

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

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The present organization of Lutheran Social Service resulted from a series of mergers of predecessor organizations, which in part paralleled the mergers of Lutheran church bodies.

In 1865 Vasa Lutheran Home for Children was established by Pastor Eric Norelius with four children in Red Wing. This first Lutheran institution for children in Minnesota was under the auspices of the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Church, which would later become part of the Lutheran Church in America. In those early frontier days orphanages were needed to care for children who had lost their parents through illness, Indian uprisings, or through the severe struggle of crossing an ocean and a continent. In the early 1900s there were between 70 and 80 children living at Vasa.

In 1900 the Lutheran Children's Friend Society was established in Winona for homeless children at a little parish schoolhouse under the auspices of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. A Twin City chaplaincy work was also begun at that time. In 1905 the Lutheran Inner City Mission was also established on behalf of orphans. It incorporated with a similar program called the Colony of Mercy to form the Lutheran Welfare Society and become an agency of the predecessor bodies of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. The Colony of Mercy was a Community Chest agency from 1923 through 1929. The Lutheran Welfare Society was admitted as an agency in 1934, and the Children's Friend Society became a member agency of the St. Paul United Fund in 1957.

The Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Church opened Bethany Lutheran Home for Children in Duluth in 1916 to serve homeless children, and in 1922 it established the Board of Christian Service to administer its social welfare programs, including Vasa and Bethany.

The commitment to serve homeless children was severely tested in the early years. Vasa was destroyed twice, once by a tornado and once by fire. Bethany was nearly devastated by the winter flu epidemic in 1919, and the building was destroyed by fire in 1920.

Eventually these agencies changed their focus from institutionalization for orphaned children to seeking permanent homes. By the mid 1950s orphanages were no longer needed, and other urgent needs of children emerged. Vasa became a program for retarded children who needed special care and training. Bethany at Duluth began serving emotionally troubled teenaged boys and girls. These institutions were part of the Lutheran Church in America merger of 1962.

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota came into being on January 1, 1963, as a merger of the Lutheran Welfare Society, the Child Placement Department, the Bethany and Vasa Homes of

the Board of Christian Service, and the Lake Park—Wild Rice Children's Home at Fergus Falls. On January 1, 1969, the Lutheran Children's Friend Society and Lutheran Chaplaincy Services also merged to join Lutheran Social Service. This merger brought all Lutheran organized child welfare, family counseling, chaplaincy, and residential treatment programs of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod into one corporate, coordinated service effort in Minnesota. The agency now describes itself as being jointly owned and operated by several jurisdictional units of the three Lutheran church bodies.

The St. Paul United Way made separate allocations to the Lutheran Welfare Society, subsequently LSS, and the Children's Friend Society until 1969. The merger in that year also brought about a consolidated allocation to the organization.

After the mergers, LSS continued to grow as a new organization. The agency was asked to provide more programs through Lutheran churches which would assist people in coping with changes and strengthen the family's capacity to support each other. Eight major counseling centers were established around the state, as well as more than thirty part-time service sites. LSS expanded Life Enrichment services to include more pre-marriage work, communications programs for couples and for families, sessions for divorced persons, workshops on stress, conflict, grief, and other major experiences which impact personal lives and relationships. Individual and family counseling became the most heavily used services offered throughout the state.

In 1972 Lutheran Social Service initiated a Major Fund Appeal. As a result of the Appeal, Vasa was greatly expanded, and a new Bethany was completed in Duluth. The Appeal also provided for the opening of a new office in St. Paul, and on November 1, 1975, a small office was opened at 993 Payne Avenue, St. Paul. In 1979 this office was moved to 1201 Payne Avenue on the corner of Maryland.

During the years LSS has also negotiated a large number of governmental grants and contracts. In 1973 the agency began to administer a Senior Nutrition program in northwestern Minnesota, providing congregate dining at 23 centers for the elderly in small communities. In the same year Portland House was established in Minneapolis and became an alternative to prison for young male felons. An LSS Girl's Home for unwed mothers was converted to become Friendship House I in 1974 and became a residential treatment center for teenaged girls, some of whom had children. In the following year LSS became involved in Resettlement Services, and during that year alone it helped 2200 Vietnamese refugees settle through Lutheran congregations. In 1976 LSS began the development of group homes for retarded adults in a program to move people out of institutionalized settings and into community living. LSS now has seven group homes for retarded adults located around the state with backup programs from day activity centers, sheltered workshops, and community or church resources for fellowship, recreation, and worship. Along with this growth, the Chaplaincy program at LSS was also

expanded dramatically, and now about 50 chaplains serve in 150 institutions, including chemical dependency centers, prisons, medical-surgical hospitals, and nursing homes.

As a result of this growth, the total operating budget of Lutheran Social Service grew from a little more than \$1 million in 1963 to approximately \$9 million in 1980.

The programs of the agency now include individual and family counseling, adoption, foster care, services for unmarried parents, chaplaincy, services to congregations, some governmentally funded senior citizens programs, and a variety of residential services in about a dozen facilities around the state.