



WOMEN IN  
CHURCH AND  
SOCIETY  
THE LUTHERAN  
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

# Women on the Move – Her Story:



*Miss Gertrude Sovik speaking at Christuskirche (Salsburg, -Austria). LWF Photo Archives*

<b>Name:</b>	Gertrude Sovik
<b>Country of origin:</b>	USA
<b>Date of birth:</b>	21.10.1907, in China
<b>Date of death:</b>	23.03.1992, in the USA
<b>Church:</b>	Evangelical Lutheran Church USA
<b>Period of Mandate:</b>	Supervisor of the USA resettlement for LWF in Austria First woman in the field for the LWF

**Short biography:** *From LWF News release 12/1957:* Miss Gertrude Sovik, supervisor from USA, resettlement for LWF in Austria is leaving her work with the Federation, 30 June 1957 after seven years of service to return to her home in Northfield, Minnesota. For the coming year, she is also planning to work as assistant to the director of the Alumni Association at Saint Olaf College in Northfield. On the occasion of her departure from the LWF World Service, during a dinner given in Vienna in her honor by the Austrian staff, The Rev. Theodore Althof, LWF Senior Representative in Austria said: "Miss Sovik dedicated herself not only to her work but to everyone around her who was in need of love and affection and material help almost to the point of her complete exhaustion". From her office in Salzburg, Miss Sovik has personally supervised the resettlement of nearly 3000 refugees in Austria to the United States and aided in the resettlement of others to different countries. She was in charge of the LWF sponsored program in 1953 of resettling "hard core" refugees from Trieste to Sweden, most of them aged persons. She has worked for months and even seven years with individual cases helping them meet the necessary requirements for US immigration. During the Hungarian crisis, she set up an office in Camp Roeder near Salzburg to interview and help process Hungarian Lutherans emigrating to America.

*From LWF News release No 32-33/1955:* "The 1000<sup>th</sup> RRA visa issued in Austria: the 1000<sup>th</sup> LWF refugee from Austria emigrating to the United States under the Refugee Relief Act was granted his visa this week according to a report received today from Gertrude Sovik, LWF/World Service resettlement officer in Salzburg Austria. 10-year old George Sent was the recipient and the and his family will be leaving shortly for their new home in the United States. The total number of RRA visa issued in Germany is now 2585. However the German case load is several times that of Austria and therefore the Austrian figure is considered quite high. Resettlement workers believe that the desire for emigration is much stronger in Austria than in Germany mainly because refugees in Austria fear they will be repatriated behind the iron Curtain despite promises from the government and assurances from voluntary agencies that this will not happen. Economic conditions are also at a lower standard in Austria than in Germany. Of an estimated 500,000 refugees coming into Austria after the war, some 68,000 were Lutheran. Through July of 1955, LWF/World Service had resettled 8,518 of these under several resettlement schemes in different countries. At present the main emphasis is on the RRA which will run until late next fall. By then, the Lutheran Refugee Service in New York hopes to have resettled 15,000 refugees from Europe, mainly Austria and Germany, in the United States".



*The 1000<sup>th</sup> refugee. LWF Photo Archives*

Born of American missionary parents in Hankow, China, Miss Sovik had travelled around the world from China over Russia, through the United States and back before she was five years old. She attended Saint Olaf College and was graduated with a bachelor of Arts degree in 1931. She studied for short periods at the Universities of Detroit, Iowa and Minnesota in following years, majoring in physical education and school administration. In 1931, she became an instructor in German at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota for one year before teaching physical education at Saint Olaf College until 1935. She then returned to China for six years where she taught at the American School until 1941. Back in the States, she taught German at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa (1941-1943) and then worked for the American Red Cross (1943-45).

In 1946, Miss Sovik went to China for the last time and taught again at the American School until 1949 when she was forced to leave with the advance of the communists. She joined the Lutheran World Federation staff in 1950 and has served in Austria since then.