

Memories

By Luther Piel

I believe all who came to the first meeting paid their own travel expenses. Everyone who attended was enthusiastic about what we were doing and about the possibilities of a national organization.

I remember some of the “giants’ of the movement – Pastor Ed Simonsen, Pastor Carroll Lang, Greg Steele. Then there were us smaller people – Pastor Bill Corkish, Pastor Emil Ibel, Pastor Paul Steingruber, and Connie Sjostrom.

After coffee and rolls we sat down to try and decide what to do. After hearing from individual secretariats and much sharing and discussion, our pastor/leader thought that the first thing we should do was to elect lay leaders, so names for president were recommended and written on a chalk board. I was glad that my name was at the bottom of the list because I knew that one “well known” nominee from a larger secretariat would be elected before they got to my name. I didn’t realize that the host (that was me since the Atlanta secretariat sponsored the event) is often favorably considered because of early introduction to explain accommodations, smoking rules, restroom facilities, etc.; important stuff. But then, each nominee was asked to stand and give a little personal history I now knew that I was safe when people like Greg Steele told about all his involvement. I couldn’t compare.

Last, and finally, I stood up and gave my name. “Luther Piel, Atlanta Lutheran Secretariat. I made Atlanta Cursillo number...” and the chimes, with sensors on the roof of the building we were in, started playing so loudly, the assembly could barely hear me. It was 12:00 noon and the chimes were set to play briefly. I sat down quickly and everyone laughed as our leader said it was obvious that I was receiving “approval” from above. I was elected. Now what to do?

After electing a secretary, treasurer, and Pastor Ed as our Spiritual Director, we did the next best thing – we broke for lunch. At least now we had someone to say grace.

For the rest of the day, our chalk board was used frequently, and everyone eagerly participated because we all had a “mind to work”. We decided on, and then formed committees. Everyone accepted a task or two. We needed a name, organizational structure, a constitution and by-laws, a publications committee, etc. Everyone worked hard and the committees were very productive in developing proposals to present to the whole group the following day.

Do you know that Connie Sjostrom and her committee wrote the draft constitution and the by-laws (that still form the basis of our present constitution) for presentation to the assembly by noon the following day? You know that a lot of “second shift” time was invested!

Do you know that:

- Tom and Judy Kraska from Michigan wrote our first lay talks.
- Pastor Carroll Lang of Iowa wrote our first clergy talk outlines;
- We started consideration of a “Leaders Manual” but we still don’t have one. [Editorial note: It was finally published in 1997.]
- We recommended an organizational structure that included six “areas” within the United States;
- We found out that the Florida and Iowa weekends were not the same;
- Right after our meeting, groups in Arizona and Texas asked for assistance to form;
- Things were happening on a national scale.

I would like to be able to tell you about all the efforts and individual contributions of those present at that first meeting – truly they were all “giants”, but I do want to single out two – Pastor Carroll and Judy Lang. These two people, in their quiet and unassuming way, always contributed much more than their “fair share”. I believe Pastor Carroll is the only one who attended every one of the first twenty-five plus meetings of the National Lutheran Secretariat. No one will know all that he and Judy have contributed, and still do. Pastor Carroll knew something that I didn’t. he knew that a computer has a better memory retrieval system than the human memory bank. He bought a computer and I didn’t. I hope that he too will write about some of his memories of those early meetings. I bet he could write a book!