2005

The Danish Interest Conference

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Recommended Citation
Hansen, Thorvald (2005) "The Danish Interest Conference," The Bridge: Vol. 28 : No. 1 , Article 8. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol28/iss1/8

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On January 1, 1963 The American Evangelical Lutheran Church ceased to exist as a separate entity. The AELC was the new name that had been assumed by the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1954. Therefore, what really came to an end in 1963 was the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, which hereinafter shall be referred to simply as the Danish Church.

The Danish Church came into being as the Church Mission Society on a September day in 1872. It was to have a long and checkered history. Surviving a bitter division in 1894, it eventually became the smaller of two Danish Lutheran bodies. In 1961 it had a membership of slightly less than 24,000. That membership was gathered into nine districts and these encompassed sixteen states and with one congregation in the Canadian Province of Alberta.

Prologue

On that same summer day at Neenah, Wisconsin as the Danish Church in America was born, an official Church paper was also planned. That paper was to be called Kirkelig Samler (Church Gatherer) and the editors were to be chosen at the annual meeting of the Church. The paper, therefore, had many editors during its long history. That history, as a separate paper, came to an end on July 1, 1933, because fewer of the remaining subscribers could read Danish. The Church, at its annual meeting that year, accepted the offer of the Holst Printing Company in Cedar Falls, Iowa that Kirkelig Samler be continued as a page in its weekly Danish paper, Dannevirke. The page was to be edited by a pastor of the Danish Church. Steps were then taken to produce a paper in the English language. That paper came to life in 1934 and had a number of editors until it came to an end with the church merger of 1963.

The arrangement with Holst continued until the demise of the weekly, Dannevirke in 1951. This meant that the church was no longer producing any literature in the Danish language. It was soon obvious that the older generation of church members needed and
demanded this. The Publication Committee met to consider this need and, on a temporary basis, sent a small Danish language paper, which it called *Kirke og Folk* (Church and People), gratis to all who desired it. It was edited by Pastor Holger Strandskov, who also edited *Lutheran Tidings*. At the next annual meeting of the Church this action was approved and the *Kirke og Folk* was to be continued for one year under the editorship of Paul Wikman.

A year later the annual report of the Board of Publications revealed that *Kirke og Folk* now had about 725 subscribers as well as being sent to the pastors who read Danish. It also revealed that the paper had received many gifts from friends and supporters. The result was that though the name of the paper was changed to *Church and Life* in 1983, the subscription list has declined considerably and the paper has become exclusively English, it still exists in 2004. Today it is the sole remaining responsibility of the Danish Interest Conference.

**An Interest Conference is Born**

It was obvious to all that when the Danish Church ceased to exist any interest in things Danish would be hard, if not impossible, to maintain. There was still a good deal of interest in Danish tradition, language and culture in 1962. Not least there was a continuing interest in the philosophy and teachings of N.F.S. Grundtvig. That Danish pastor, who lived most of his productive life in the nineteenth century, had been an important inspiration in the Danish Church. His teachings, spiritual as well as cultural, had become vital for many and were still being studied and discussed in Denmark and America. If a merger was not to lead to the neglect and forgetting of these roots, provision must be made for keeping the Danish heritage alive.

This fact was recognized by the framers of the new Lutheran Church in America. They wisely provided for the existence of special interest conferences as auxiliary units of the new church and there were already indications that there would be other such conferences within the Lutheran Church in America. According to his final report to the annual meeting of the Church at Waterloo Iowa in 1960, Pastor Alfred Jensen, stated that such a conference
could be established if thirty-five pastors and representatives of thirty-five congregations, by petition, requested such of the new LCA. This matter was then brought before the Waterloo meeting for discussion. As a result it was moved and carried that the AELC representatives on the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, (JCLU) take such steps as might be necessary to ensure that AELC people might have such a Conference. It was emphasized that there would be periodic meetings to be hosted by member congregations. Such meetings would be related to Christian faith and life. Such a Conference would quite possibly also want to publish a Danish language paper, very likely *Kirke og Folk*.

At the subsequent meeting in Tyler, Minnesota in 1961 a motion was adopted which provided for contacting by mail those pastors not present and congregations not represented at the Tyler meeting who had not previously indicated a desire for an interest conference. The same motion also stated that the petition for such a conference would be presented to the Executive Board of the new LCA following the constituting convention.

At the constituting convention in Cobo Hall in Detroit the next year a similar resolution was presented and passed. This resolution included the proposed rules for the Conference and asked that they be approved in substance. Pastor A. E. Farstrup, the president of the AELC, stated that the Conference would consist of congregations and pastors and that it would operate in the English language. It was further indicated that the paper, *Kirke og Folk*, would continue and that it would be under the sponsorship of the Danish Interest Conference.

Meanwhile, at the request of the Synod Board, proposed rules for a Danish Interest Conference, which will hereinafter be referred to as simply the Conference, had been drawn up by the AELC representatives on the JCLU. These rules were presented in the report to the meeting at Cobo Hall. Here those rules were adopted for submission to the new church and they were later approved in substance by that body. There were nine major sections, with some of them having several subdivisions, in the rules. The sectional divisions dealt with such things as the name, the purpose,
membership, voting rights, officers, publications, itineraries, and amendments.

Under the rubric purpose was the expressed desire to stress the cultural, religious and educational values as these existed in Denmark and the Danish Church in America and to sponsor a publication which should disseminate those values. Other publications could also be sponsored. Membership in the Conference would be open to any congregation or pastor who signified in writing a willingness to further those purposes. There would be no dues or membership fees but the expenses of the organization would be defrayed by free will offerings from congregations and individual members. Meetings were to be biennial and might be held in various sections of the country. Each meeting was to be financially self-sustaining. Voting rights, of one vote each, were to be granted to all congregations and pastors who were members. The officers of the conference were to be drawn from the membership with the proviso that the president of the Conference must be a minister. They were to be elected for a term of two years and could be eligible for reelection. Such officers would fill the normal duties of the office to which they were elected. The publication, *Kirke og Folk* was to be a monthly or twice monthly paper and was to be published on a self-sustaining basis. The section on itineraries indicated that it was up to the Board of the Conference to arrange itineraries for the speakers and that there should not be more than two such in any one year. Finally, the rules provided for the possibility of amendments by a majority vote at a meeting of the Conference as well as approval by the executive council of the Lutheran Church in America. It was left to the officers of the Danish Church at the time of the merger to arrange for the first Conference. They were to do this in consultation with the president of the new church.

**The Organizing Meeting - 1964**

The first and organizing meeting was held at the Danebod Folk School in Tyler, Minnesota on August seventh and eighth of 1964. The Danebod congregation, of which Jerome Nilsson was pastor, was the host. A special guest was the Rev. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry,
president of the LCA. Dr. Fry was to open the Conference and to preside until officers for the new group had been elected. It was, incidentally, the fourth such interest conference at which Dr Fry had officiated during that summer. The others were the Finnish, the German and the Hungarian. The Danish Special Interest Conference differed from the others in that English was to be the official language of the Conference.

In the hours prior to the arrival of Dr. Fry an informal meeting of the Conference, led by Pastor A. E. Farstrup, was held. Present were twenty-three pastors, representatives of twenty-one congregations, and a number of visitors. There was some discussion of the rules for the Conference as drawn up by the members of the delegation from the Church to the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity. Of particular interest was the so-called purpose clause of the Conference. The general feeling was that this clause tied the Conference too closely to the Church of Denmark. The only action taken at this informal meeting was to appoint a three member nominating committee for the three offices in the new Conference.

The organizing meeting officially began with the arrival of Dr. Fry who promptly convened the Danish Interest Conference. The nominating committee presented a slate of nominees and elections followed. As a result of that election Pastor Farstrup was chosen president, Pastor Willard Garred was chosen secretary and Mr. Erik Johansen, of Tyler, Minnesota was named treasurer.

At the suggestion of Dr. Fry, the rules for membership were changed so that any LCA pastor or lay person who signified a desire to participate in the Conference might become members. It was also voted to amend the rules so that any LCA member who attended a meeting could vote. A further change in the proposed rules would allow any layman to become president of the Conference. The purpose clause as proposed came in for special consideration. A committee was appointed to study the issue and to report back the next day. As a result of the revised proposal and considerable floor discussion, the purpose clause now reads: “The purpose of this Conference shall be to mediate the insights and values of a century of Church life in America, rooted in the heritage of the Danish
Church and culture, and to relate these to the contemporary church.”

The matter of the History and Archives Fund was then considered. This Fund may be used to pay the salary of an assistant or intern at Luther Memorial so that the pastor, Enok Mortensen, may be free to write a history of the Danish Church for publication.

Area meetings also came under consideration. If held, such meetings would be in odd numbered years, whereas the meetings of the entire Conference would be held in even numbered years. The officers elected at this meeting were to serve for the 1964-1966 biennium and they were to determine the time and place for the 1966 meeting. The organizing meeting of the Conference then adjourned on Saturday afternoon, August 8, 1964.

The 1966 Meeting

In the interim, prior to the 1966 meeting, an appeal was made for funds. The rules specified that the sole source of income for the Conference was to be gifts and donations. Accordingly, an appeal was made by the secretary right after the organizing meeting. This appeal succeeded to the extent that the treasurer was able to report a balance of $2,880 prior to the 1966 meeting. The bulk of this balance, some $1,567, had been donated to printing the history of the Danish Church. Further, in 1966 the editor of *Kirke og Folk* was able to report a balance of $2,204 and a subscription list of almost one thousand.

Regional meetings had been provided for with the intention that such should be held in the odd numbered years. However, none were held in 1965 and indeed, the idea of regional meetings never bore any fruit.

It had been planned to have the Danish Bishop, Dons Christensen, of Ribe, speak at the Des Moines meeting and go on a lecture tour at that time. However he was named by the Church of Denmark to be its representative at the 300th anniversary of the Danish Church in the Virgin Islands. Since this event was set for February, the Bishop’s lecture tour was scheduled for that time rather than June. Reports indicated that the tour of the Bishop and his wife was highly successful, both from the standpoint of attendance and the collections that financed the tour.
In his report to the 1966 meeting President Farstrup stated that while the officers had held no meetings, such matters as came to the Conference during the interim were handled directly by the President in consultation with an advisory committee. It was also reported that the Conference treasurer, Erik Johansen, had died during the interim and that Folmer Hansen, of Tyler, Minnesota had been appointed to that post.

Co-hosts for the Des Moines meeting were Grand View College and Luther Memorial Church, with lodging being available in the College dormitories and meals served in the College dining hall. The meeting began with a lecture on Thursday evening and closed with two worship services, Danish and English, on Sunday. Speakers for most of the meetings were chosen from among the members of the Conference.

The report from the editor of *Kirke og Folk* was accepted and a greeting sent to the editor, who because of ill health could not be present. The matter of a hymnal insert was discussed and it was left to the officers of the Conference to look into that matter and the question of getting an adequate supply.

The history of the Danish Church in America brought forth the considerable discussion. It was reported that the manuscript, written by Pastor Enok Mortensen, had now been completed. It was voted that the officers of the Conference, in consultation with Mortensen, proceed with the publication of the book. *A World of Song* came under discussion. The songbook has now been sold out and it was agreed that the copyright should rest with Grand View College. Reprinting and/or revising the book was considered but it was pointed out the there might be a problem concerning the copyrights of many of the songs in the book. It was decided that a committee should be appointed and that committee, in consultation with officers of the Conference was to come to as decision with regard to publishing a new edition.

In other actions, a committee, to be chosen by the officers of the Conference, was to look into a planning a suitable celebration for the centennial of the Danish Church in America in 1972. The committee was to work in consultation with officials of the LCA and with the officials of the United Danish Lutheran Church.
It was decided also to send a memorial to the LCA regarding the freedom of worship. The essence of the memorial to the LCA was that it should, "Reaffirm the commitments to valid traditions and the freedom of worship within the permissive Lutheran framework to the end that the freedom of traditions be stressed in principle and honored in practice throughout the LCA."

The final action of the business meeting was the election of officers for the next biennium. Pastor Farstrup was reelected president by a unanimous vote and Folmer Hansen was renamed as treasurer by a similar vote. Pastor Harald Knudsen was selected to be secretary. The business meeting was then adjourned until 1968, the date and place of that meeting to be announced later.

Third Biennial Meeting—1968

Once again Grand View and Luther Memorial were hosts to a Conference on July 25-28, 1968. There were approximately 100 persons present. The business meeting was held on Saturday, the 27th. Reports were received from the editor of Kirke og Folk as well as from the treasurer of the Conference. In connection with the latter it was stated that the funds remaining after publishing the history of the Danish Church in America were being held and administered by the LCA Board of Publication. It was voted to recommend to that Board that the sum of $500 be given to Pastor Mortensen for his excellent work. The motion to reward Enok for his work also included the thought that the remainder of the funds should be set aside for further research and publication regarding the Danish Church in America.

The previously mentioned centennial of the Danish Church which would be observed in 1972 was then taken up for discussion. It was voted that a committee, named by the officers of the Conference, would make plans, name speakers, choose the location, and set the date for the event. They would submit a progress report to the 1970 meeting of the Conference.

President Farstrup indicated a desire to retire from that position and Pastor Enok Mortensen, who was then visiting Denmark, was chosen to replace him. It was later disclosed that Pastor Mortensen did accept and would, therefore, be president of the Conference for
the next biennium. The secretary and treasurer, Harald Knudsen and Folmer Hansen respectively, were both reelected.

The business session was concluded by giving a standing vote of thanks to Pastor A. Ejnar Farstrup for his years of faithful service to the Danish Interest Conference. It was also voted to give a hearty thank you to Grand View College and Luther Memorial Church for hosting this event.

The 1970 Meeting

The fourth biennial meeting of the Conference was again held at Grand View College during the period of July 10-12, 1970. All meetings were held in the recreation room of the Women's Residence at the College and the worship services were held at Luther Memorial Church.

The vote at the last meeting thanking Pastor Farstrup for his service proved to be premature. Pastor Enok Mortensen had been elected and agreed to accept but he asked Farstrup to continue until his return from Denmark. Pastor Peter Thomsen, who had been elected as an alternate, desired to spend the summer of 1970 in Denmark and, therefore, Farstrup continued in the presidency.

The weekend meeting began with supper in the College dining room and was followed by a lecture given by Dr. Johannes Knudsen. Other speakers on Saturday were Pastor Edwin Hansen, Dr. Ernest Nielsen and Pastor Howard Christensen. An English service presided over by Pastor Willard Garred and a Danish service led by Pastor Holger Strandskov, were held at Luther Memorial Church on Sunday morning. At the closing meeting on Sunday afternoon, Pastor and Mrs. Harold N. Riber were the speakers.

A business meeting was held on Saturday afternoon at which several items were given attention. It was noted that the editor of Kirke og Folk, Pastor Michael Mikkelsen, wished to retire and it was left to the Board to find a replacement. A vote of thanks was extended to Pastor Mikkelsen for his faithful service. Dr. Johannes Knudsen was chosen as editor. Another matter to come before the business meeting was the proposed celebration of the centennial of the Danish Church. A committee had been appointed at the 1968 meeting but had not met due to a lack of funds. Significant progress
had been made by mail however. Arrangements had been made for the inclusion of the Blair group in the observance. The Church of Denmark had been notified and was asked to send a representative. A program and the time and place of such an observance could not yet be announced.

A major item for attention was the desire on the part of many to have *A World of Song* reprinted. This item had been carried over from the last meeting when the Board had been directed to appoint a committee to study the matter. The chairman of that committee, Thorvald Hansen, presented the report. A survey had shown that there would be a possible sale for some 500 copies. However, the committee advised against a reprint. The major obstacle would be the matter of copyrights. The question was whether the original grant of copyright permission would apply to a reprint. The advice of an attorney had been sought and he advised against it. It was also pointed out that the College, which now held the copyright, would not be willing to assume the risk of reprinting without specific permission of the copyright holders. To obtain permission from so many and such diverse sources would be extremely difficult. There were a number of expressions of appreciation of the book and suggestion were made for obtaining unused copies from the Iowa Synod Camp and other sources. The result of the discussion was a decision that the biennial meeting recommended that *A World of Song* not be reprinted at this time.

The meeting did, however, recommend the publishing of the authorized hymnal insert for the Service Book and Hymnal. The officers of the Conference in conjunction with Harry Jensen at Grand View College were to be responsible for the publication of such.

Following a reelection of the officers, with Pastor Farstrup, as president, Pastor Harald Knudsen, as secretary and Folmer Hansen, as treasurer, the business meeting was adjourned.

**The Centennial of the Church**

During the two year period prior to the 1972 meeting of the Conference, a number of things took place relevant to Danes in America and the Conference. The most important of these was the functioning of a committee to observe and celebrate the centennial of
the Danish Lutheran Church in America. Because the Danish church had divided in 1894, with one faction having its headquarters at Blair, Nebraska, this faction was also asked to participate. Accordingly, they appointed six members to join with the existing committee headed by Dr. Johannes Knudsen. It was in connection with the centennial that the Conference met in October 1972. The Centennial observance was to constitute the program for the Conference, but a business meeting was held on Saturday afternoon, October 7.

Dr. Johannes Knudsen, who was now editor of *Kirke og Folk*, gave a report on the status of that publication. His report indicated that the addition of more pages of English language material had met with a favorable response though there had been a few cancellations. Dr Knudsen also said that the paper was running an annual deficit, covered by available funds, but such funds were not inexhaustible. Raising the subscription price would be one possibility, but a better one would be the encouragement of more gifts and memorials.

The report of President Farstrup was concerned with a number of items. Among these were the Archives. The archives of the Danish Church had come under the jurisdiction of the LCA Archives in Chicago. The originals of photocopied material, duplicates, and other items not needed in Chicago were returned to Grand View College. This writer was elected archivist by the assembled Conference.

There was a discussion of the need to translate more of N. F. S. Grundtvig’s writing to English. It was therefore moved, seconded and carried “That we make contact with ‘Grundtvig Selskabet’ of Denmark to impress upon them the urgency of translating Grundtvig’s writing to English.” It was also agreed that the Board of the Conference seek to further this matter and report to the Conference in 1974.

Pastor Farstrup encouraged donations to the treasury of the Conference in that help was needed to meet expenses. Since there were no dues or other monetary requirements, free will offerings were most welcome. The treasurer reported that as of this meeting the Conference had a balance of $1743.16.
Officers chosen for the next biennium were: president, Pastor Enok Mortensen, secretary, Thorvald Hansen, and treasurer, Folmer Hansen. Before the meeting was adjourned a vote of thanks was given the outgoing officers, Pastors Farstrup and Harold Knudsen.

The actual observance of the centennial constituted the program for the 1972 meeting of the Conference. The event was observed with four separate meetings on October 7th and 8th. A banquet was held on Saturday, Danish and English services on Sunday morning, and a centennial celebration on Sunday afternoon.

The banquet was held at the Des Moines Country Club, with Dr Fredrich Schiotz, of the American Lutheran Church as the main speaker. Music was provided by the Grand View College choir. The preacher at the Danish language service was Bishop K. C. Holm, of Odense, Denmark and the liturgist was Pastor Enok Mortensen, Bishop Holm also spoke at the English service in St. John’s Lutheran Church in downtown Des Moines. The afternoon meeting was also held at St. John’s at which time Dr. Robert J. Marshall, president of the LCA, presented the main address. The choir from Dana College provided the music on that occasion. The session was presided over by Pastor Farstrup.

The 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Danish Lutheran Church in America was also recognized and celebrated in articles and poetry appearing in a special thirty-two page edition of Kirke og Folk. The articles, some in Danish and some in English, dealt with such things as the founding of the church, the schism in that body, the contributions of the Danish Church, the emphasis on education, the joint missionary activities of the two Danish churches and youth work related to the Des Moines based segment of the Danish Church.

A Centennial Hymn, written for the occasion by Dr. Johannes Knudsen and sung to the melody of “Den Signede Dag” (O Day Full of Grace) was sung at the banquet and was well received. The last stanza of that hymn is especially relevant to the festival as is evident from the lines quoted below:

The word was proclaimed beyond the sea,
Among us the church was founded.
A century long this offer free
To oncoming ages sounded.
God grant, in future days, that we
May thank him with praise unbounded.

The Remainder of the 70s

Ninety-eight guests were registered for the 1974 meeting of the Conference, which was again held in Des Moines with Grand View College and Luther Memorial Church being co-hosts. This was said to be one of the best meetings of the Conference from the standpoint of the speakers for the event. Lectures were given by Professor Marion Nelson of the University of Minnesota and Director of the Norwegian Museum at Decorah, Iowa. Dr Nelson gave attention to the melting pot and the salad bowl concepts of immigration. These he interpreted in terms of the tension between unity and freedom. Daniel Martensen, who was then a professor at the Hamma School of theology, also spoke. He presented a stimulating and profound devotional meditation. He stressed the heritage that the Conference had from the Grundtvigian tradition. Another speaker was Professor Philip Hefner of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Among other things he said, “We must be able and willing to accept the life in the American market place, culturally speaking, and we must develop a philosophy that enables us to make things more humane.”

The Folk Schools in America came in for an examination by Pastor Enok Mortensen, who defended the folk schools and denied that they were a failure. He was followed by Dr. John R. Christianson, of Luther College, who presented a penetrating study of the recent social and economic changes in Denmark. A visiting Danish professor responded and looked at the presentation from a Danish viewpoint.

Pastor Ove R. Nielsen, who had been asked by the editor to comment in Kirke og Folk, presented his remarks in that journal. While he commented very favorably on the talks presented, he did feel that the meeting was too highly structured and there should have been more opportunity for audience participation. He also was of the opinion that there was not enough time for group singing.
Some routine business was conducted at the 1974 meeting, such as reports on *Kirke og Folk*, the archives. A new record called “A World of Song” was announced. The desire for a recording of the group singing was expressed. One of the major items considered was a translation of some of N. F. S. Grundtvig’s works. This had been suggested at the 1972 meeting and communication with Grundtvig scholars in Denmark had brought expressions of approval, but no specific action. It was decided to appoint a translation committee consisting of Dr. Johannes Knudsen, Dr. Ernest Nielsen and Pastor Enok Mortensen.

Two years later, for the 1976 meeting, seventy-two people were registered. The average attendance at the lectures was estimated at seventy-five. There was a good deal of hearty singing led by Mrs. Harris Jespersen. Professor Otto Hoiberg spoke about several Danish American communities and what had happened to them since the merger of the churches. Dr. Johannes Knudsen spoke the next day on the topic, “The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Church.” The chaplain at Grand View College, the Rev. Gary Pence, spoke of the problem of maintaining traditional forms in a changing world. An outstanding lecture was delivered by Dr. Joseph Sittler, of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His address was called, “An Outsider Looks at the AELC”. His talk was tape recorded and later appeared in two parts in *Kirke og Folk*.

At this meeting it was reported that translations of some of N. F. S. Grundtvig’s writings had been completed and a book of 184 pages would soon be available in paperback for $5.95. The translators were Dr. Johannes Knudsen, Dr. Ernest Nielsen and Pastor Enok Mortensen.

During the biennium the annual subscription price of *Kirke og Folk* was raised without a significant loss of subscribers. The paper was now reported to be operating without a loss.

The fact that it was no longer possible to purchase copies of *A World of Song* continued to weigh heavily on some members of the Conference. It was felt by many that there was a real need for a songbook and that something should be done. Therefore, a committee under the chairmanship of Pastor Ronald Jespersen was appointed to oversee work toward a new songbook. It quickly
became obvious to this committee that it would not be feasible to assemble a committee with expertise in song and translations. The committee, therefore, entrusted the work to Dr. Knudsen. With the assistance of Pastor Verner Hansen, whose responsibility would be the layout and art work, the work proceeded apace. The project was given further impetus by the fact that Erling and Rose Jensen, of Des Moines, agreed to underwrite the publication costs. Thus it was possible at the 1978 meeting of the Conference to announce the publication of *A Heritage in Song*. In fact, copies had been especially delivered and made available for use at the 1978 meeting. It was announced that the book would sell for $2.50 and would be available at the Grand View College Bookstore.

*A Heritage in Song* was received with gratitude. Thanks were expressed to Dr. Knudsen and others who had been involved in the production of this significant work. The book contains 108 songs and hymns of Danish origin, taken from *A World of Song*. In a few instances slight changes have been made by Dr. Knudsen, who also included a few of his original songs and translations.

The Conference was off to a good start with the introduction of the songbook. There were then reports by the editor and the business manager of *Kirke og Folk*, Dr. Knudsen and Phyllis Sorensen, respectively. Mrs. Sorensen asked to be relieved and it was later revealed that Mrs. Hazel Serritslev, also of Askov, Minnesota would replace her. Reports were also received from the archives and from the Conference treasurer. The latter stated that the assets of the Conference had been favorably invested and continued to grow.

Elections were then held and, in view of the fact that Dr. Ernest Nielsen did not wish to continue as president, Pastor Willard Garred was elected to that position. The secretary, Pastor Ronald Jespersen, and the treasurer, Ove Jensen were reelected. Fifty-three ballots were cast. The low number of ballots reveals that this 1978 meeting was not as well attended as previous meetings had been.

Arnold Bodtker, of Junction City, Oregon was present to give a report on the newly formed Danish America Heritage Society, of which he was president. The objectives of the group will be to focus on the social as well as the religious heritage of Americans of Danish
descent regardless of church or non-church affiliation. Though the Board of Directors of the new group were all residents of the West Coast, it was by no means intended to be an exclusively West Coast organization. The Society will publish a journal called *The Bridge* twice each year and it will pertain to Danish immigration. The Society will also sponsor a Pacific Northwest Danish Cultural Conference each year at Menucha, a conference site near Portland, overlooking the Columbia River.

The devotions on Friday and Saturday were led by Pastor Folmer Farstrup. Lectures were presented on Friday evening and on Saturday. Speakers were: Sonja Knudsen, a professor at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois; Rudolf Jensen, a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; and Karl Langrock, President of Grand View College. A unique feature of the 1978 meeting was a panel discussion on Saturday morning. The weekend meeting closed with worship services at Luther Memorial on Sunday. Dr. Ernest Nielsen preached at the Danish service and Pastor Harold Olsen preached at the English service.

**A Decline Begins**

The 1980 meeting of the Conference was again held in Des Moines early in June. No figures are available for attendance at this meeting but there were indications that the Conference was losing ground. Indeed, quite early in the meeting the secretary introduced a motion calling for the dissolution of the Conference. The motion was not seconded and was intended to raise discussion concerning the future of the Conference. There is no record of any such discussion being held.

However, in a related development, the rules for the Conference were revised to the extent that, in addition to the three officers of the Conference, four other board members would be appointed by the officers. Thus a Board of Directors would be established. That Board could conduct the business in the event that a biennial meeting was not held. This board could also affect dissolution of the Conference when such became necessary and desirable. Following the service on Sunday morning it was announced that the officers had decided to ask Ellen Nielsen, of Iowa City, Ellen Jensen and
Pastor Beryl Knudsen, of Des Moines and Richard Grau, of Frederic, Wisconsin to be the appointed members of the Board of Directors. All of those named to this new position accepted.

In other business there was a report from Dr Knudsen on Kirke og Folk. The report of the Business Manager, Hazel Serritslev, indicated that the paper has a balance of over $800 and that gifts exceeded subscription income. The Christmas issue would again have a stiff and more colorful cover. The Conference also voted to contribute $750 to Grand View College to be used in furthering The Danish Immigrant Archival Listing (DIAL) project. This was a project headed by Thorvald Hansen, Grand View Archivist, the aim of which was to locate and list the archival items existent in the United States, Canada, and Denmark. The Danish American Heritage Society had also made a contribution to this endeavor.

At this 1980 meeting there was a guest speaker, the Rev. Dr. Jorgen Thorgaard, from Denmark. He spoke in fluent English on “The Church of Denmark Today.” Other speakers at this meeting were Professor Donald Watkins, from Kansas, Professor Stephen Rye, of Grand View and Dr. Knudsen. The preacher at the Danish Sunday morning service was Pastor Thorgaard and the English service was conducted by Pastor Beryl Knudsen.

A Board Meeting

On June 21, 1981 the enlarged Board, as provided for in changes made at the 1980 meeting, met at Luther Memorial Church. That Board consisted of Willard Garred, President, Ronald Jespersen, Secretary, Ove Jensen, Treasurer and Ellen Nielsen, Ellen Jensen, Richard Grau and Beryl Knudsen. Incidentally, it was announced at the meeting that the secretary of the LCA had notified the Conference that the rule changes adopted in 1980 had been approved.

Meanwhile, at the meeting in 1981 it was made known that two anonymous donors offered to give $2,000 to establish an endowment fund for Kirke og Folk. To this sum the Conference Board voted to add $500 and to place the total in a separate investment account. It was also voted to place the funds of the Conference in investments paying a higher rate of interest. In a final action the Conference
Board agreed to facilitate the publication of Willard Garred’s translation of *Fra de Store Søers Land* (From the Land of the Great Lakes). Carl “Kelly” Jensen had volunteered to pay the publication costs.

Despite an earlier decision to forego a Conference meeting in 1982 in deference to a planned Grundtvig meeting, the Board members of the Conference had some second thoughts about not having a meeting in 1982. Consequently, a meeting was planned for the new College Center in Des Moines for June 17-20. Dr. Joseph Sittler was scheduled for two talks, “Tradition and the Forward Look” and “Content, Joy and Happiness.” Other scheduled speakers were: Dr. Johannes Knudsen, Dr. Otto Hoiberg, Prof. and Mrs. Axel Kildegaard, Pastor Ronald Jespersen. Pastor Charles Terrell was the devotional leader and Mrs. Asta Ibsen was the song leader. The Conference would be slightly longer than some previous ones had been in that it would begin on Thursday evening.

The attendance was somewhat greater than had been expected; with the average being about 55, with others coming for individual lectures. At the business meeting the rules were amended so that anyone who subscribed to the cultural and religious purposes of the Conference could be a member. Membership would thus not be limited to former members of the Danish Church. Election of officers resulted in Dr. Ernest Nielsen becoming president, Pastor Ronald Jespersen becoming secretary and Pastor Charles Terrell remaining as treasurer. The total assets of the Conference now totaled $7,648 and are invested in the Lutheran Brotherhood’s Money Market. *Kirke og Folk* was doing well financially and it was reported that Erling V. Jensen and Carl “Kelly” Jensen had contributed toward a support fund for the paper and that ordinarily only the interest from that fund should be used.

On November 14, 1982, Dr. Johannes Knudsen died. Known far and wide as “Joe.” he was an avid supporter of the church, education and Danish-American causes. He played a significant role in the life of this Conference and he had served as editor of *Kirke og Folk* since 1970. With his death the editorship of that paper was transferred to Thorvald Hansen. An editorial assistant, Willard
Garred, was added to the staff. His primary responsibility was to be the proofreading of the Danish articles.

Prior to his death Dr. Knudsen had recommended that *Kirke og Folk* become a monthly rather than a twice monthly publication. Beginning in January of 1983 this recommendation was implemented. It had also been revealed that the publication had been endowed with a gift of $10,000. The gift came from Karen Bensen, of Denmark, who was formerly a resident of West Denmark (Luck) Wisconsin.

In the late spring of 1983 the officers of the Conference and the editor met at the Grand View College Archives and considered, among other things, a name change for the paper. Translation of the Danish name was considered, but no satisfactory combination of words suggested itself. Finally, Pastor Charles Terrell, suggested that the paper bore a Grundtvigian emphasis and since Grundtvig was concerned both with the church and with human life, perhaps the paper should be called *Church and Life*. This suggestion struck an immediate responsive chord and this title was chosen. It became effective with the July 15 issue in 1983.

There were repercussions of course. The editor recalls one long distance phone call lasting twenty minutes or more in which he, and a small group in Des Moines, was accused of forsaking our Danish heritage. At the Danebod meeting in Tyler that year a petition, largely inspired by the same source, deploring the name change, drew a number of signatures. The vast majority of subscribers,
though they continued to refer to the paper as *Kirke og Folk*, accepted the change as justified and even inevitable.

The officers of the Conference met at Grand View College on October 6, 1983. The treasurer, Pastor Charles Terrell gave a report on the total assets of the Conference at that time. He reported a total of just over $11,000. All of the funds, including those of *Church and Life* are deposited in interest bearing notes and, collectively, they bring a return of about $100 a month in interest. It was recommended that, in addition to the twelve regular issues, a special Christmas number be presented. This recommendation was accepted. At this meeting also a proposal from the Danish American Heritage Society was presented for a joint conference in the Midwest in 1984. It was decided that this would not be wise because of the limited time left for planning such an event. Finally, preliminary plans were made for the biennial meeting of the Conference at Grand View College on May 18-20, 1984. Possible speakers were suggested and arrangements were made for contacting these.

The biennial meeting assembled at Grand View for a business meeting on May 19 with approximately fifty-five members being present. Most of the matters presented had been considered at the previous Board meeting. The elections for the next biennium brought the only significant change in that Dr. Ernest Nielsen did not wish to continue as president and, therefore, Pastor Ronald Jespersen, the secretary, was elected in his place and Pastor Willard Garred was named as secretary with Pastor Charles Terrell continuing as treasurer. The appointed members all accepted reappointment for another two year term.

Speakers at the weekend event were Dr. Harold Jensen, who spoke about American literature between the wars, his wife, Ingrid, who introduced the group to Finnish readings, Richard Grau, who spoke about those who make up the Conference. Grand View President Karl Langrock was the banquet speaker and Dr. Signe Betsinger spoke about the Danish Immigrant Museum. The worship service at Luther Memorial Church was led by Pastor Beryl Knudsen. Following the worship service on Sunday morning a forum with Ellen Jensen and Ellen Nielsen, discussed “What’s New or News in Your Congregation.”
In his report to the Conference for the biennium 1984-86, President Ronald Jespersen took a realistic approach as he viewed the Conference. He pointed out that during the biennium a number of firm supporters of the Conference had died. Some of deceased had been officers. Pastors Ejnar Farstrup and Enok Mortensen had, at one time or another served as presidents. Pastor Charles Terrell, who was killed in a traffic accident, had served as treasurer. Alfred C. Nielsen and Pastor Folmer Farstrup had held no office but were interested supporters of the Conference. He wrote, “The deaths of these people make us aware that our circle is diminishing.” Again he wrote, “Moreover, those concerns around which we gather have largely disappeared in nearly all of the former A.E.L.C. congregations. One does not need to be prophetic to see where all of this leads,” he wrote. That realism was tempered by a report on the significant work done within the Conference during the last two years.

In 1985 the Conference sponsored the publication of Dr. Ernest Nielsen’s translation of one of Grundtvig’s works and gave it the title, What Constitutes Authentic Christianity. The following year a new songbook, called The Joy of Song, primarily a songbook for young people, was published by the Conference. The editor of that book was Dr. Miriam Showalter. The songs are primarily taken from A World of Song, though a few are from Saralice Petersen’s Grandma Sings. The book had sixty-four pages and two indices, one for song titles and the other for first lines. The book was ring bound for convenience in using and will sell for $4.00 postpaid.

The meeting in 1986 was held during the weekend of May 25-27 was again at Grand View College. This time the meeting began on Friday afternoon and concluded after the church service on Sunday morning. There not being much business to discuss, that aspect of the Conference was confined to an hour on Saturday morning. The officers, including Marvin P. Jessen, who had been appointed as treasurer succeeding the late Pastor Terrell, were reelected. The remainder of the time was given over to lectures and singing. It was reported that the subscription list for Church and Life now numbered some 550. Attempts had been made to gain new subscribers by
sending sample copies to potential readers but the result, according to the Business Manager, Hazel Serritslev, was not very good.

Lecturers for the 1986 meeting of the Conference were: June Sampson, of the new Danish Immigrant Museum at Elk Horn, Iowa; Rudolf Jensen and Prof. and Mrs. Kildegaard. Devotion leaders were Pastors Paul Axness, Joseph Sibert and Don Zinger. The sermon at the worship service on Sunday morning was delivered by Pastor Ronald Jespersen.

The Board of the Conference met in Des Moines on January 10, 1987. Some were not able to be present. It was also necessary to replace Ellen Nielsen, a widow who had remarried and who would now be Ellen Laursen. She had recently moved to Arizona. Anitra Jensen, of Des Moines, was appointed. The chief item of business was the transfer of $6,000 of the Conference funds to a source bearing a higher rate of interest.

Fifty-eight persons were registered for the biennial meeting of the Conference in May of 1988. The meeting host was Grand View College and the various meetings were held in the College Center. A varied program was presented. It included singing, films, lectures. Devotions, and worship services. Following a devotional period on Friday afternoon three films were shown. The films featured Denmark and one of them had to do with the life and work of N.F.S. Grundtvig. A panel discussion on the “Task of the Parish Minister,” was featured on Friday evening. Retiring College president Karl Langrock, spoke about the heritage of the College and said that it continues to be influenced by its Gruntvigian background.

Following a brief business meeting on Saturday morning at which all officers were reelected, Dr. John Mark Nielsen, of Dana College, was the speaker. He told about the work of Kristian Østergaard. Østergaard’s writings shed much light on the immigrant experience. Ruth Thorup Nielsen spoke about growing up in her parent’s boarding house in Omaha. June Sampson, the Museum director, presented a video glimpse of the Danish Immigrant Museum at Elk Horn in Iowa. Dr. Thomas Fischer, Dean of Grand View College, gave a humorous talk on “Looking at Danes from a Distance.” The singing periods were under the leadership of Mrs. Asta Ibsen. A
Pentecost sermon by Dr. Ernest Nielsen at Luther Memorial Church and dinner in the College dining room, brought the weekend to a close.

In view of the fact that many of the regular Conference participants would be joining the planned Grand View College tour of Denmark in 1990, no regular meeting of the Conference was scheduled for that year. Instead, a short meeting on the afternoon of August 29th at Tyler was planned for all who might come to the Danebod Meeting. No program was planned for the Tyler meeting and the chief item of business discussed was *Church and Life*. Regarding the latter it was stated that the present $15 subscription fee did not nearly cover the cost printing and mailing the paper, but gifts and memorials keep the paper operating in the black. An enlarged Christmas issue was still planned but heavier paper and a two color cover would no longer be used. There were now 472 subscribers to the paper and that number was steadily decreasing. In an effort to increase the number of subscribers some 267 sample copies were sent to potential subscribers, but the results were not great. Once again the possibility of republishing *A World of Song* was raised and again it was shown that this would not be feasible.

From its creation in 1974 the Conference had been one of four such conferences in the Lutheran Church in America. With a new merger of the Lutheran churches in 1988, the Conference, along with others, became a special interest group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA. It was first planned that such Special Interest Conferences were to report to the Commission on Multi-Cultural Ministries. However, this was later changed so that these conferences were to report to the Office of Ecumenical Affairs.

On October 18, 1990 the presidents of the four conferences were asked to come to Chicago to acquaint members of the Ecumenical Affairs Office with the work and position of those groups. This had a by-product in that the Danish president, Ronald Jespersen, gained an insight into the other three conferences. His conclusion was that each of the three was more concerned with preserving culture and language than the Danes were. The Office of Ecumenical Affairs of the ELCA expressed a willingness to permit each of the Conferences,
i.e. the German, Finnish, Hungarian and Danish, to continue on its own course.

The Last General Meeting
What was to prove to be the last general meeting of the Conference took place on June 19th to 21st of 1992. Some fifty guests were present at Grand View College in Des Moines for the event. Among those present were three men who had been pastors in the Danish Church and who were now bishops or former bishops in the merged church. They were Howard Christensen, Harry Andersen and Richard Jessen.

The business session was held on Saturday afternoon. Reports were heard from the editor of Church and Life and the nominating committee. In the latter case it was moved that the present officers be reelected and this was done. Professor Axel Kildegaard announced a drive to secure funds to establish an AELC lectureship at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Seminary students would thus be made aware of the life and history of the Danish Church. The editor of the paper was honored for ten year’s work with a gift of $500.

Lectures were given by Prof. Kildegaard, Bishop Richard Jessen and Dr. Dan Martensen. Among the devotional leaders were Pastor Willard Garred. On Sunday afternoon an outdoor festival was held on the College campus. There were outdoor food booths, Nordic Folk Dancers from Decorah, Iowa, story tellers, a Maypole dance and an evening bonfire.

Since 1992
The Conference did not cease to exist following its last general meeting in 1992. Through its officers and Board members it continued to meet on an irregular basis to transact such business as was necessary. The original purposes of the organization were no longer operative and, in one sense, it would appear that the Conference had outlived its usefulness and should be dissolved. However, the Conference was still the publisher of Church and Life and as long as that paper existed there would be a need for the Conference. Despite a slowly declining subscription list there was
no real indication that the paper had come to its end. Therefore, during the past fourteen years the Conference, though no longer even a shadow of its former self has lived on through its officers and Board members and still continues to do so today.

A board meeting was held in connection with the Danebod Meeting at Tyler in the summer of 1993. At that meeting it was revealed to that last general meeting in 1992 had resulted in the deficit of more than $800. A report on *Church and Life* was also given indicating a healthy balance of over $7,000, but the subscription list had declined to some 470 subscribers.

A survey was made of 106 younger people, whose names were gleaned from the youth camp lists at Tyler. The purpose of the survey was to determine if there was interest among the younger people in carrying on the activities of the Conference. This revealed that there was very little interest on the part of most of them in carrying on the Conference. At this meeting it was also decided to give $1,000 each to Grand View College and to The Danish Immigrant Museum.

At a meeting held at the home of Harry and Ellen Jensen in Des Moines in June of 1994, an accounting of the books owned by the Conference and held by the Grand View College Bookstore came under consideration. After selling fifty copies of *A Heritage in Song* to Luther Memorial congregation, fifty-seven copies remained at the Bookstore. A few other books owned by the Conference are also held by the Bookstore. These include *The Joy of Song*, *Grundtvig/Selected Writings* and *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity*. Occasionally, one of these is sold and each year a box of such books is taken to the meeting at Danebod where some are sold and the money credited to the Conference. At this meeting also it was decided the give $1,000 each to Grand View College and to The Danish Immigrant Museum.

A couple of the earlier meetings were held in connection with the Danebod meeting at Tyler, but in the years after that the meetings were held at various places in the Des Moines area for the simple reason that all of the officers and most of the Board members lived there. The Board member who did not live in Des Moines, Fylla Kildegaard, was contacted by mail when she could not be present.
The Conference in some respects was continued more informally than had been the case. Board members were chosen to fill vacancies, largely on the basis of availability and a willingness to serve. Changes in the Board most often came about through a death. In such cases the spouse, if willing, was appointed in place of the deceased. Thus, when Beryl Knudsen died in 1994, his wife, Eunice, was named in his place. When Anitra Jensen died in 1998, her husband, Roland, was appointed. In 1999 the president, Ronald Jespersen, died and the secretary, Willard Garred, assumed the presidency and no new secretary was named. Board member Ellen Jensen died in the year 2000 and her husband, Harry, was named in her place. The persons named above, plus Marvin Jessen, the treasurer, constitute the present leadership of the Conference. Indeed, for all practical purposes, they are the Conference today.

At a meeting in 1996 the mission of the Conference was discussed and it was agreed that the sole purpose of the Conference now was the publication of *Church and Life*. As long as there is a desire for the continuation of the paper, and it remains financially solvent, the Conference will be responsible for its publication.

To one such Board meeting came a request from the Folk School, at Askov, in Denmark, for financial aid. It was felt by the Board that in recognition of the fact that many of the earlier ministers of the Church in America received their training at Askov, we should send some help. The question of the amount was decided by having each Board member suggest an amount and then sending an average of these. The result was that a check for $550 was sent to Askov.

At one of the Board meetings during the 1990's, plans were made for the disposition of such funds as might remain after the demise of the Conference. Certain institutions and causes were selected as beneficiaries. When any other obligations had been met, to these would go a percentage of the remaining assets of the Conference. Neither the recipients nor the percentages are to be revealed until such time distribution is to be made.

**A Forty Year History**

The Conference became a reality in 1964. The intent was that through such a group all who had an interest in things Danish
would find in that body an expression of such things. And, for these forty years, it has served as such. There is a tendency in America to think in terms of the future and of what an agency or institution contributes to the future. This was not the case with the Conference; its purpose did not lie in what it could contribute to the future. Rather it was aimed at the present; it was an organization dedicated to making the past relevant to the present and providing for many a transition period from the old Danish Church to the new merged churches. For over 30 years it fulfilled that task and since then it has continued to provide a monthly paper that caters to the interests of the aging and rapidly dwindling group who were once at home in the Danish Church. *Church and Life* still binds that rapidly dwindling group together.

It should be noted that in its forty year history the Conference has sponsored other publications. Probably the most important of these is Enok Mortensen’s *The Danish Lutheran Church in America*. Not to be forgotten are such publications as *Heritage in Song, N.F.S. Grundtvig/Selected Writings, In the Land of the Great Lakes, What Constitutes Authentic Christianity* and *The Joy of Song*.

On October 1, 2004, Pastor Willard Garred resigned as president of the Conference. He was replaced by Asta Twedt, of Ankeny, Iowa. Asta is the daughter of Pastor and Mrs. Harold Petersen. Pastor Petersen served a number of congregations in Minnesota, where Asta and her siblings grew up. Dr. Marvin P. Jessen, longtime treasurer of the group, resigned that position effective February 1, 2005. He was replaced by Erna Jensen, of Des Moines. Erna is a retired mathematics teacher at Grand View College. In both cases these individuals were elected by the Board of Directors of the Danish Interest Conference.

How much longer *Church and Life* can continue is uncertain. The future of the paper is not dependent upon finances, but upon content. In July of 2004 the Danish pages were eliminated and a sporadic shortage of content made it necessary to reduce from...
sixteen to twelve the number of pages in each issue. This, the last remaining vestige of the Danish Church, is now the sole reason for the continued existence of the Conference. When *Church and Life* has been distributed for the last time, the Conference can be dissolved. To be sure, there will be some sadness, but also a note of gratitude for what has been.

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A Note on Sources.

The sources from which this article was written, and for which the endnotes are not listed, are primarily the minutes of the many meetings of the group. Other correspondence, which had a bearing on this history, was also used. Past issues of *Church and Life* which contained reports and other information about the Danish Interest Conference were also consulted. Finally, to a very limited extent, the memory of this writer as well as the memories of living officers was also tapped.