

History of the Michigan District Presidents



The Michigan District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode Nördlichen Distrikts

*German Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Northern District
(Later the Michigan District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod)*

1847

The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod was organized when congregations banded together to be able to carry out a ministry beyond their own individual borders.

1855

The Synod divided itself into four “districts.” The **Northern District** included Michigan and Wisconsin. The District presidency was a part-time position. The president continued to serve as pastor of his parish.

Presidents of the Northern District

1. Rev. Ottomar Fűrbringer 1854–1872

June 30, 1810–July 12, 1892



Born in Gera, in the German state of Thuringia, Fűrbringer studied theology at Leipzig 1828–1830 with C.F. Walther, T.J. Brohm, J.F. Bűnger, and others. He was an instructor from 1831–1838 in an institute for boys at Eichenberg, conducted by G.H. Lűber.

He traveled to America in 1839 in the Saxon immigration. With Brohm and Bűnger he founded Concordia College, Perry County, Mo. and was the first instructor in classical languages and history. He served as a pastor in Venedy, Ill., in 1840.

Fűrbringer helped draw up the Missouri Synod constitution and was present in 1847 at the first meeting of the Synod, becoming a voting member at the 1848 meeting.

In 1851, he was the pastor of congregations in Freistadt and Kirchhayn, Wisc. During this time he was drawn into the controversy with the Buffalo Synod; his articles appeared in *Der Lutheraner*.

While serving as pastor at St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth (1858–1892), he served as the president of the Northern District, Missouri Synod twice (1854–1872 & 1875–1882).

At the beginning of the Civil War he called together unmarried men in his parish and persuaded them to voluntarily fill the quota of men demanded from their county in order for husbands and fathers to be exempted from military service.

Known as an effective preacher and catechist, he was regarded by some as the profoundest thinker among the fathers of the Missouri Synod.

**cyclopedia.lcms.org website, W.G. Polack, "Ottomar Füberbringer," Concordia Theological Monthly, V (1934), 211–217 (reprinted in Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, VII [1934], pages 42–50).*

2. Rev. Johann/es Adam Hügli/Huegli 1872–1875

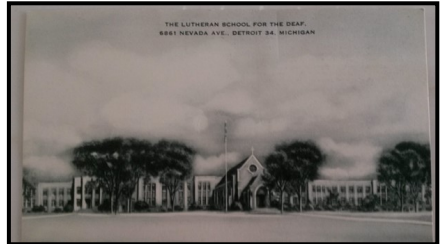
January 23, 1831–April 12, 1904



Born in Hassloch, Rhenish Palatinate, Hügli was ordained in 1856 after attending Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. He served in Jonesboro, Ill.; and Frankenmuth (St. Lorenz), Saginaw (Holy Cross) and Detroit, Mich. He was pastor at (Historic) Trinity Lutheran Church in north Detroit for 42 years.

During his time at Trinity, he organized congregations in Wyandotte, Dearborn, north Detroit, and Royal Oak.

In 1866, a hospital for Civil War soldiers and sailors was located next to Trinity. Due to close contact with patients, widows, and orphans, he began the Lutheran Fraternal Association (Insurance) to assist widows with burials.



He co-founded the Lutheran Home for Orphans in Royal Oak. This eventually morphed into the Lutheran School for the Deaf.

In his last years, Hügli experienced a number of physical problems. On May 4, 1902, he resigned as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church.

**cyclopedia.lcms.org website and "The Life Story of Johannes Adam Huegli" at <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~banana/genealogy/SurnamePages/Huegli/TextsJohannesLifeStory.html>*

1874

Wisconsin and Minnesota were asked to form a Northwestern District. Michigan and Ontario continued as the **Northern District**.

3. Rev. Ottomar Füberbringer 1875–1882

June 30, 1810–July 12, 1892

Füberbringer was elected Northern District president for a second time. He reluctantly accepted and served until 1882. During his presidency, he continued serving as pastor at Frankenmuth.

**Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, VII [1934], pages 42–50*

1878

Ontario was granted permission to form a separate district. The **Northern District** was restricted to the lower peninsula of Michigan, with the upper peninsula attached to the Wisconsin District.

1882

The name “Michigan Distrikts” was first used on an official **Proceedings** (convention minutes) of the District publication.

Presidents of the Michigan District

1. Rev. Dr. Martin Joseph/Joseph M. Schmidt 1882–1891

March 25, 1846–May 1, 1931



Schmidt was born in Altenburg, Perry County, Mo., and educated at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. In 1868 he was pastor in Weston, Platte County, Mo.

He served Michigan congregations in Dallas (St. Peter) and near St. Johns, Clinton County (Zion's/St. John's) from 1869–1872. From 1872–1894 he was pastor at Holy Cross in Saginaw, while serving as president of the Michigan District of the Missouri Synod.

Schmidt was a professor at Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Ind. from 1894–1917. He served as director of the college from 1894–1903.

His last public appearance was at the June 1921 college commencement exercises, where the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him in the name of the St. Louis faculty.

**W. F. Kruse, “Prof. Martin Joseph Schmidt, D. D.,” Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, V, No. 1, April 1932, pages 35–46.*

2. Rev. Gustave (Gustav) Ernst Spiegel 1891–1912

January 22, 1852–February 3, 1925



Spiegel was born in Fort Wayne, Ind. After his confirmation, he entered Concordia College at Fort Wayne and graduated in 1872. He finished his theological training at the St. Louis Lutheran Seminary in 1875 and accepted a call to a congregation in Fairbanks, Iowa.

In 1878 he became pastor of the Lutheran Church at Preble, Ind. On September 17, 1884, he took charge of Trinity Lutheran Church in Jackson, Mich. He served there faithfully for 40 years. He served as president of the Michigan District for 21 years.

Spiegel fell down in the pulpit of Trinity Lutheran Church, Jackson after preaching his February 1, 1925 sermon and leading the congregation in the Lord's Prayer. He suffered an apoplectic stroke and lapsed into unconsciousness. He never fully regained consciousness after being moved to a hospital, where he peacefully passed away.

**Pastor Spiegel's obituary in The Michigan Lutheran, March 1925*

3. Rev. Theodore Edward William Engelder 1912–1914

January 21, 1865–June 23, 1949



Born in Olean, New York and educated at Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Ind. and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo, Engelder was a pastor at Sugar Grove and Logan, Ohio from 1886–1890, and Mount Clemens, Mich. (Trinity) from 1890–1914 (while serving as the Michigan District president). Rev. Engelder was a professor at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill. (1914–1926) and at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. (1926–1946).

He was a staunch defender of verbal inspiration and molded the thinking of the Missouri Synod and clergy along dogmatical lines. He contributed to *Lehre und Wehre* (Teach and Defend), *Theological Monthly*, and *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Other works include *Scripture Cannot Be Broken; Reason or Revelation?*

Engelder was the chief translator of F.A.O. Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik* in the edition that appeared 1950–1957 under the title *Christian Dogmatics*.

**cyclopedia.lcms.org website; "Theodore Engelder, 1865–1949," Concordia Theological Monthly, XX (August 1949), frontispiece and pages 561–563.*

4. Rev. Dr. Emanuel August Mayer 1915–1924

April 12, 1859–August 25, 1940



Born in Mannheim, Germany, Mayer came to America as a youth, largely through the influence of Pastor Friedrich Brunn of Steeden, who confirmed Mayer in 1875. He received his education at Fort Wayne and St. Louis and was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne in 1928.

His first congregation was Christ Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo. In 1887 he was called to Norfolk, Neb., where he served for two years. He then went to Immanuel Church in New Wells, Mo. for four years.

In 1893 he accepted a call to St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth, where he served as pastor for 47 years. His congregation grew steadily until 1940, when it became one of the largest rural churches in the Missouri Synod. He was described as “a very rare combination of profound theological knowledge and the practical ability to apply it to the manifold problems of church life.” He frequently contributed to the general and professional publications of the Synod and by serving the district as a visitor and Synod president.

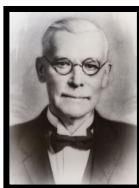
**Pastor Mayer’s obituary in The Michigan Lutheran, September 1940*

1922

The **Synodal Bericht** (convention minutes) of the Michigan District was printed in both German and English.

5. Rev. John Jacob Frederick Schinnerer 1924–1942

January 28, 1865–May 1, 1950



Born in Willshire (Schumm), Van Wert County, Ohio, Schinnerer received his theological training at the Seminary in Springfield, Ill., where he graduated in 1887.

Schinnerer was called to Zion congregation in Ocheyedian, Iowa, where he served until 1892. He then accepted a call to Trinity Lutheran Church in Arcadia, Mich., serving for seven years. He served St. John’s in Amelith, near Bay City, for 26 years (1899–1925). In 1925 he was called to Concordia Lutheran Church, Delray, Detroit. Concordia later merged with Stephanus (St. Stephen’s). He spent all but his first five ministry years in Michigan.

**Pastor Schinnerer’s obituary in The Michigan Lutheran, June 1950*

1939

Proceedings (convention minutes) of the Michigan District was printed in English only.

6. Rev. Dr. Andrew Zeile 1942–1957

November 30, 1886–February 1, 1960



Born in Woodworth, Iroquois County, Ill. His family moved to Frankenmuth, Mich. in 1898. Zeile completed his theological training at Concordia Seminary St. Louis in 1909.

His first call was to St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wilson Township, Alpena County, Mich., where he served for six years.

In 1915 he was called to Bethlehem, Saginaw, as its first pastor. He served there for almost 45 years until his death.

Zeile served as president of the Lutheran Children's Friend Society of Bay City from 1916–1923. He was elected the Financial Secretary of the Michigan District in 1924, serving until 1942. In 1926 he helped organize the Synod's Fiscal Conference.

The Faculty of Concordia Seminary awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1952, in recognition of his distinguished service to the Lutheran Church. That same year, he was sent by Synod as an official observer to the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Hannover, Germany.

During his presidency, the Michigan District grew to be the largest of the 34 districts of the Missouri Synod.

**The Detroit Lutheran, February 5, 1960, and biography included in the "Service of Thanksgiving Commemorating The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ordination of The Reverend Andrew Zeile D.D., October 18, 1959."*

7. Rev. Dr. W. Harry Krieger 1957–1965

May 2, 1914–January 13, 1974



Born in Marion, Ill., Krieger received his college training at St. Paul's College, Concordia, Mo. and his theological training at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, graduating in 1939. He served as pastor of Mt. Calvary Church, Charlotte, N.C.; Messiah Lutheran Church, Columbia, S.C.; Trinity Lutheran Church in Traverse City, Mich. (1948–1961); and Trinity Lutheran Church in Jackson, Mich.

Krieger served with the 38th Infantry Division in the Pacific during WWII. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, and other decorations.

Academic degrees included Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (STM 1947) and Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Ill. (D.D. 1963).

He served as a member of the Church's Board of Missions in North, South, and Central America; member of the Church's Commission on Literature; president of the Michigan District, with the position becoming full-time in 1961; Chairman, Board of Control, Concordia College, Ann Arbor; fourth vice president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) [1965–1969]; fifth vice president of the LCMS (1972–1974); and held several other positions on boards and commissions of the LCMS.

He led the efforts to establish a new Concordia College in Ann Arbor.

**Biographical Notes, Memorial Service for Reverend W. Harry Krieger, D.D.*

1960

The 78th Michigan District Convention adopted a resolution to establish and maintain the Presidency of the District as a full-time office.

1961

President Krieger began serving as the first full-time president of the District.

1964

Michigan District Conventions began being held at Concordia Lutheran Junior College, Ann Arbor.

8. Rev. Dr. Edwin C. Weber 1965–1969

September 13, 1910–April 11, 1998



Born in Frankenmuth, Mich., Weber was baptized at St. Lorenz Lutheran Church and attended the Lutheran school there for 7 years. He graduated from Concordia College, Ft. Wayne, Ind. in 1931. He received his theological training at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. and graduated in 1935. His first congregation was St. Mark Lutheran Church, Steeleville, Ill., where he served as assistant pastor.

He was called to St. Michael Lutheran Church near Rogers City, Mich. in June 1937, where he became the pastor and teacher of a one-room school. In 1944 he was called to St. John, Fraser to serve as pastor.

He served on the Church Extension Board of the Michigan District from 1951 to 1962. Weber was elected first vice president of the District in 1964. He became District president in June 1965 when his predecessor, the Reverend Dr. W. Harry Krieger, was elected a vice president of the LCMS.

During Weber's presidency, he was the Chairman of the Council of District Presidents and a member of the Synod's newly created Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR). The Synod may adopt or use the CTCR explanations as guidelines.

Weber received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill. in 1968. A large sculpture stands in his honor in the chapel of Concordia University at River Forest, Ill.

He was elected third vice president of the LCMS in 1969 and first vice president in 1973, when he moved to St. Louis, Mo.

**Rev. E.C. Weber Biographical Data Sheet*

1966

The new District Headquarters building, located on Geddes Road in Ann Arbor, was completed.

1967

The Eastern half of the upper peninsula was included in the Michigan District.

9. Rev. Dr. Richard Louis Frank Schlecht 1969–1985

April 15, 1921–April 20, 2010



Born in Halliday, N.D., Schlecht spent his early years in the small farming communities of Tilden and Orchard. He graduated from St. John's College, Winfield, Kan. in 1940. While attending the college, he ran the student infirmary. He then entered Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, where he initiated and managed the first infirmary for the seminary. He earned the nickname "Doc."

He served his vicarage at St. Paul Lutheran Church, St. Clair Shores, Mich. from 1943 to 1944. After graduating in 1945 from the seminary, he was called to the dual parishes of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Powell, Wyo., and Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cody, Wyo. From 1948 to 1953, he served as Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Fairbury, Neb.; then as Assistant Pastor of St. Paul, Royal Oak, Mich. from 1953 to 1960; and then from 1960 to 1970 as Pastor of St. John, Rochester, Mich.

Schlecht was elected to the position of Michigan District president in 1969. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1974 by the St. Louis seminary, where he was a member of the Board of Regents from 1989 to 2003.

Beginning in 1984, he was a member of the board of directors of Lutheran Braille Workers. Schlecht received the *Christus Primus Award* in 1986 from Concordia College (now University) Ann Arbor. After his retirement from the Michigan District in 1986, he served as Visitation Pastor at St. John, Rochester, until June 19, 1994.

**"The Christian Funeral Service ... of Richard Louis Frank Schlecht"*

10. Rev. Dr. John L. Heins 1985–1997

January 3, 1934–



A native of Shelton, Neb., Heins attended St. John's Academy and college in Winfield, Kan., from 1947 to 1953. He graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1958. From 1958 to 1974, he served as pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Grand Blanc, Mich.

He then served as pastor of Guardian, Dearborn, from 1974 to 1985.

Heins also served as first vice president, 1978–1985; fourth vice president, 1977–1978; secretary, 1975–1978; convener of the District Youth

Commission; and vice presidential representative to the Boards of Youth Ministry, Christian Education, and Stewardship of the Michigan District.

He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the St. Louis seminary in December 1988.

Some new ministries started during his presidency: Camp Mahn Go Tah See, Lutheran Child and Family Services Foundation, Sowers Fund (providing monetary grants in 18 countries), a presence on the World Wide Web, the beginning of POBLO (outreach to Muslims) and the Lutheran City Ministries in Downtown Detroit.

**<https://www.historictrinity.org/about-us/our-pastors/rev-dr-john-l-heins> and 95th Michigan District Convention Proceedings, page 23.*

11. Rev. Dr. C. William Hoesman 1997–2009

June 4, 1940–



A native of Michigan, Hoesman began his ministry as a teacher in St. John School, Portage, Wisc. During this time he received his M.A. from the University of Wisconsin. He entered Springfield Seminary after serving at St. John School for four years. His first congregation was Eternal Trinity at Milton, Fla. He then came to Michigan, serving Our Savior in Detroit, then Zion, Holland, and in 1987 began serving as pastor to St.

Lorenz, Frankenmuth.

He was granted various awards: Concordia University Chicago Alumnus of the Year; the *Servus Ecclesiae Christi* Award (Servant of the Church of Christ) from the Fort Wayne Theological Seminary; and later a Doctor of Divinity degree. Hoesman served as chair of the LCMS Council of Presidents for six years.

Some accomplishments during Hoesman's presidency included:

1. *Michigan In Touch* began publication in January 2002, replacing *The Michigan Lutheran*.
2. Also in 2002, the District established weekly "E-bulletins" and developed a District website to enhance communications.
3. There were 23 significant mission, ministry, and satellite starts. Retiring in 2009, he continues to serve St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth in worship and preaching.

**The Michigan Lutheran, July/August 1997 and 99th Michigan District Convention Proceedings, page 45, and other sources.*

12. Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier 2009–2022

May 8, 1956–



Maier served at Our Savior, Marlette, Mich. and St. Peter, Arlington Heights, Ill. after being ordained in 1982. He later became Senior Pastor at Our Savior, Lansing, where he led the church through a large building program.

As District president, Maier retained a loyal heart for his alma mater, Concordia University Ann Arbor, and its mission. During a difficult time, he worked to bring about Concordia's financial recovery and its relationship with Concordia University Wisconsin. He also worked with District officers to put forth four critical targets for District ministry, including the Great Commission Ministry, Great Compassion Ministry, Healthy Congregations, and Healthy Workers.

In 2011, Maier oversaw the initiation of Theological Conferences, fashioned after Synod's first Theological Conference. Maier served as the chairman of the LCMS Council of Presidents for four years.

He initiated the flourishing intentional urban ministry, Acts 2 Enterprise, which has expanded to include the Benton Harbor Lutheran Outreach; Camp Restore Detroit; Elli's House, Detroit; Flint Mission Network—encompassing Franklin Avenue Mission, York Avenue Mission, Mercy House, and The Luke Clinic; Family of God, Detroit; The Luke Clinic, Detroit; Summer Camps in Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Pontiac; St. Paul Community, Pontiac; Charity, Detroit; and other ministries to under-served populations.

In 2016, Maier traveled to many locations throughout the District to share the vision of *Here We Stand*, a capital campaign to raise \$10 million to support professional church worker scholarships, innovative missional ministry, the Michigan District Endowment Fund, and international ministry. The campaign exceeded its goal.

Maier was awarded his first honorary doctorate by St. Peter Confessional Church of South Africa in 2007. Concordia University Ann Arbor presented him with the Outstanding Alumnus Award in May 2010 and, in 2012, the university awarded him the Doctorate of Laws Degree. Concordia University Wisconsin conferred him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in December 2012.

In 2017, Maier oversaw the District's 500th Anniversary of the Reformation Worship service at the Breslin Center in Lansing. Over 13,000 attended.

He is currently called to Historic Trinity, Detroit as Associate Pastor (Deployed).

**Michigan In Touch, August/September 2009 and other sources.*

13. Rev. David A. Davis 2022-

September 13, 1957-



Born in Flint, Mich., Davis grew up in Grand Blanc. He attended Concordia University Ann Arbor and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. His education also included Classical Studies at Washington University, St. Louis; and Governance and Executive Training, Pastoral Leadership Institute.

After his ordination on January 8, 1984, he served as pastor of four different congregations, all in Michigan: St. Matthew, Spring Lake; St. Paul, Trenton; Immanuel, Grand Rapids; and St. Luke, Haslett / Lansing. He is the author of *Toward Significance, A Guide For Pastoring Well* and has a blog with the same name (towardsignificance.com/blog). He also served as Adjunct Faculty at Concordia University Ann Arbor.

During his ministry, Davis has planted congregations, developed multi-cultural ministry, led non-profit governance seminars, developed mentoring processes, wrote leadership development materials, and facilitated meetings and retreats. He also produced a 12-month leadership development resource to help pastors raise up to 12 laypeople by spending a year with them, reading and discussing assigned texts. The program is called *Leadership Pathway*.

In 2019, Davis received CUAAs Outstanding Alumnus Award.

He was elected Michigan District president in June 2022 and is currently serving his first term in office.

**<https://michigandistrict.org/people/rev-david-a-davis> and Michigan In Touch, November 2022*

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