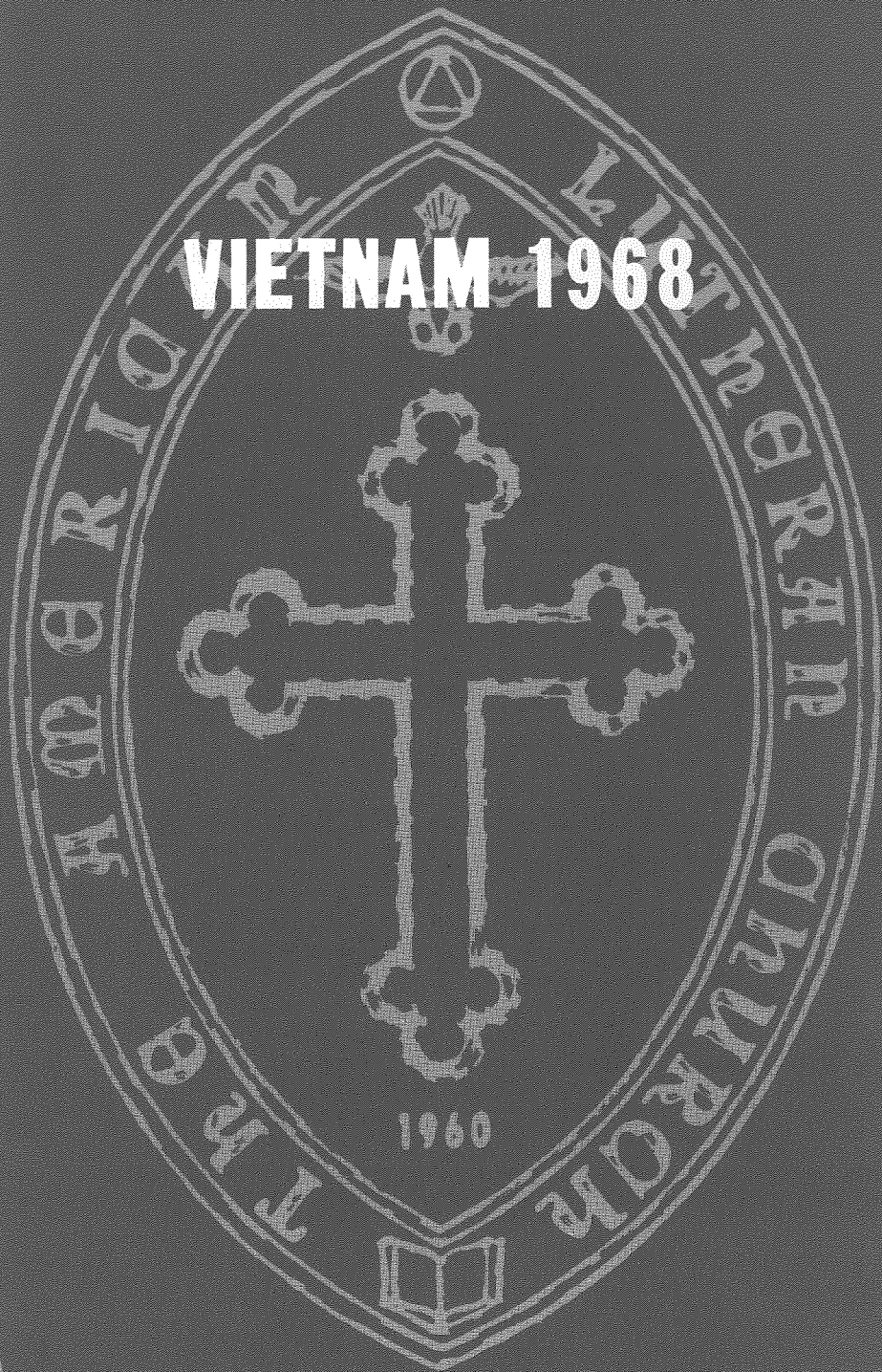


VIETNAM 1968



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(A statement approved by the Fourth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 16-22, 1968, "for commendation to congregations as a statement to their members in order to stimulate their thinking, promote a desire for informed discussion, and encourage fervent intercessory prayer." Votes: Favor, 457; Against, 153.)

1. The Third General Convention of The American Lutheran Church in 1966 noted its "uneasy and troubled" mind over United States' involvement in Vietnam. Since then there has been a rising toll of casualties, both military and civilian, and a continued diversion of resources from the crises in this country. Further escalation or a prolonged stalemate threatens to increase chances of a major war directly involving the great powers.

2. The Vietnamese have been struggling for centuries to develop a national identity and to establish their independence. They fought against the French colonial interests after World War II. Their effort is now entangled in the encounter between the conflicting international interests and ideologies of the United States, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and the North Vietnamese which threatens to destroy the Vietnamese population and culture. The great powers, along with the Saigon and Hanoi Governments and the National Liberation Front, all bear heavy responsibility for the present burdens of the Vietnamese people.

3. An increasing number of Americans are becoming critical of what they regard as a continuing Americanization of the war and its escalation, the high rate of civilian casualties, the limited support given to the Saigon Government by the South Vietnamese people, and widespread corruption among South Vietnamese military and public officials. There is growing anxiety over our country's loss of prestige and moral leadership due to the war. There also are continuing questions of our nation's obligations to treaty provisions which appear to conflict with one another. While many persons support the efforts of the American Government to secure a non-communist South as essential to United States' national interest, others question whether our national interest requires such extensive involvement in the area. Numerous voices are raising serious questions relating to the morality and justice of the conflict.

4. As delegates to the Fourth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, we share the above concerns. We do so as loyal citizens, but also as Christians whose first allegiance is to God under whose judgment the policies and actions of all nations must pass. We recognize that military power is necessary for national security. But we believe that the use of military power must be guided by an emphasis on human rights and values, by a desire to provide the stability through which justice and human community can be pursued. The tragic ambiguity of any military action is that it tends to ruin the created order, to subordinate other values to military necessity, and to destroy a nation's population and social order.

5. We commend the Government of the United States for its unilateral de-escalation of the war which paved the way for the beginning of preliminary discussions in Paris, and urge that every responsible effort be made to secure a cease-fire agreement at the earliest possible date. We support a settlement of the conflict in a manner that recognizes the essential interests of all parties involved, including adequate guarantees for the safety of those who supported either side.

6. Shifting public moods of optimism and despair do not advance the cause of peace. We caution the members of The American Lutheran Church and our fellow citizens against undue impatience with the pace of the Paris talks and subsequent peace negotiations. The conflicting interests of the warring parties and the uncertainties surrounding our national elections tend to make the negotiating process move slowly. The search for peace involves harsh choices with often imponderable consequences. Our nation is called upon to exercise both determination to establish a just peace and reasonable patience in pursuit of such a peace.

7. We encourage continued re-examination of the foreign policy of our Government. Public discussion needs to consider the role of the United States in international affairs and the requirements of our national interest. Christians as well as other citizens must share responsibility for helping to define the objectives of foreign policy and to subject its operation to critical review.

8. In closing our observations on Vietnam 1968, we reaffirm the closing observation expressed by the Third General Convention in these words:

As an assembly of The American Lutheran Church, therefore, we urge our people to study the issues and express themselves to their leaders in government. We urge our pastors, congregations, individual members, indeed, the nation as a whole, to turn to God in fervent intercessory prayer and genuine repentance for the widespread spiritual apathy presently characterizing our nation, recognizing that even though the blame for this conflict is widely shared, nevertheless, no nation involved in its solution has a right to expect to find a sound course of action leading to an end to this or any such conflict apart from such prayer, repentance and spiritual renewal. Let no corporate worship service be complete without the intercessory paragraphs of "The Prayer of the Church," or some adaptations of these petitions for governmental leaders and for world peace. We urge that on Thanksgiving Day and on Christmas Day special additional intercessions be made that God make plain to the leaders of the nations the means by which they might become His agents in bringing to Vietnam and other troubled nations that concord and harmony which we believe God wills for this world.

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