

Fred W. Meuser, Lutheran theologian and leader, dies at age 94

Meuser, a scholar of Martin Luther and American Lutheran history, also served on a multidenominational council and as a seminary president.

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Fred W. Meuser, theologian, pastor, and first president of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Ohio, died June 16 at age 94 in Orlando, Florida.

He studied at Capital University and Yale Divinity School and joined the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus as professor of church history in 1953. He was ordained in the American Lutheran Church, one of the predecessors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and served as a pastor in Florida before becoming a professor.

In 1969, Meuser accepted a two-year call to serve as the executive secretary of the Division of Theological Studies at the Lutheran Council in the United States of America as it studied the ordination of women for three Lutheran denominations.

“Meuser considered the work to reflect the power of the Holy Spirit leading both women and men to see ordination of women as biblically warranted and theologically responsible,” his family wrote in his obituary.

He became president of ELTS in 1971. He remained president after the school merged with Hamma School of Theology in 1978 to form Trinity Lutheran Seminary until his retirement in 1989.

He published numerous articles and books on Martin Luther and American Lutheran history.

Meuser spoke at the 1997 ELCA assembly, saying that God’s power sustains the church.

“It’s easy to forget what God promises to build: not sanctuaries, not the American way of life, not American Christianity,” Meuser said, according to ELCA records. “God’s church is not a little fearful remnant hiding from the big bad world, always bemoaning how bad things are, hanging on by their fingernails. Oh, no! That church is a great company, from every land from times past and present and yet to come, with the mind of Christ in them and a Lord out in front of them who says, ‘Follow me! I have overcome the world! I will build my church!’”