

Post-war, one in six Lutherans was a refugee.
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a post-war migrant*

A hearty welcome and new beginning by Rachel Kuchel

It was a topsy-turvy state of affairs. The world had been turned upside down, inside out and back-to-front and was now trying to find a new way to balance.

Armistice had been declared and World War II ended. Borders were realigned, countries redefined and people were trying to find their place as best they could amid a new order of chaos.

Australia opened its arms to welcome European migrants: Australia needed more workers and needed to boost its population. Those who came were mostly displaced persons from the Baltic countries. It was a change from Australia's previously closed borders and remarkable in that so many were welcomed from countries which Australia had so recently considered enemies.

In the global Lutheran sphere, there was a need for reconciliation and communication between the Lutherans of the world—'between the victors and the vanquished, between the persecuted and the persecutors'. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was formed in 1947 to provide a united ministry to displaced Lutherans—post-war, one in six Lutherans was a refugee. By the mid-1960s, one in five Australians was a post-war migrant.

In 1950, the UELCA synod in Australia joined LWF. The UELCA already drew many of its pastors from Germany, and some Australians who wanted to

become pastors went to seminaries in Germany. So the UELCA was well-placed to provide a ministry to new immigrants. The ELCA synod had close connections to the Missouri Synod in the United States, so they did not join LWF, although they certainly provided their own ministry to migrants in Australia (but that's a story for another day).

With the arrival of the first boatload of immigrants in November 1947, Pastor Bruno Muetzelfeldt took up the challenge to provide ministry to the newcomers in one of the barracks at the Bonegilla Migrant Centre in Victoria. Pastor Muetzelfeldt was himself a migrant from Germany, and the pastor at Albury, 20 kilometres away. Ten months later he was made the full-time UELCA immigration chaplain, an acknowledgement from the church of how essential this ministry was. Notices over the loudspeakers were read in English and German stating: 'The Lutheran Church of Australia extends to all new arrivals a hearty welcome', with details of a church service where 'all are cordially invited to celebrate their safe arrival in this worthy manner by attending the service'.

As a German speaker, Pastor Muetzelfeldt was able to converse and assist Lutheran and non-Lutheran migrants in a language they knew—even if it wasn't their native language. He regularly advocated for the people of Bonegilla, for better

living conditions at the centre and on behalf of people who wanted to be placed near relatives who had arrived in Australia earlier.

As the migrants moved around the country on their two-year work visas, Pastor Muetzelfeldt passed their addresses on to local pastors—no matter whether they were ELCA or UELCA. What really mattered was that the migrants received Lutheran ministry.

Pastor Muetzelfeldt was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by Capitol University, Columbus Ohio in 1962 in recognition of his service. In 1961 he became director of the LWF Department of World Service.

Not only did Pastor Muetzelfeldt care for the migrants, but the migrants themselves cared for fellow Australians: in 1959, plans were made for the Bonegilla Boy Scouts to send Christmas gifts to the children at Hope Vale Mission, Cooktown (though it isn't certain that this finally happened). In 1957, inquiries were made about holding the 1958 Lutheran Youth Association triennial conference at Bonegilla, so that there could be interaction between the migrants and Australian youth. The Department of Immigration did not accede to the request because it was too difficult to predict how many beds would be available (the youth were requesting 800!). The conference was held at Walla Walla, New South Wales, instead.

"The Lutheran Church of Australia extends to all new arrivals a hearty welcome!"



Above: In 1948, as boatloads of immigrants arrived, notices over the loudspeakers were read in English and German stating: 'The Lutheran Church of Australia extends to all new arrivals a hearty welcome'.

Pictures: Lutheran Archives



Above left: The Muetzelfeldt family arrives in Adelaide in August 1934. From left: Elfrieda, Mrs Getrud Muetzelfeldt and Pastor Karl H T Muetzelfeldt, Dorothea (in front), Hannah and the young Bruno. Bruno Muetzelfeldt's own immigrant background and language skills made him highly suited to his lifelong ministry among migrants and refugees. **Above right:** Many European migrants passed through the Bonegilla Migrant Centre, near Albury in New South Wales. It quickly became the centre of Pastor Bruno Muetzelfeldt's ministry.

The ministry that Dr Muetzelfeldt began continues today in many forms. At the time of the formation of the Lutheran Church of Australia in 1966, full membership of LWF was not continued (though the LCA remains an associate member). However, Bruno Muetzelfeldt's ministry has continued as Australian Lutheran World Service. Lutheran

Archives also assists in this ministry. In recent years, through our records we have been able to put family members separated through post-war displacement—members of families who spread from Latvia to America and Australia—back in contact with each other.

The world found new balance in a global community, in formalised

Lutheran cooperation around the world. And in Australia, the two synods worked together to reach out to the new migrants, helping them to settle into their new country and their new life, and welcoming them with open arms.

Rachel Kuchel is LCA Archivist. Her regular 'Stepping Stones' column appears each month in *The Lutheran*.

SEEDS THAT SPROUT

In 1957 a delegate of Australians, including Dr SP Hebart, Dr Max and Mrs Lohe, South Australian district treasurer and film maker Carl Schulz and his wife, went to Minneapolis to attend the third LWF convention. They were joined by Dr Erich Renner, Mrs WW Fritsch, a youth delegation, and Rev and Mrs Grope. Our Lutheran Archives has original footage of this event, which was widely reported in the *Lutheran Herald*, and naturally, this is also one of the films that we need your help to save. (Read about this important project at lca.org.au/seeds)



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