

The John P. Meyer Papers  
An Inventory

Archive of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
Mequon, Wisconsin

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Fonds-Level Description

Title: The J. P. Meyer papers

Dates: 1922-1957

Extent: 1.2 meters of textual records

Biographical sketch:

Johannes Peter Carl Meyer was born on February 27, 1873, at Zittau, Wisconsin, the son of Pastor J. Meyer and his wife Meta, nee Behnken. His father had received his ministerial training at Hermannsburg under Theodor Harms, having enrolled at this mission seminary with the intention of going to Africa. He was, however, persuaded to come to America because of the spiritual needs of the many German immigrants. The Meyer family had moved to the Helweger Moor in the vicinity of Hermannsburg in 1792, when this region was being colonized under the encouragement of special government grants and benefits. His mother came from the village of Baden on the Weser River. John Meyer was eleven years old at the death of his father, who at that time was serving a pastorate at Caledonia, Wisconsin. He was confirmed at St. Marcus Congregation, Watertown, Wisconsin, and thereupon entered Northwestern College, graduating from this school in 1893 and from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, then located in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, in 1896. The same year he was installed as pastor of St.

Stephen's Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, where he served until 1902. During this period he also ministered to congregations at Town Trenton and Fox Lake, Wisconsin.

During the 1902–1903 school year he was instructor and dean of men at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin.

On November 26, 1903, he married Lydia Reinke. Their marriage was blessed with three sons, John, Henry, and Arnold, and one daughter, Lydia. Henry and Arnold became pastors in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Mrs. Meyer died in 1948.

In 1903 he was called from his position at Watertown, Wisconsin, to the faculty of Dr. Martin Luther College at New Ulm, Minnesota, where he then taught Latin and Greek. In 1915 he accepted the pastorate of St. Paul's Congregation at Oconomowoc,

Wisconsin, where special problems called for an experienced leader. When in 1918 the presidency of Dr. Martin Luther College became vacant, he was called back to head that institution, and for the next two years was its administrator and an instructor in its teacher training courses.

In 1920 he was called to the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to succeed his younger brother Herman, whose seminary professorate was cut short by a sudden death after five years of service.

Professor John P. Meyer worked at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for forty-four years. From 1937 to 1953 he served as its president. Professor Meyer's principal field of teaching was that of Christian doctrine and New Testament introduction, but during his long tenure on the faculty he also taught a great number of other courses, some for more than a decade (interpretation of Genesis, the history of the ancient Church, and symbolics).

Throughout his public ministry Professor Meyer served the church also in many other capacities: he was a secretary of the Synodical Conference; a member of the Intersynodical Committee of the 1920's; a vice-president of the Synod; he served on the Synod's Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union, on the Advisory Committee on Doctrinal Matters, on the Board of Education—Wisconsin Synod, on the Northwestern Publishing House Board, on the Editorial Board of *The Northwestern Lutheran*; he was a frequent contributor to many church papers; the index of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* alone lists more than 250 items written by him.

Professor Meyer was an invaluable link with the Synod's and the Seminary's past. He had studied under Dr. Adolf Hoenecke and had served in the ministry for twelve years while Dr. Hoenecke was still the Synod's leading theologian. Meyer appreciated the confessional clarity and doctrinal precision of Dr. Hoenecke. In his own teaching he was intent upon preserving these gifts of God for the future ministry of our church. For a lengthy period he had also served on the seminary faculty with Professors John P. Koehler and August Pieper, the two other men who had a very vital influence on the Seminary's theological approach. Professor Meyer appreciated their stress on thorough study of the Scriptures. The emphases which he appreciated in Hoenecke, Koehler, and Pieper influenced his own teaching and have become emphases which characterize the preaching and teaching of the Synod as a whole.

On November 10, 1964, the Reverend Professor Johannes Peter Carl Meyer died. He was intensely active to the very end. Fifteen days before his death he preached for the last time in St. Marcus Church (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), where almost monthly for a period of thirty-seven years he had served as an assistant preacher. On the Friday before his entrance into the hospital on October 26, he had still delivered his regular schedule of class lectures.

The funeral service was held at St. Marcus Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, his pastor, the Reverend Paul W. Knickelbein, officiating. The Reverend Oscar Naumann, president of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, preached the sermon on John 3:16.. The seminary chorus, and the children of St. Marcus School, sang in the service.

Custodial history:

The collection was held since the time of Meyer's death in the office of the president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Storage of the papers held in the president's office had moved several times over the years. In January of 2001, in preparation for another move of the stored items in the president's office, Armin Panning, former president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, weeded the papers in the president's office and the seminary donated the Meyer papers to the Archive of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

#### Scope and Content:

The fonds is made up of materials created by and collected by Rev. John P. Meyer. The collection reflects the life of a active man involved in leading a small, conservative Lutheran synod with its roots in Germany into a solid, confessional church in the United States. Many of the items in the collection point to the role he played in working with other Lutheran bodies in the United States.

The fonds consists of the following series:

- Series 1: Correspondence and documents on the Chinese Term controversy
- Series 2: Documents on anniversaries and special occasions
- Series 4: Protes'tant Controversy correspondence
- Series 5: Northwestern Publishing House
  - Subseries 1: Annual audit report – 1937-40, 1945
  - Subseries 2: Annual statements – 1933, 1937-42, 1945
  - Subseries 3: Monthly trial balances – 1933-1945
  - Subseries 4: Miscellaneous
- Series 6: Correspondence and reports on Arizona and Colorado district missions
- Series 7: Synodical documents
- Series 8: Church school documents
- Series 9: Intersynodical Hymnal Committee documents
- Series 10: Intersynodical documents
- Series 11: Manuscripts and materials for Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly
- Series 12: Correspondence
- Series 13: Constitutions
- Series 14: Newspaper clippings
- Series 15: Correspondence
- Series 16: Miscellaneous

Source of supplied title: Title based on the provenance of the records.

Arrangement

Restrictions: None

Accruals: No additions are expected.

Series-level description

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 1: Correspondence and documents on the Chinese Term controversy

Dates: 1932-1940

Extent: 7 folders, 13 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and essays dealing with the use of term “*shangti*” for God by missionaries in China. Correspondents are Theo. Hanssen, George O. Lillegard, R. H. Matthews, R. H. Gebhardt, and the Shen-Shangti Committee.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 2: Documents on anniversaries and special occasions

Dates: 1893-1963

Extent: 6 folders, 12 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of programs, pamphlets and other documents pertaining to anniversaries, graduations, and special occasions of schools and congregations, and especially of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 3: Protes'tant Controversy correspondence

Dates: 1922-1932

Extent: 7 folders, 8 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence between Meyer and many different people concerning events of what has come to be known as the Protes'tant Controversy. Most of the correspondence is in German. Many are handwritten in *fraktur* and are in poor condition.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 4: Northwestern Publishing House

Dates: 1937-1945

Extent: 6 folders, 5.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of reports dealing with the finances of the Northwestern Publishing House. Meyer sat on their Board of Directors.

Subseries 1: Annual audit reports – 1937-40, 1945

Subseries 2: Annual statements – 1933, 1937-42, 1945

Subseries 3: Monthly trial balances – 1933-1945

Subseries 4: Miscellaneous

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 5: Correspondence and reports on Arizona and Colorado district missions

Dates: 1931-1949

Extent: 7 folders, 8 cm. of textual materials

Scope and Content: This series consists of two folders of correspondence regarding mission work in Colorado and Arizona, including among the Apache Indians, and three folders of reports to the synod regarding that same work.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 6: Synodical documents

Dates: 1910-1944

Extent: 7 folders, 14 cm. of textual records.

Scope and Content: This series consists of documents that deal with work at the synodical level including: revisions to the constitution, proposed pension plans, reports to synod conventions from 1910-1940, synod budget reports, Synodical Committee reports from 1935-1944, and minutes from the Southeastern Wisconsin District from 1934.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 7: Parochial school documents

Dates: 1926-1957

Extent: 9 folders, 13 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of documents related to elementary and secondary education in the synod including: reports and minutes of teachers' conferences; correspondence regarding the acquisition of Bethany College, Mankato, Minnesota by the Norwegian Bethany Lutheran College Association; documents related to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 8: Intersynodical Hymnal Committee documents

Dates: 1930-1940

Extent: 21 folders, 33 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and minutes of the committee regarding the translation and revision of the catechism in English and correspondence of the committee to revise the intersynodical hymnal. Many of the documents are reviews and critique of the text of hymns to be included in the hymnal.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 9: Intersynodical documents

Dates: 1914-1944

Extent: 22 folders, 23 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and documents related to intersynodical issues such as: military chaplaincy, scouting, lodges, the Wausau Agreement, the Dr. Geiseman incident, Lillegard's criticism of Arndt's approach to Scripture, and minutes and reports from intersynodical meetings.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 10: Manuscripts and materials for Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly

Dates: 1924-1951

Extent: 23 folders, 28 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence originating because of Meyer's position as editor of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, handwritten notes for articles that would appear in the WLQ, manuscripts of articles for the WLQ, book reviews, and articles by Pieper, Zich, Kiessling, Koeberle, Ulrich, and Hoenecke for the WLQ.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 11: Correspondence

Dates: 1898-90, 1943, 1947

Extent: 1 folder, 3 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence with John Schaller and Adolf Hoenecke, among others.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 12: Constitutions

Dates: 1867-1902

Extent: 1 folder, 2 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of various constitutions and revisions of constitutions from the *Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Michigan*, *die Deutsche evangelische-lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten*, and *die Deutsche evangelische-lutherische Synode von Wisconsin u. a. Staaten*.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 13: Newspaper clippings

Dates: 1920-1951

Extent: 1 folder, 5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of newspaper sections and clippings on various aspects of religion in general and the Lutheran Church in particular. Many are penciled with the words "For archives."

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 14: Sermons

Dates: No dates given

Extent: 3 folders, 3.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of two folders of typed manuscripts with handwritten revisions of sermons by Meyer and one folder of printed sermon pamphlets by other authors.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 15: Correspondence

Dates: 1926-1928

Extent: 1 folders, 1 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence regarding the tension between St. Matthew and St. Thomas congregations about a case involving Pastors Bendler and Kionka.

Fonds: The John P. Meyer papers

Series 16: Miscellaneous

Dates: 1930-1945, ?

Extent: 3 folders, 6 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of partial papers and manuscripts, many unidentifiable and in German script, reprinted articles about religion from various magazines, incomplete fascicle versions of German theological periodicals.