kinderfreund Society was incorporated under the laws of the State of Wisconsin. The Articles of Incorporation were signed by the following charter members: W.H. Graebner, F.H. Hoeck, F.W. Wehle, Rev. J. Schlerf, Rev. J.F. Rubel, Aug. M. Neumann, Jobst H. Buening, Rev. Aug. Pieper, H. Wallschlaeger, Jr., Theodor F. Hahn, Heinrich Kaliebe, Rev. B.P. Nommensen, Christian Greve and Geo. Stueber.

The work for which the Society had been formed was immediately begun. For somewhat over a year, Geo. Stueber--one of the charter members and a former teacher, took care of the work of placing children into foster homes, and visiting them in a supervisory way, with the assistance of the officers of the Society. On December 7, 1897, Rev. Carl Eissfeldt was called as superintendent. Much of the success of the work at the Society in the early years of its existence can be attributed to the untiring effort and God-given foresight of Pastor Eissfeldt.

Although the Kinderfreund Society in Milwaukee was blessed with success from its very beginning, one must not believe that the work met with overwhelming approval by everyone concerned. It did not. In fact, some of the early records indicated that there was quite a bit of opposition to the idea of placing children into foster homes. It was argued that



this method of caring for children was too untried and too filled with dangers. The organizers of the Society, though, were men of courage, conviction and vision. They ably defended their position that placing children into foster homes was the most natural, the wisest, the most effective and by far the most expedient method of caring for children.

These men were pioneers in the foster home method of child care among Lutherans in the United States and were instrumental in the establishment of similar societies in other parts of the country. From its inception, the Wisconsin Society was providing child-placement service over an area ranging as far east as New York State and as far west as Arizona. It was not long before other states were asking the Milwaukee men for help in organizing their own societies. Pastor Schlerf reported to the July, 1897, meeting of the board of directors that the work of the Society was being favorably accepted in Minnesota. A Minnesota Society was eventually founded in St. Paul in 1901. Pastor Eissfeldt organized similar work in Michigan in 1898, and in Iowa in 1901. He personally helped pastors and laity in Peoria, Illinois; Topeka, Kansas and Buffalo, New York lay the groundwork for child-placement societies in those areas during the years immediately following the turn of the century.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted also that it was through the efforts of the men who organized the Wisconsin Kinderfreund Society that the Home for the Feeble-Minded (Bethesda Lutheran Home) at Watertown was founded.

On August 14, 1896, the board of directors arranged to have Mrs. Augusta Teich give temporary boarding care to those children accepted by the Society. Mrs. Teich used her own

home at 1242 N. 26th Street as a receiving home for the children. She received three dollars a week for the first child, and fifty cents a week for each additional child. Until the fall of 1899, Mrs. Teich cared for as many as a dozen or more children at a time in her home.

The Missouri Synod also had an orphanage at Wittenberg, Wisconsin, which had been established in 1886. However, when the Kinderfreund Society was formed, an agreement was reached with the orphanage at Wittenberg. On July 16, 1897, it was agreed that the orphanage at Wittenberg would turn over to the Kinderfreund Society for foster home placement, all children who had been released to them by the parents, or who were permanently committed by the courts. The Wittenberg orphanage, in turn, would receive and care for such children as the Kinderfreund Society could not place into foster homes. However, at the annual meeting of the Society on October 10, 1899, it was decided to have the Society take over all of the children at Wittenberg for foster home placement. The doors of the orphanage were closed and the property later deeded to the Kinderfreund Society. With all of the children from Wittenberg coming to the Society, quite a problem arose regarding how and where to house the children temporarily. The voters at the annual meeting of 1899 further decided that a new receiving home was the answer. At a special meeting of the board of directors on October 25, it was voted to rent the Sielaff residence on Vliet Street in Wauwatosa, for \$15.00 per month. With the addition of these rented quarters, fifteen children were soon transferred from Wittenberg.

Less than a month later, at the November meeting of the

board of directors, it was reported that the Gold Cure Home in Wauwatosa was for sale for \$8000.00. The Society however, at the time, could not afford to buy it. The need for a larger receiving home was well known and so sixteen men, who were friends of the Society, formed the Milwaukee Orphan's Aid Society. With their own money they purchased the Gold Cure Home and rented it to the Society for one dollar a year. This solved the problem of a receiving home for nearly twenty-five years.

From about 1904, the number of children the Society worked with continued to increase steadily. This, of course, also led to an increase in the amount of work that had to be done by those in charge. On October 10, 1911, the state board of control granted the Society its first license.

It was obvious to all concerned that if the work of the Society was to be expanded, a new receiving home would eventually have to be found. Friends of the Society contributed funds, and a new site was purchased. On July 25, 1923, the board of directors formally resolved to put up a new building. Thus, construction of the building which still stands on Harvard Avenue in Wauwatosa was begun and the main section was dedicated to the service of the Lord on September 21, 1924. The fine response given by the friends of the Society was encouraging and so a west wing was soon added to the new building. This addition was in use by September 1926.

By 1928, the Society had been in existence for thirty-two years and had provided for almost 1900 children. There can be no question as to the success which the Lord granted to the ministry of the Lutheran Kinderfreund Society during these

years. Otto Hattstaedt remarks, "When we consider that for many of these children a home was provided where in most cases they certainly enjoyed more comforts than they could have elsewhere, and that above all else their spiritual welfare was and still is being cared for, then we must designate the children's Friend Society as an organization that is richly blessed."<sup>6</sup>

The depression years of the 1930's were no less difficult for the Society than they were for the rest of the American population. One of the present staff members of LCFS commented that if it's at all fair to draw a comparison between the depression and the current recession, the demands for service would have increased, but no funds would have been available to provide the services. The records of the agency reveal little about the 1930's. The only increase in services offered at that time was apparently the start of a ministry to unmarried mothers which began in the mid-1930's. This particular ministry was expanded considerably in the years that followed. F. Dean Lueking writes of the depression years, "During the depression years of the 1930's, a time when profound changes took place between private and public welfare agencies, the Society felt free to utilize the resources of governmental agencies. Though the point of contact was not large in scope--it simply involved boys and girls under the Society's supervision receiving instructions from PWA workers while awaiting placement in 1937...."<sup>7</sup>

In the year 1941, the name of the Society was changed to The Lutheran Children's Friend Society of Wisconsin. At that time, some changes were also made in the Articles of Incorporation. As amended and adopted on April 28, 1941, the Articles

of Incorporation now state that the "objects and purposes of the organization shall be:

- (1) To give protective and preventive care and casework service to orphaned, dependent, neglected, maladjusted and delinquent children; to give to such children Christian guidance and training and a thorough instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian religion and in the tenets of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Synodical Conference); and to maintain a working relationship with the juvenile courts and public and private agencies in regard to the physical, mental and social needs of such children and their protection; and to provide such other Christian social welfare services as the board of directors may, in keeping with these articles, decide to institute.
- (2) In the prosecution of such objectives and purposes on the basis of providing for the individual needs of children, subject to conditions provided by law, to assume temporary or permanent care, custody and guardianship of children, and to consent to the adoption of the wards of the Society.
- (3) To investigate and issue permits to foster homes, as provided by law, to place children into foster homes, and to support and supervise them in such homes.
- (4) To place children for adoption, to supervise them in adoptive foster homes, and to consent to their adoption.
- (5) To place children, and to supervise them, in homes of relatives.
- (6) To give casework service to children and to their parents in their own homes.
- (7) To give care to children in an institution.
- (8) To give casework service to unmarried mothers and their children.
- (9) To provide medical, dental, and psychiatric services, and to supply clothing and material relief to children in need thereof.
- (10) To carry on all the activities of a child welfare agency, as defined in the statutes.
- (11) To receive, buy, lease, sell or exchange all kinds of property, real and personal, for the purpose of this corporation; to cooperate with other societies having similar purposes and objectives."

The fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Lutheran

Children's Friend Society was observed in the summer of 1946. In those first fifty years, over 4500 children had been cared for in one way or another. In 1947, there was a total of some 370 children under the care of the agency--60 in the institution, and 310 outside of the institution in foster care.

Some of the saddest days for the Society came in the year 1957. Financially, the bottom of the barrel had been reached; or, as one of the officials put it, "the Society has gone right through the bottom." A \$50,000.00 mortgage had to be placed on the property. On October 8, 1957, the board of directors reluctantly ordered the curtailment of the work being done with the children on the second floor. However, they were able to maintain a unit of six boys on the main floor of the Home. The operating receipts for the fiscal year 1957-58 did increase though, and the Society was able to pay off the mortgage.

In the spring of 1959, plans were being finalized for the initiation of a new program within the agency complex. The new program, totally distinct from the general child and welfare services which had been carried on all along, was to provide residential care of emotionally-disturbed children. The plan was to open the residential care facility with 50% boys and 50% girls. On August 1, 1959, the Society opened its doors for the care of emotionally-disturbed children.

The year before, contacts had been made with the larger purchasers of service in the state. It was found that there were only about 100 spaces available in the state for the more than 2000 children in need of such care. Once the program was under way, various county welfare departments and the State of

Wisconsin purchased service from the agency which included the residents' clinical treatment--primarily treatment by the psychiatrist who was on the staff at that time. As the program developed it became obvious that more boys than girls were being treated. Studies revealed that only one in ten girls required treatment for emotional disorders in the childhood years compared to a much larger percentage of boys. Hence, the board of directors adopted the resolution that the new residential care program be limited to thirty-two boys between the ages of six and twelve years.

In September of 1973, a day treatment program was begun at the agency to include six additional boys. Thus, the totals of the two programs with emotionally-disturbed youngsters were: thirty-two boys living full time at LCFS and another six coming in on a day treatment basis.

In the early 1970's the main services of the Lutheran Children's Friend Society included:

1. The full time care of thirty-two emotionally-disturbed children, and day treatment for six additional children.
2. Counseling services to Lutheran unwed parents, both with regard to their own problems, and with regard to their plans for their baby.
3. Foster homes for the emotionally-disturbed boys who need them; and also foster homes for the babies, until they can be adopted, or their mothers take them home.
4. The adoption work connected with serving unwed parents and their babies; also adoption work in the areas of mixed-racial children, children with physical or mental disabilities, children over the age of five years, and foreign-born children.
5. Family counseling, which means working with families where there are problems between husband and wife, or between parents and children.

6. Planning, staffing and conducting marriage seminars, parent effectiveness training programs, all sorts of group therapy sessions, and many other programs that are part of the services offered by social welfare agencies.

December of 1976, marked the termination of the residential and day treatment programs due to financial cutbacks of the purchasing agents. In the sixteen years during which the residential treatment was carried out, costs had skyrocketed from about \$800.00/month/child to approximately \$1700.00/month/child. With the exception of the full time care of emotionally-disturbed children, and the day treatment for six additional children, the main services outlined above still continue today.

Today the Lutheran Children's Friend Society has an extended outreach in the State of Wisconsin. The administrative office is temporarily located on N. 124th Street and serves the southern portion of the state. The buildings in Wauwatosa which for some fifty years housed LCFS will be razed giving way to a proposed retirement community to be operated by the Altenheim on N. 76th Street in Wauwatosa. The Lutheran Children's Friend Society administrative office will eventually return to Harwood Avenue to occupy new buildings to be built in conjunction with the retirement community. Other full time LCFS offices are in Sheboygan, Eau Claire, Appleton and Wausau. Sub-offices are in a variety of cities, fanning out from these cities.

The Society, as it always has been, is a non-profit organization. Although the agency is accredited by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, it receives no funding from the Synod. The agency today is funded and maintained through six different



sources. There is a fee system both for adoption and for family service. The agency is a certified mental health clinic which allows the client to make use of his insurance to help pay for the cost of the service. Another source of funding for the Society is the individual who makes a direct donation. Anyone who makes a \$10.00 donation or more in a given year is a member of the corporation that owns the Society. The third source of income is the congregation which takes up a special collection or perhaps has LCFS in its budget. The donations made by both public and private organizations also provide funding which allows the agency to continue operating. The fifth category is a miscellaneous type income which includes monies from the LCFS Thrift Shop and memorials. Legacies and wills also provide part of the funding for the operation of the Society. The Society receives no funding from the federal government or from organizations such as United Way.

There can be no doubt that the Society still continues to be a source of help for many, many people. A percentage of those served by the Society are referred by pastors, some by teachers and some by the courts. A small percentage of those served realize their need for help and have sought the services of the Christian counselors at LCFS on their own. Quite naturally, the Society serves predominantly the members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In the last five years the agency was involved in work with over 3200 children in the family service division alone. This figure does not include the work done with the parents of these children nor does it include the children served through the foster care and adoption programs.

Over the years there have been many changes in the programs offered by the Lutheran Children's Friend Society. This is to be expected, for progress demands change. However, one thing has remained constant and unchanged from 1896 to the present--the Lutheran Children's Friend Society began as a Christian social welfare agency, and by the grace of God it is still that today.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>F. Dean Lueking, A Century of Caring (St. Louis: Published by the Board of Social Ministry, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Erwin L. Lueker, Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Lueking, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>4</sup>Lueking, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Lueking, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>6</sup>Otto F. Hattstaedt, History of the Southern Wisconsin District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>Lueking, op. cit., p. 35.

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