

JOHN W. BEHNKEN

Pastor, President

BORN: MARCH 19, 1884 *Cypress, Texas*

DIED: FEBRUARY 23, 1968 *Hollywood, Fla.*

JOHN W. BEHNKEN CAME FROM A FAMILY OF PASTORS. His father died when Behnken was still a small boy, but his mother encouraged him to consider being a pastor like his father. Behnken was in Lutheran elementary school when he knew that he wanted to be a pastor. He studied at St. John's Academy in Winfield, Kan., before attending Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He graduated in 1906 and was called to serve as a mission developer in Houston, Texas, establishing Redeemer Lutheran Church. In 1908, he was called as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas where he served until 1935.

Behnken distinguished himself not only as missionary and pastor, but also as church administrator. He served as vice-president of the Texas District of the Missouri Synod from 1919 to 1926 and as District president from 1926 to 1929. He was second vice-president of the Synod from 1929 to 1932 and first vice-president from 1932 to 1935. He accepted an even heavier responsibility when he was elected Synod president in 1935.

Behnken was the sixth president of the Missouri Synod, but he was the first American-born president of the Synod; the previous five presidents had all been born in Germany. Behnken was elected nine times to the presidency, serving from 1935 to 1962. His 27-year tenure is the longest in the Synod's history.

The Synod experienced great numerical growth in congregational membership during Behnken's presidency, more than doubling in size in 25 years. The preaching and teaching of God's Word remained the central task of the church, bringing the Gospel to the unchurched. Yet during this time, much attention was paid to the education of pastors, teachers, missionaries and other workers for the church, as well as engaging the youth for service in the church's future.

In the aftermath of World War II, Behnken was among the first church leaders in America to sponsor relief efforts in Europe. He traveled to Germany to see firsthand the war's effects, organizing a mercy mission to help those whose lives had been devastated. Behnken also was instrumental in aiding the Lutheran churches in Germany after the war to rebuild and continue the faithful work of proclaiming God's message of salvation and peace after years of the Nazi regime.

After his retirement, Behnken continued to serve the church. He was chairman of the Board of Trustees of the LCMS Foundation and served on other committees supporting the Synod's work.

He died at the age of 83 after a 56-year career, and he is remembered as a man of faith, strength and spirit, dedicated to serving our Lord's Church.

For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.

DISCOVER MORE

John W. Behnken, *This I Recall*, Revised Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972).



1847 2022

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NO OTHER NAME

— 175 YEARS —

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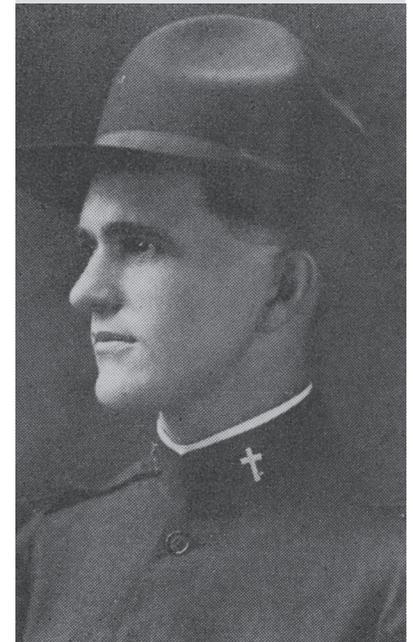
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