

## Former LCMS, seminary President Ralph Bohlmann dies

† [blogs.lcms.org/2016/ralph-bohlmann-dies](https://blogs.lcms.org/2016/ralph-bohlmann-dies)

The **Rev. Dr. Ralph Bohlmann**, who served four terms (1981-92) as president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and was named as the church body's first president emeritus, died July 24 in St. Louis. He was 84.

A memorial service is planned for 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 27, in The Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus on the campus of [Concordia Seminary](#), St. Louis, with a reception to follow. Visitation will be from noon to 2 p.m. that day in the chapel.

At the request of Bohlmann's family, clergy in attendance will not vest or process at the service.

Bohlmann was president of Concordia Seminary from 1975 to 1981. He joined the seminary faculty as a professor of systematic theology in 1960, and continued to teach there until his election as LCMS president.

Bohlmann was one of five Concordia Seminary faculty members who remained on the faculty following the "confessional crisis" and "walkout" there in February 1974. The walkout involved a majority of the seminary's faculty and students who held to a "moderate" view on the authority of Scripture and biblical inerrancy.

While he was president of the seminary, Bohlmann played a pivotal role in rebuilding the school's curriculum, faculty and student body, and by the end of his tenure, student population had surpassed pre-crisis days.

His time as seminary president also was marked by significant growth in cultural offerings, with the founding of the World Mission Institute in 1977 and a pilot program to train Hispanic men and women to become lay workers — with a long-term goal of also preparing Hispanic pastors — beginning in 1979. That work led to the development of the seminary's Center for Hispanic Studies.

LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, who has been visiting Bohlmann for several years, saw him last on July 21, when he was unconscious and had been taken off life support.

During a visit a few weeks before that, Harrison said the two talked for two hours.

"Ralph is the last of the faithful who stood against the faculty majority for the truth of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions," Harrison told *Reporter*. "He wrote 'A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles' in response to a request from ... [then-LCMS President Rev. Dr. J.A.O.] Preus for a document to use to evaluate the teaching of seminary professors."

Preus "liked the document so much he put it to the LCMS convention to adopt," said Harrison, who described the document as "a tremendous and timeless rejection of the historical-critical method of interpretation of the Scriptures, which finally destroys the Gospel itself."

"The Synod is deeply indebted to Dr. Bohlmann," Harrison added, "and all these years later, we can hardly imagine the difficulties and trials which faced the men who were faithful. Dr. Bohlmann was resolute on these issues to the end."

Concordia Seminary President Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer called Bohlmann "a gentleman, a learned theologian and a kindly churchman. His love for Holy Scripture was seen through his pastoral and winsome Lutheran confessionalism, a legacy that



abides to this day in our church and seminaries.

“Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, remembers with deepest gratitude his service as our seventh president and the collegiality he always showed to us who are privileged to serve on the faculty. President Bohlmann will be forever remembered and honored as a brother and father in faith who helped lead us to Jesus.”

In addition to his LCMS and seminary presidencies, Bohlmann was executive secretary of the Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) from 1971 to 1974, and served as a member of the CTCR from 1965 to 1971 and from 1975 to 1981.

Bohlmann was a 1956 graduate of Concordia Seminary, a Fulbright Scholar at Germany’s Heidelberg University from 1956 to 1957, and in 1968 earned a Ph.D. from Yale University. He also held an honorary doctorate from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. (1982). He was awarded the Christus Primus Award from Concordia College (now University), Ann Arbor, Mich., in 1988 for being “consistently and unwaveringly ... a strong, confessional, evangelical voice, both within the Synod and in the worldwide Christian community.”

He also served as pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Des Moines, Iowa (1958-60), and as part-time assistant pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Pagedale, Mo. (1961-71).

Bohlmann wrote numerous books, articles and documents with particular emphasis on interchurch relations and biblical interpretation — including *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (Concordia Publishing House) — and represented the Synod in ecumenical dialogues with other church bodies. He also was a frequent essayist at conventions and conferences, both in the United States and abroad.

Survivors include two children: Paul of New York City and Lynn of Jacksonville, Ill., and two grandchildren. Bohlmann’s wife, Pat, died of cancer in 2012, after 53 years of marriage.

Memorials are requested for:

- [Concordia Lutheran Church](#), 505 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-5925.
- the St. Louis Student Aid Fund of Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105 (please designate the gift as “Dr. Bohlmann memorial”). Gifts also may be made to this fund by calling 800-822-5287 or online at [csl.edu/give](https://csl.edu/give) — click on “Student Financial Aid” and follow the prompts.
- [Lutheran Senior Services Benevolent Care Fund](#).

*Posted July 25, 2016 / Updated July 26, 2016, with a correction on the year Dr. Bohlmann graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*

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