

The FOX VALLEY LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL  
PLANNING COMMITTEE

with attention paid to the  
founding purpose

Lutheranism in America  
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June 07, 1991  
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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
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## Introduction

My Grandma Wierschke attended Wrightstown High School in the early 1920's, Grandpa did not. Both of Grandma's high school age children attended high school (one at Wrightstown, my father at Northwestern Preparatory School, although he did not then follow into the full-time work of the Wisconsin Synod). All of Grandma's grandchildren received their high school diplomas from Fox Valley Lutheran High School.

This development in the Wierschke family history made me wonder how did FVL get there? The four years I attended I had just always reckoned that it had always been there (actually it first opened its doors in 1953). And also what was the purpose of this institution?

As I began work on this paper I called one of my FVL professors who had just written his doctoral thesis on Lutheran secondary education. I asked him what the "purpose" of FVL was. He (now I realize why) whimsically responded to the effect that "who really knows?, the standard reply in all the Handbooks is for a sound Christian secondary education." This report is an investigation of the founding of FVL, particularly the work of the Planning Committee, with a special eye cast in the direction of understanding a purpose. It also may be regarded as an education in whimsicalness.

Tenor of the Times

When did the interest in Lutheran secondary education arise? The majority of students served in the beginning years and well into the 1960's at Northwestern in Watertown as well as at Dr. Martin Luther campus in New Ulm were students for high school education. However the interest goes back even further. In a promotional tract "The Fathers Cared" the Valley Lutheran H. S. Planning Committee cited this newspaper notice:

We, the undersigned, intend to establish an institution of instruction and education, which distinguishes itself from ordinary elementary schools, especially by this, that it comprises, besides the ordinary branches, all 'gymnasium sciences' (that is High School and Junior College branches) necessary to a true Christian and scientific education,.....

Perry County August 13, 1839<sup>1</sup>

However, the document in our circles often acknowledged as the trumpet call for Lutheran secondary education is the Special Committee on Education report submitted to the Synodical Committee October 1926 and presented in the 1927 Synod Convention.<sup>2</sup>

H. Koller Moussa was Secretary for that Special Committee. Taking the side for Lutheran secondary education was not new for Moussa, as an editor for the Northwestern Lutheran in the early 1920's he had overseen a deluge of articles concerning education and he was a driving force behind the outgrowth of Winnebago Lutheran Academy from his St. Peter parish in Fon du Lac (1925). He was an apt spokesman to blaze a trail for Lutheran secondary education as well as to signal the charge against state sponsored schooling. In a 1923 commentary in the Northwestern Lutheran he zeroed in on the heart of the discussion:

...the principal factor in education which molds the desires and the whole conception of life in a definite way....that factor is religion. The state is forever unfitted to act as the provider of education for the learners of the land because it knows nothing about<sup>3</sup> the soul of its citizens and isn't suppose to know.....

The fact that in the minds of many Lutherans the State was unfit to educate in the complete sense of the word, raised greater alarm in the 1920's because now more Lutheran children were going on to high school and even perhaps on to college. A 1925 Northwestern Lutheran article estimated that "every seventh child of school-age in congregations that have parochial schools, attends a public high school."<sup>4</sup> With nearly 15% of the children going on to high school could the dangers of the public high school be ignored? The same Northwestern Lutheran article asked:

Can we, with an easy and clear conscience, expose our children to the dangers of the teachings of evolution and of the equally hazardous syncretism, which claims that all religions, creeds, and beliefs are alike?<sup>5</sup>

Pastor Walter Hoepner would echo the same concerns some 20 years later when he declared, "Woe unto us, if we send them to the public high schools, and they learn the wrong thing!"<sup>6</sup>

However, an article that perhaps best embodied the gravest concerns and fears of the times is found in the 1925 Northwestern Lutheran, "Why a Christian May Not Send His Child to the Public School." The author chose 2 Co 6:17, "Therefore, come out from them and be separate," as his motto. He went on to develop three major points:

- 1) God entrusted the education of the Christian child to the parents
- 2) the public school by its very nature is anti-Christ
- 3) the immoral atmosphere that prevails in public school

Much of what the author stated proceeded from valid concerns: evolu-

tion, materialism, humanism, work righteousness which are diametrically opposed to Christ and his message were part of the public school curriculum (as they are still today); striving to establish morals and values without Christ is indeed immoral in the proper sense. But was the conclusion valid? No matter how beneficial, no matter how sanctified a judgment, telling New Testament Christians what they may or may not do in the realm of adiaphoron is still legalism. Besides, such public school bashing, if intended more deeply than overstatement,<sup>7</sup> while not only belittling the education of Moses under Pharoah and Daniel under Nebuchadnezzar and much of the noble natural wisdom of Proverbs wouldn't have seemed to be the most beneficial method of promoting Lutheran High Schools. But this was the tenor of the times.

A more constructive approach toward Lutheran secondary education was hailed in the 1927 Northwestern Lutheran. An entire conference of Lutheran teachers submitted a statement promoting Christian education especially singling out the necessity of it during "the period of adolescence when modern youth is confronted with dangers too numerous to mention."<sup>8</sup> A comprehensive and somewhat prophetic article had appeared two years earlier (in fact two issues before the "Why a Christian May Not Send" article) that outlined the needs, blessings and even organizational structure for the emerging Lutheran High School, "Reasons for Establishing Lutheran High Schools." While condemning the dangers of public education it also detailed the great positive blessings to church, school, family and state that the Lutheran high school would engender. It noted also that the Lutheran high school was merely the logical continua-

tion of the parochial elementary school.

It is uncanny, though not surprising, how the same arguments and assertions of the 1920's would reemerge in the 1940's during the discussions leading up to the founding of Fox Valley Lutheran High School, maybe they read their old Northwestern Lutherans.

But how did this background affect the formation of Fox Valley Lutheran (FVL)? What slant did it project for the developing high school's purpose? No doubt much discussion was generated from the public vs. private debate. But how could good conscientious Lutherans concerned about the necessary religious factor needed in education and the obvious dangers and shortcomings displayed in the public schools avoid establishing a high school largely in opposition to the offering of the public school, their faith demanded it. The background indicates Lutheran high schools were established for the same reasons Lutheran elementary schools were. One parent recalled, "We just wanted Christian education for our children."<sup>9</sup>

The bond between elementary and secondary education is extremely close in the story of FVL. Principal Harold Warnke in his history of FVL credits the Consolodation School Committee for germinating the idea of an area Lutheran high school<sup>10</sup> (the committee was unsuccessful in bringing about a consolodated elementary school).

The topic was also discussed in pastoral conferences. In October 1945 Pastor Hoepner was asked to deliver a paper on the subject.

He recalls the event this way:

....three younger pastors of the Fox Valley Pastoral Conference asked me to write a paper to be read to the Conference, presenting the need and desirability of starting a Lutheran high school in the area. The paper was duly written, read, and discussed. Some of the pastors were wholeheartedly for the proposal, some lukewarm or indifferent.<sup>11</sup>

The Consolodation School Committee was encouraged enough by the paper's reception to call together area Synodical Conference congregations for what would be the first official meeting to consider a Lutheran high school for the Fox Valley area. The meeting on March 10, 1946 at 2 p.m. at St. Paul's in Appleton was attended by 250 interested persons, representing 25 congregations. At the meeting Pastor Hoepner again delivered his paper entitled, "Why We Should Have a Lutheran High School in the Fox River Valley," there was lively floor discussion following. At that meeting three courses of action were taken which will also serve as the outline for the remainder of this paper:

- 1) A Planning Committee was elected
- 2) Each congregation was asked to appoint one ambassador to meet with the Planning Committee when called upon -- contact man
- 3) Pastor Hoepner's paper along with a note of explanation were to be sent and read to every congregation

#### Trying to Convince Ourselves

The task that lay ahead for the Planning Committee was a daunting one. They were venturing into largely uncharted waters. True, by 1946 there were two Lutheran high schools in the Wisconsin Synod and six more Missouri (Chicago, Fort Wayne, Racine, Oregon City, Fort Lauderdale and Detroit) ran solely. But the Planning Committee's venture was entirely different for the Wisconsin Synod. The oldest Wisconsin Synod high school was Milwaukee Lutheran H.S. founded in 1903 in cooperation with the Missouri Synod; Winnebago Lutheran Acadamy 1925, undertaken for the most part by St. Peter Fon du Lac, rode high on the shoulders of Pastors HK Moussa and Paul G E Bergemann, in 1925 Pastor Bergemann was President of the Wisconsin

Synod. By contrast the Valley Lutheran High School Planning Committee under strong lay leadership would have to weld a group of largely Wisconsin Synod congregations (after May 1952 solely Wisconsin Synod) together to make a go of it. The comments of Pastor Hoepner reflect this daunting task, "We sat through many planning committee meetings, often till midnight, trying to convince ourselves that it could be done!"<sup>12</sup>

What they may have lacked in confidence they compensated for in determination. Their Planning Committee met four times in the first month of its existence to hammer out a constitution and by-laws. They would continue to meet faithfully, 29 times in the 2 years 2 months of their service. But throughout its existence that nagging need to "convince ourselves that it could be done" would reemerge. A full year later the minutes of the First Anniversary Rally, March 16, 1947, conclude by stating "a discussion for and against the promotion of a Lutheran high school followed the above reports." Seven months later the minutes for October 10, 1947 again state "the advisability and feasibility of continuing the proposed Lutheran High School project made up the discussion for the greater part of the meeting." And barely three months before the Association's Articles of Organization were approved the minutes of February 8 read, "A general discussion prevailed concerning the feasibility of the establishment of the high school and the interest or lack of interest registered by the various congregations." This detailing of the Committee's indeciveness is in no way intended as harsh criticism, just the opposite. In spite of the uncertainty and obstacles, they continued to press ahead, determined to achieve their objective, a Lutheran high school for the Fox Valley.



When your own efforts bog down one alternative that comes to mind is to talk to someone who has already done it. The Planning Committee found such a man in Dr. E.W. Anderson. Dr. Anderson was Principal of Detroit Lutheran H.S., organized in 1944. No doubt he invigorated the hearts of the Planning Committee and 700 other high school supporters when he spoke at a rally June 23, 1946. His address encouraged them with the fact that "Christian education is the only answer, explaining that it is a continuous process which not only adds wisdom but receives spiritual understanding with it."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Anderson would be called upon again in the summer of 1948 to canvass and solicit support and funds from area congregations in the name of the Fox Valley H.S. Association.

It's hard to estimate, or even imagine, the efforts exerted by the Planning Committee in those early years. They organized pot-lucks, spoke to men, ladies and youth organizations in congregations, they employed contact men and orchestrated support committees in congregations, they mailed, they called, they held endless meetings. However, the feather in their cap, at least in the public relations field, has to be the September 21, 1947 outdoor Rally. 1150 attended the event at Goodland Field, there were two mass choirs, a 220-voice children and 180-voice adult choir, and the Northwestern College band played. Dr. Kiessler, the guest speaker, affirmed the objectives of the Committee and all interested in Christian education by pointing out:

training of children, our most precious heritage, is the heart of the church program, and secular training must be supplemented with Christian training if we are to do the will of God.....if we have faith, the job of building a high school will be a small one...<sup>14</sup>

It must also have been assuring to hear Dr. Kiessler report that

Synod gave their blessing to their project and NWC would even offer a course for high school teachers this term.<sup>15</sup>

At this time special recognition is due Mr. A.W. Ponath. An attorney in Appleton, his office often served as conference room and meeting place. Besides serving as chairman of the Planning Committee and president of the Board of Regents the first two years, until his membership in a contested Missouri Synod mission in Appleton and the whole Synodical Conference question overshadowed the Association, he carried on voluminous personal correspondence in his position and exhibited untiring zeal and dedication to the high school project. The debt of appreciation owed to Mr. Ponath and all who worked with the Planning Committee is insurmountable. Even while they struggles to convince themselves that the high school project could be done, it was their job to forge ahead and convince others. Their role was vital in guiding and coordinating the high school project as will be seen in the following two sections.

#### Getting the Word Out

The group that had gathered on March 10, 1946 had asked each congregation to appoint one ambassador to work with the Planning Committee, a contact man. By definition a contact man is "to assist in distributing information, enrolling interested members....collecting dues....meet at intervals....to get first hand information of the progress."<sup>16</sup> The Planning Committed early on acknowledged the importance of these men in order to get the word out to the congregations. At their fourth meeting (April 25, 1946) a formal invitation was sent to notify the contact men of every congregation to attend the May 5th meeting which would discuss the proposed

constitution, 30 contact men representing 30 congregation were present on May 5th. Contact men would continue to take interest in the work of the Planning Committee, though attendance would fluctuate, it wasn't uncommon for the minutes to take note of contact men who attended even without special notification. Some were more zealous than others, and at times it seemed pastors usurped the responsibilities, but it was a healthy way of involving the congregations. Although the congregation reports the contact men presented at the First Anniversary Meeting often contained the phrases "some work," "plans," "not yet," "support will be given," the work was progressing, the Word was getting out.<sup>17</sup> Evidently the conscientious labor of the initial contact men warranted the following decision:

A motion was made and seconded to the effect that the head contact man from each congregation be appointed as a member of the Planning Committee at Large with the right to vote. Motion carried.<sup>18</sup>

To this day the Fox Valley Federation exercises a similar policy.

But not only did contact men need convincing so did congregations. Some congregation members readily recognized the dangers of the public school, others needed their awareness heightened. A flier of the time attempted to achieve just that:

It is in the public high school, with its doctrine of evolution, its worldly philosophies of life, and its emphasis on human achievement and human "advancement," where many a Christian youth begins to doubt the doctrines of the Bible.<sup>19</sup>

But interestingly there were also unique circumstances. The situation that existed in Town Freedom of the 1940's is hard to comprehend these days, Pastor Hoepner recalls:

As pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church.....I was disturbed by the fact that none of the children

continued their education after graduation from the eighth grade. The reason was that the public high at Freedom consisted mostly of Roman Catholics and was felt to be under the domination of<sup>20</sup> the Catholic parish of the village of Freedom.

The need was unescapable, but could the area congregations be convinced that establishing a Lutheran high school could be accomplished? Their question mark evolved out of the dollar sign, but there were many faces to the money question. Foremost on everyone's list was the prohibitive price tag. It sticks out as a glaring flaw on the Planning Committee's record to have published in promotional literature a starting calculation for a 400 student school at the cost of \$900,000, a hefty sum still today. Such an ambitious goal only renewed the fears of suffering through financial difficulties that WLA had experienced in its beginning year during the Great Depression. Other building projects competed with the Planning Committee's financial drive, remember the committee that fostered the whole high school issue had been called to administer rapidly expanding elementary schools. Support would come slowly, and not from the congregational level, but by God's grace it would come when it was needed.

One situation worthy of taking note of is St. Paul Appleton. As "the" church in Appleton it would be considered the flagship of any project in the Appleton area. But a number of concerns moved St. Paul congregation to take a backseat in the planning stages of the high school project. For one they were in the midst of their own building project and there may also have been a twinge of fear of the "St. Peter syndrome."<sup>21</sup> Basically if the project were in trouble they, like St. Peter Fon du Lac would be called upon to

take the lion's share. At the March 16th Anniversary Rally the contact man for St. Paul Appleton reported:

The congregation voted not to take part in the support of the project as a whole. A meeting of interested persons in the congregation will be held soon.

Since this was a characteristic response (though at times not presented so uprightly) the 1925 article "Reasons for Establishing Lutheran High Schools" would prove to be prophetic in detailing organizational structure:

A good working minority is usually better than a slow moving, unwilling majority....."button-holing" your man, working in harmony with other like-minded friends. This may lead to forming a Lutheran high school association that will start and support a school independent of any local congregation. But the final upshot must be: high schools owned and supported and managed by the congregation.<sup>22</sup>

History speaks for itself, this is the course the Fox Valley group followed. And in 1958 the Association became a Federation of congregations.

The effort to convince congregations was often initiated by a visit to convince the pastor that the project could be accomplished. The minutes of the Planning Committee contained a "Report on Visits and Reactions of Pastors." A sampling of evaluations (names withheld since this is already a second-hand evaluation) will demonstrate that either the pastors held the same concerns as their congregations or they represented their congregation's interests very well.

Assured me that he was for the project even tho his congregation has a Christian Day School building program under consideration.

Expressed misgivings concerning the size of the project at first, but finally agreed to support the project as planned.

....certain misgivings about the large amount being asked for....

Own building program had him scared, Now is willing to go along...

People are reticent to begin work.

Needs a bomb of dynamite. Gets very little done.....

For all the concerns and misgivings, it should be noted that almost every pastor registered interest, offered support and offered ways to the Planning Committee to get the word out to his congregation. The Fox River Valley was blessed with pastors who saw the need and were concerned about Christian education, the number of Christian Day Schools attested to this fact.

It was just for this reason that another attitude was prevalent, however in greatest quantity among the Planning Committee: IT COULDN'T FAIL! Pastor Lehninger rationalized, humanly speaking, his whole-hearted support for the high school project to this realization (the phrasing is also borrowed from him). As a member of the Planning Committee, member of Board of Regents, even serving half a term as its president, he was well acquainted with the demands of starting a Lutheran high school. However, he strongly felt the area's number of communicants, number of school-age children and rate of growth (Pastor Lehninger founded a mission on Appleton's South side, Riverview) could more than adequately support the project. A brief excursion into the statistical record will demonstrate that the numbers back up Pastor Lehninger's convictions.

The statistics consider the list of congregations participating at the July 12, 1946 Planning Committee Meeting.

<u>Year</u>	<u># Children enrolled</u>	<u># of Christian Day Schools</u>
1927	873	12
1936	904	10
1946	1171	13 (14 congregations)
1952	1388	13 (16 congregations) <sup>23</sup>

The numbers indicate a growing pool of prospective students for an area Lutheran high school (it consequently demonstrates why a Consolodation School Committee was originally undertaken). The 10 years prior to the first Promotional Meeting for the area Lutheran high school saw a 30% increase in the number of children attending Christian day schools. There would be another 20% increase by time FVL first opened its doors. Also at this time missions were opened in Appleton, Kimberly, Neenah (2), and Christian day schools began in Wrightstown and Menasha. It was a period of growth that would continue to fuel Fox Valley Lutheran H.S.'s expansion in the 60's and 70's.

While the work of convincing individuals and congregations of the need and feasibility of the high school was undertaken another question arose, what would this high school do? What was its purpose? That "Report on Visits and Reactions of Pastors" gives us a glimpse of what some area pastors were envisioning.

....favorably inclined toward the junior high unit on the high school campus.

Interested primarily in establishing an Acadamy of the Synod....

In favor of amalgamating Winnebago and Appleton under Synodical control.

Very much interested....local Catholic control in public schools make people ripe for action [another congregation besides Town Freedom]

....children now attend four different high schools....  
stress agricultural program....

The wide variety of opinions suggests another important task of the Planning Committee, cover all the bases.

### Covering All the Bases

From the outset steps were taken to insure that all sides of the high school issue were publicized. When the gathering at the Preliminary Meeting, March 16, 1946, requested Pastor Hoepner's paper be distributed to every area congregation they also wanted attached a letter explaining how this evolved. At their first meeting, the Planning Committee added another page detailing the trend toward Lutheran high schools. When published that first promotional booklet entitled "How to Build the Future!" totaled eight pages. Additional promotional materials not only included scriptural admonitions but also cost estimates, proposed curricula and stewardship principles, they attempted to cover all the bases.

A conscientious effort was also made to reach the people. The services of the Minneapolis based Lutheran Journal were secured. Local editions of this monthly paper carried Synodical Conference news of interest with the back page reserved for the sponsoring group. The first issue of the Fox Valley Lutheran H.S. edition was sent out September 1948, but by May of 1949 there was movement to establish the Association's own newsletter. On May 21, 1950 the Fox Valley H.S. Association commissioned the quarterly production of the "Christian Beacon" (not a bad name considering the other choice was the "Valley Trumpeter"). Also it might be noted that the Fox Valley group received favorable press from the Post-Crescent,



Appleton's daily. Later in the 1950's Melvin Prah1 would attribute the paper's responsive coverage to a St. Paul Appleton member on the Post-Crescent staff who regularly called him for news releases. In the days of the Planning Committee I would have to credit A.W. Ponath's public relations skills for the coverage.

There was one more area the Planning Committee had to cover that they seemingly overlooked, that is till some visitors appeared on their doorstep. The May 9, 1947 minutes have a pencil scrawled note to include mention of the "Fon du Lac visitors and their mission." A page is appended to the minutes that reads:

During the meeting of Friday May 9, 1947, three visitors from the Fon du Lac Winnebago Lutheran Acadamy came in unexpectedly....Their mission was to discuss with us the feasibility and practicability of organizing another Lutheran high school so close to the Fon du Lac Acadamy, especially since officers of Synod have regarded the existence of the Winnebago Acadamy as a burden to Synod instead of a help and blessing to it.

At their May 22nd meeting the Planning Committee requested the pastors of the Committee to prepare a memorial to synod concerning the need for more high schools. It was agreed that the Fon du Lac visitors would be invited to discuss the proposed memorial at a June 9th meeting, the meeting eventually took place on June 16th.

Before we take a look at the proposed memorial it may be beneficial to review the Synod's track record in regard to the high school question. As mentioned in the background section the largest efforts of synodical school from the beginning were in the area of secondary education. The Special Committee on Education report presented to the 1927 Synod Convention however, called for a re-evaluation of the entire system. Recommendation III. of that report squarely addressed the secondary education issue:

III. The Synod should authorize and subsidize the establishment of preparatory schools, or academies, in many different parts of its territory, preferably according to conferences.<sup>24</sup>

In expounding on point III. the Special Committee offered three forms of organization. Two were partnership arrangements, Synod with either a federation of congregations or an association of members, Synod contributing about 25%. The third was more traditional, similar to the synodical preparatory system already in place. In assessing this recommendation it should be noted that the terms preparatory school and acadamy are used in contrast to commercial. The recommendation seems to promote what today we would call a "dual-purpose" school.

The Committee on Education's report was largely dealt with by a specially appointed committee. The committee distilled the report to four resolutions: the establishment of a fourth synodical secondary education institution located in the Dakota-Montana District, a request to temporarily provide subsidy to the Fon du Lac Acadamy, and two resolutions refering all further discussion to the General Synodical Committee's consideration. Synod accepted all but one of the special committee's resolutions, it tabled the subsidy to the Fon du Lac Acadamy.

This established a trend for the years to come. While it is true the Great Depression would squelch any grandiose expansion, Synod had already determined its intention to pursue the traditional preparatory system while rejecting to subsidize or actively promote the partnership arrangement in secondary education. The resolutions on the whole were a pale reflection of what was proposed by the original committee. In describing Synod's handling of the secondary

question Pastor Lehninger made use of a German phrase: Wir bleiben beim alten.<sup>25</sup> While it might often be used it is an especially appropriate description of the synodical backdrop afforded when the question of Fox Valley's area Lutheran high school entered the stage.

It should be noted in defense of the Synod's reluctance to act on the emerging high school question that the years following the 1927 Convention were extremely tough times for our church body. Pastor Hoepner graciously summarized the numerous crises:

There was no synodical enthusiasm to start more area high schools. The difficulty the synod had experienced in ridding itself of deficit spending and the debt of the depression years, the lingering remembrance of whole seminary graduation classes left idle in the late 30's, the repeated requests by Winnebago Lutheran Academy for synod subsidy, the debate whether the synod should retain or close its academy at Mobridge, South Dakota, all played a part, I believe, in the reluctance of many to encourage the formation of more area Lutheran high schools.<sup>26</sup>

But during the summer of 1947 it would be necessary to address the question of area Lutheran high schools. And it was about time.

That brings us back to the Memorial. There is an interesting historical footnote attached to the Memorial prepared by Fox Valley Lutheran H.S.'s Planning Committee, it appears there were two. The June 16th meeting did not approve a memorial but rather ordered that a redrafted memorial be sent to the Committee members (a number of the Planning Committee's pastoral members were unable to attend the June 16th meeting) for approval and then on to Synod. The reasons for the need to redraft are obvious, the two Memorials are worlds apart in tone and diplomatic tact (excerpts of each are presented in the Appendix). The redrafted Memorial was sent to Synod along with a copy endorsed by the Fox River Valley Delegate

Conference of the Northern Wisconsin District.

However, The Fox Valley Memorial was not the only one to be under consideration at Watertown in 1947. Memorials regarding establishment of area Lutheran high schools and academies were also received from New Ulm (in favor of an Arizona Academy), Winnebago at Fond du Lac, the Pacific Northwest, Nebraska and Milwaukee. [In 20 years there seems to have been a slight shift in terminology, academy is now used in contrast to general or area high school, the term preparatory is absent]. The 1947 Convention presented a Committee Report, chaired by Irwin Habeck, President of the Northern Wisconsin District and pastor at Weyauwega, that was adopted almost in its entirety. This report clearly drew the distinction between academies and general high schools. The general high schools were entirely on their own except for "a certain degree of supervision in matters of curricula" by the Synod's Board of Education.

The Report didn't come as a surprise, in fact the Report was much in line with the Planning Committee's redrafted Memorial. From its inception, the Fox Valley group, for the most part, had in mind a locally supported and maintained high school.<sup>27</sup> In fact the article of Temporary Organization passed at the first Promotional Meeting on March 10, 1946 clearly indicates this understanding:

WHEREAS, A community with over 15,000 communicant members, such as ours, has the material resources to establish and maintain a modern Lutheran high school, and.....

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we urge our congregations to authorize their delegates to join with the delegates of other congregations in the organization of an association for higher education whose purpose shall be the establish-<sup>28</sup>ment of a Lutheran high school

There is no mention of Synod and the model is such establishments in "other Lutheran centers."

There was a troubling aspect to the Convention of 1947 Report, however. Synod, it seems, intentionally and effectively distanced themselves from the emerging general high schools. But even more troubling than this was that the underlying motif of "burden" again appears:

III. A. We recognize the need of Christian education on the secondary school level. Even though we recognize the serious manpower shortage, nevertheless we encourage preliminary work looking toward the establishment of such high schools. 29

Establishment of general high schools is regarded as a drain on worker resources instead of an opportunity and source of replenishment. [Most distressing is that this attitude is voiced still today even amongst the outcry for area Lutheran high schools to produce workers.] The final outcome was that the entire high school question was placed into the hands of a committee.

Even though the 1947 Convention had resigned the issue to the bottomless pit of a committee, the question of general high schools would continue to arise. Just as in 1927 however, larger issues would overshadow the question, now it was the matter of the "Friendly Invitation," Scouting and the whole Synodical Conference strife. Through it all Fox Valley's Planning Committee continued to forge ahead.

The final base the Planning Committee needed to cover was the one of legality. May 26, 1948 is hailed as a highly important date in the history of FVL for it is on this date that an organizational meeting accepted the Articles of Organization, bringing The Fox Valley H.S. Association into being. Four days later the newly-elected Board of Regents would file the necessary papers with Madison and three weeks later the matter would be discussed and legally submitted

to the Northern Wisconsin District. There would still be some eleventh hour debate whether the high school should be a general high school or an academy, but now the organization was formed, the support system in place. In his FVL History Principal Warnke aptly drew this comparison at the establishment of the Association:

the infant was almost ready to stand on its own feet, although it experienced many difficulties before it began to walk steadily.<sup>30</sup>

A sampling of some of the difficulties on the horizon were the Synodical Conference strife, the subsequent resignations (two separate occasions, 1950 and again in 1959-CLC), inability to acquire a building for another 5 years, scarcity of funds and shortage of qualified teachers. There would still be many trying and testing days ahead.

### Conclusion

However under God's grace, Fox Valley Lutheran High School would open its doors on September 14, 1953 to 7 students (the eighth joined the following day). The dream of the Planning Committee became a reality through the tireless efforts of many dedicated lay persons, teachers and pastors of the Fox River Valley. What can we gain from this review of the activities of the Planning Committee? What legacy did the Planning Committee leave to its successors? Future Boards, Associations, and latter Federations, would emulate the same characteristic hard work, adaptability, resourcefulness and the vision to forge ahead when faced with adversity. There would continue to be the need for strong lay

leadership. As its halting funding and support in the early years would indicate, the project would never become the recipient of a mass movement, but rather strong individual efforts would be needed to accomplish the task. The dedicated service of so many lay persons is a testimony to this.

But what example was set when it came to determining the purpose of the high school? That ambiguous phrase "a sound Christian secondary education" again comes to mind, and it can be traced back to the Planning Committee, they employed it in the Articles of Organization. The phrase reflects the fact that a powerful incentive for the establishment of the area Lutheran high school was the desire and need to extend the parochial elementary school, by extension the high school assumed the same general, ambiguous, purpose as the elementary school. A further factor is to consider the support base. We've already mentioned ~~that~~ at the start the Fox Valley group considered themselves to be locally centered, it would continue to be a regional movement rather than synodical.<sup>31</sup>

By contrast a commentary in the Northwestern Lutheran in 1945 described the definite purpose of synodical academies to be

- 1) college preparation for pastors and teachers
- 2) a general Christian high school education<sup>32</sup>

The two systems appear to be mirror images of the other. The minutes of the discussion prior to the 1948 Northern Wisconsin District reveal this philosophy that the high school be "locally supported, but subsidized by Synod to the extent fo the number of acceptable students derived from such high schools for the ministry."<sup>33</sup>

An unofficial agreement seems to have been struck that the general high schools would handle schooling, the Synod worker training. But without synodical involvement in the high schools on any level, that meant the high schools were on their own in the field of worker training and recruitment also.<sup>34</sup> The contrasts between the two systems would only become more pronounced, the gap between the primary and secondary objectives would continue to widen.

The impact at first would be slight. Pastors who served on the Planning Committee strongly expressed their plans for the high school to prepare students to go on to synodical colleges. The Memorial to the Synod Convention in 1947 cited the "urgent need for more pastors and teachers" and the hope that the high schools would "serve as feeders" as reasons for sanctioning and promoting them. When classes were small, teachers strongly behind worker-training and a "preparatory" curriculum the only one available, Principal Warnke could boast "the percentage of graduates preparing themselves for full-time church work has averaged somewhere between 10 per cent and 25 per cent."<sup>35</sup>

But schools experience growing pains and as class sizes grew the opportunity for faculty-student interaction decreased, future faculty members would not all be as strongly behind worker-training, the broader curriculum attracted a more diversified student body and the student's home and spiritual life would fluctuate with society's. As a result of many factors, in recent years the number of students who have gone on to the worker training colleges of the Wisconsin Synod has decreased sharply.

A survey sent to the faculty of Fox Valley Lutheran (and



several other area Lutheran high schools) while it revealed the characteristic primary emphasis of an area Lutheran high school on "sound Christian secondary education"<sup>36</sup> also revealed that a vast majority rated "encouraging students' desire to prepare for full-time work (enter DMLC or NWC)" as a priority or concern (see Appendix for sample survey). Is this an indication that the spirit is willing but the structure not available? True, surveys may provide inaccurate or incomplete conclusions (especially when unscientifically administered), the influence of individual departments (most notably the Guidance Department) and faculty members must be considered, the spiritual condition of students / parents and the subsequent home life are variables.

However one observation gained from reviewing the establishment of Fox Valley Lutheran High School is to recognize the historic priority of worker-training. Area Lutheran high schools are largely left on their own and without a regimented structure or designated personnel or majority interest, recruitment for worker-training depends on individual efforts<sup>37</sup>, it often runs along the laissez-faire principle, "The opportunities are there, but its up to you." If area Lutheran high schools are to contribute to the growing demand for workers the partnerships, until now neglected, between the general high schools and those designated to carry out worker training must be formed. Together they can strive to raise awareness, to actively promote, to establish personnel and structure needed otherwise performance, humanly speaking, will only continue to deteriorate. The fact that all this is in the hand of our gracious God is understood and comforting, but there seemingly are consider-

ations under our responsibility that need to be addressed before future plans may be plotted.

END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>The Fathers Cared!, p.2
- <sup>2</sup>Principal Harld Warnke credited the essay of Prof. Lehninger to the 1923 Synod Convention for its strong emphasis on the necessity of secondary education.
- <sup>3</sup>HKM, "The Cost of the Public Schools," Northwestern Lutheran, 1923, p.85.
- <sup>4</sup>Fr. M, "Reasons For Establishing Lutheran High Schools," Northwestern Lutheran, 1925, p.265.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.263.
- <sup>6</sup>Walter Hoepner, How to Build the Future!, p.6 (Spring 1946).
- <sup>7</sup>The article went as far as to say, "sending our children to the world for their bringing up and allowing the world to set standards of education.....means then, sending our children to the devil for their education," p.314.
- <sup>8</sup>J.B. "Lutheran High Schools," Northwestern Lutheran, 1927, p.291.
- <sup>9</sup>Melvin Prah, interview at his home, Green Bay, WI, April 9, 1991.
- <sup>10</sup>Principal Harold Warnke, FVL Handbook: History, 1967, 1.11 p.1.
- <sup>11</sup>Walter Hoepner, correspondence May 13, 1991.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup>"700 at Rally," Appleton Post-Crescent, June 24, 1946.
- <sup>14</sup>"Lutherans Will Raise Fund," Appleton Post-Crescent, Sept.22, 1947.
- <sup>15</sup>Evidently the high school teacher program fell through. Mr. Kaniess related an incident in 1955 when in desparate need of teachers he and Principal Warnke asked President Kowalke concerning some Northwestern graduates who weren't intending to go on to the Seminary. Kowalke is reported to have responded that all collegiates were going on to the Seminary but there were two students who had flunked out the previous year who would make suitable high school teachers.

END NOTES (cont'd)

- 16 "What is a Contact Man?" publicity mailing.
- 17 One conditional response that should be saved for the historical record was made by the contact man from Emmanuel, Greenville: To date \$2300 in pledges have been solicited by Committee [a sizeable sum, 20% of the total]. Some members have promised pledges as long as they live when the high school actually opens its doors. May the members have known the doors wouldn't open for another 6 years? Minutes March 16, 1947
- 18 Planning Committee Minutes, Sept. 5, 1947.
- 19 "Why a Lutheran High School?" publicity mailing.
- 20 Hoepner correspondence.
- 21 Pastor Lehninger in an interview echoed the same position taken by Beaver Associates (a funding organization) in August 1950, that the largest problem causing a lack of funding was the lack of support from two of the areas largest congregations (St. Paul was one). Pastor Lehninger respected Pastor Brandt's position and understood the situation. He went on to say when St. Paul did become active they "jumped in with both feet."
- 22 "Reasons for Establishing," p.265.
- 23 Wisconsin Synod Statistical Reports, 1927 (auf Deutsch), 1936, 1946, 1952.
- 24 Wisconsin Synod Convention 1927, p.28.
- 25 Pastor Ernst Lehninger, interview at WLCFS office, April 30, 1991.
- 26 Pastor Hoepner correspondence.
- 27 It seems to me that the Planning Committee developed their vision of the high school more along Missouri's pattern than Moussa's 1927 proposal. At the first Planning Committee meeting the pamphlet "The Lutheran High School" was suggested, I assume this was published by the Missouri Synod. Also a number of the original Planning Committee members were strong Missouri men: A.W. Ponath-president, Pastor Paul G Bergmann-vice-president, and Omer Schroeder.
- 28 Temporary Organization For an Association of Congregations, March 10, 1946.
- 29 Committee Report, Wisconsin Synod Convention 1947, p.78.
- 30 Warnke, 1.11 p.2.

- 31 Gerhard Kaniess, Conference video.
- 32 "Why Lutheran Academies?" Northwestern Lutheran, August 5, 1945,  
p. .
- 33 Minutes Special Meeting of the Board of Regents, June 14, 1948.
- 34 It is my personal opinion that Synod really missed the boat when they distanced themselves from the general high schools, they lost opportunity for valuable influence and direction, especially in the field of worker training. This is a partnership that needs to be cultivated, it is not too late.
- 35 Warnke, 1.14 p.4
- 36 The results from the four high schools surveyed were comparable however, on Question 3 the FVL totals were noticeably less positive.
- 37 Pastor Plitzuweit, Principal of Fox Valley Lutheran H.S. indicated that Area Lutheran High Schools are dedicated to doing "better" in the field of worker training. The FVL Board has recently demonstrated this by calling workers with the consideration of how they can promote worker training. They are working on it.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Warnke, Harold. Fox Valley Lutheran High School Handbook: History, 1967.

#### Correspondence

Delmar Brick, May 13, 1991.

Walter Hoepner, May 13, 1991.

#### Interviews

Gerhard Kaniess, at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, April 9, 1991.

Ernst Lehninger, at WLCFS office, April 30, 1991.

James Plitzuweit, at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, April 9, 1991.

Melvin Prah1, at home Green Bay, WI, April 9, 1991.

## Minutes

Fox Valley Lutheran High School Planning Committee  
March 10, 1946 -- May 26, 1948.

Fox Valley Lutheran High School Board of Regents  
May 30, 1948 -- December 8, 1950.

Wisconsin Synod Preceedings 1927 -- 1955.

Wisconsin Synod Statistical Reports 1927, 1936, 1946, 1952.

## News Articles

Lutheran Journal September 1948 -- September 1949

### Northwestern Lutheran

"The Cost of the Public Schools," 1923.

"Lutheran High Schools," 1927.

"Reasons For Establishing Lutheran High Schools," 1925.

" Why a Christian May Not Send His Child to the Public School,"  
1925.

"Why Lutheran Academies?" August 5, 1945.

### Appleton Post-Crescent

"Lutheran Will Raise Fund," Sept. 22 1947.

"700 at Rally," June 24, 1946.

## Promotional Materials

The Fathers Cared!

Fox Valley Lutheran High School

How to Build the Future? (Spring 1946)

What is a Contact Man?

Why and How of our Valley Lutheran High School

Why a Lutheran High School?

## Survey

Area Lutheran High School Survey: Fox Valley, Winnebago, Nebraska  
and California.

MEMORIAL COMPARISON

OLD

NEW

BUILDING

Synod...has determined on a large building program....to serve many, many years -- and the million dollars given.... be used in the wisest way possible.....

....before any definite committments be made in rebuilding the Synod's existing schools....

DORMITORY SEPARATION

....neither practical nor wholesome to crowd our teenage high school students...

no mention

WORKER TRAINING

....many more students could be won for our preaching and teaching needs if preparatory courses were made available to them closer at home.....

In view of the Synod's urgent need for more pastors and teachers....

SYNOD'S ROLE

....the Synod to establish more Lutheran high schools.... Synod provide also for the secular education of the laity.. Synod supervise the curriculum.. such Lutheran High Schools be maintained by the territories which they serve.....

Synod to commit itself to establishing a policy regarding such secondary education....schools, to be supported by local interest and funds.

The purpose of documenting these differences is simply to demonstrate that temperatures were rising in regard to this issue, but by the grace of God cooler heads prevailed.

My name is David Wierschke, I graduated from Fox Valley Lutheran High School (FVL) -- Appleton, WI in 1983. Now I am a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and I am working on a church history paper concerning my old high school, FVL. I'm asking you to participate in order to provide me a broader view of the goals and objectives of the area Lutheran high school.

As Christians we follow the Apostle Paul's command in whatever we do to "do it all to the glory of God," that however can be implemented in a number of ways. This survey attempts to evaluate how the area Lutheran high school views its role in training our Christian youth.

Rate the statements below according to the following scale:

- 1 High Priority
- 2 Priority
- 3 Concern
- 4 Interest
- 5 Slight Interest
- 6 Irrelevant

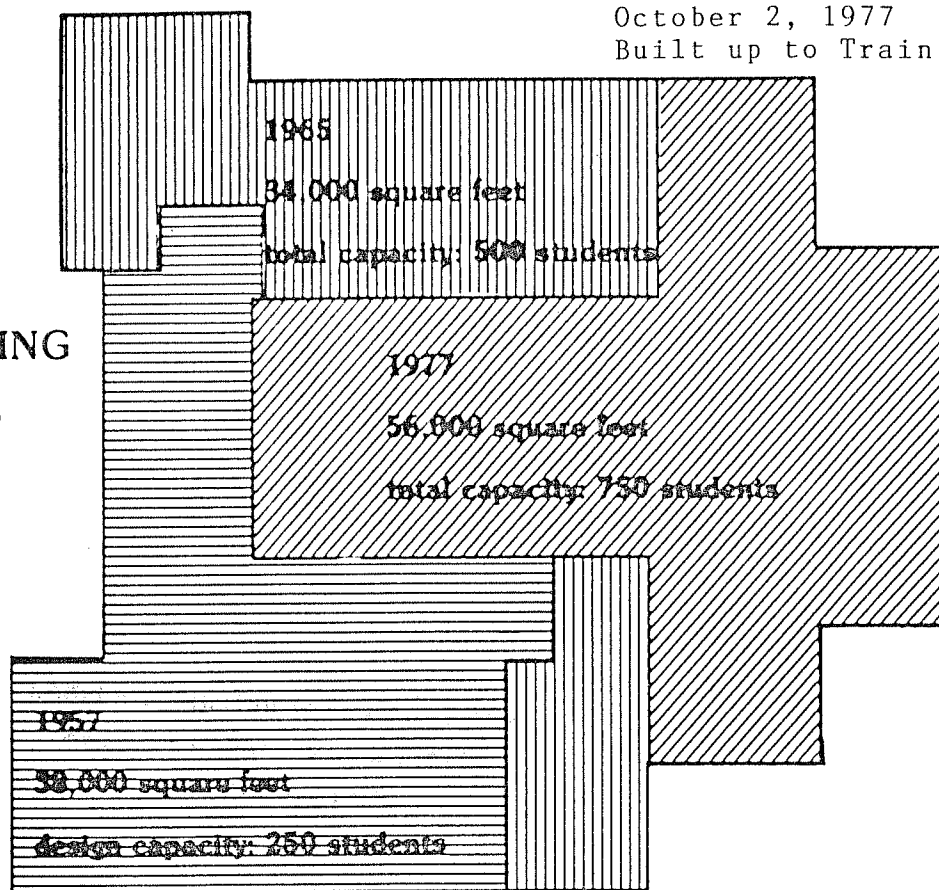
All but the last two are your personal feelings as an instructor in the classroom.

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Nurture and development of students' personal Christian faith life.  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Fostering support for the high school in the Federation.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Training students for service in local congregations.  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Personal interaction with students outside of classroom.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Achieving proficiency in material and teaching of my particular classroom discipline.                      | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Fostering and encouraging students' desire to prepare for full-time work in the church (enter DMLC or NWC) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Attitude toward the significance of the synodical certification program.                                   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Desire for continued study in my discipline.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| Desire for continued study in spiritual and doctrinal matters.   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| How do you rate your high school's role in the christian training of the youth in your area.               | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| How do you rate your high school's role in the training of future workers for our church.                  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

I thank you for your frank, honest evaluations. I welcome any other experiences or insights you would like to share, they would be much appreciated.

Please return to principal by May 6.

### THREE BUILDING PROJECTS



## HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

### 1948

May 26: The Fox Valley Lutheran High School Association is formed.

July 19: Fifteen acres of land (the present site) are purchased.

### 1953

September 14: Fox Valley Lutheran High School begins its first year in the Jefferson School with eight students.

### 1956

August 5: Groundbreaking ceremonies for the first building are held.

1956-57 enrollment is 179.

### 1957

February 3: The cornerstone of the first building is laid.

November 17: The first building is dedicated.

1957-58 enrollment is 278, exceeding the design capacity of the building.

Eleven congregations make up the Association.

### 1958

April 23: The Fox Valley Lutheran High School Federation is formed with sixteen congregations as members.

1958-59 enrollment is 350.

### 1964

May 3: Groundbreaking ceremonies for the first addition are held.

1964-65 enrollment is 394.

### 1965

August 15: The first addition is dedicated.

### 1972

September 6: Enrollment reaches 519, exceeding the design capacity of the building.

### 1976

June 9: The "Rise Up and Build" expansion project begins with groundbreaking ceremonies.

1976-77 enrollment is 650.

### 1977

September 1: Fox Valley Lutheran officially begins its twenty-fifth year with 668 students.

October 2: The "Rise Up and Build" addition is dedicated.