



October 7

Commemoration: Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, pastor in North America, 1787

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (an anglicization of Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg) (September 6, 1711 – October 7, 1787), was a German Lutheran pastor sent to North America as a missionary, requested by Pennsylvania colonists.

Integral to the founding of the first Lutheran church body or denomination in North America, Muhlenberg is considered the patriarch of the Lutheran Church in the United States. Muhlenberg and his wife Anna Maria had a large family, several of whom had a significant impact on colonial life in North America as pastors, military officers, and politicians. His and Anna Maria's descendants continued to be active in Pennsylvania and national political life.

Muhlenberg was born in 1711 at Einbeck, to Nicolaus Melchior Mühlenberg and Anna Maria Kleinschmid in the German state of Hanover. He studied theology at the Georg-August University of Göttingen. As a student, Muhlenberg came under the influence of the Pietist movement through fellow students from Einbeck who had worked at the Francke Foundations in Halle (Saale), an important Pietist institution. With two other men, Muhlenberg started a charity school in Göttingen that eventually became an orphanage.

After completing his studies in spring 1738, Muhlenberg taught at the Historic Orphanage of the Francke Foundations. He was mentored by its director, the Pietist theologian Gotthilf August Francke, son of the institution's founder, August Hermann Francke, and a professor at the University of Halle. Muhlenberg was ordained in Leipzig in 1739, and served as assistant minister and director of the orphanage at Grosshennersdorf from 1739 to 1741. In 1741 he was sent by Gotthilf August Francke, son of August Hermann Francke and his follower as director of the Francke Foundations to serve German speaking congregations in Pennsylvania. In 1742 he emigrated to North America in response to a request from Lutherans in Pennsylvania. He essentially founded the Lutheran Church as an institution there.