

THE CLOSING OF NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN ACADEMY

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"'Going once, going twice, sold for \$375,000,' echoed the words of auctioneer Joe Maas as he slammed down an oversized gavel onto the auction block. Close to 250 people crowded into the cafeteria at the Northwestern Lutheran Academy Tuesday morning, <July 28, 1981> to watch the Rochester, Minn., real estate auctioneer sell the 24-acre Academy campus on the west edge of Mobridge." <sup>1</sup> This was the final chapter of Wisconsin Synod involvement in secondary education in the Dakota-Montana District. Why was this school closed? Why was it opened in the first place? This paper will attempt to answer these questions.

The story of the closing of NLA begins with a report on the role of synodical academies which the Commission on Higher Education presented to the WELS synod convention of 1971. In its report on NLA the commission made the following recommendations:

1. That the Academy be advised to use to the limit the facilities which the Synod has provided in favor of students in the worker training program.
2. That the expansion proposed by the Academy, a new gymnasium and music facilities, with the present gym converted into additional classrooms and library, not be undertaken as a synodical program as long as this expansion is necessitated by the presence of general education students.
3. That the original purpose and objectives, the so-called charter, of the Academy be restudied and updated.
4. That the Academy and the Dakota-Montana District study the feasibility of greater local support to the extent that the Academy serves as a general high school.

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1) The Mobridge Tribune, Vol. 74, #47, July 30, 1981.

The 1971 synod convention acted on only the third recommendation, resolving "That the Commission on Higher Education restudy the purposes and objectives of this academy and report to the 1973 Synod Convention." 2

The NLA Board of Control responded to this action by submitting a paper entitled, "A Restudy of NLA's Role in the Educational Program of the WELS." The Academy president, Rev. Daniel Malchow, provided the research material for the paper. The following quotations are from this paper.

At times the original purposes and objectives of NLA have been referred to as the Academy's "charter." To hopefully put any future argument to rest, let it be stated that extensive research and inquiry have turned up no such "charter." Nor has there been discovered any specific set of purposes and objectives which were formulated at the time of the Academy's inception.

At the same time, it is beyond dispute that the type of school the Academy was to be was clearly envisioned by those who worked vigorously toward its founding. The Academy was not designed to serve solely or even primarily as a "feeder" school for our Synod's col-  
education on the secondary level for the young people of the Dakotas.

This was one of the key problems: many people in Synod wondered why the synod was supporting general education in the far-off Dakotas. This was true in the 1920's as well as the 1970's. In the 1920's there were people who felt that the synod had no call to subsidize any education that does not solely prepare for the preaching or teaching ministry. But there were also those who believed just the opposite. Prof. E. R. Bliefer-

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2) 1971 Proceedings, p. 50.

nicht, who was at this time the president of DMLC, delivered a paper to the 1924 Dakota-Montana District, in which he stated:

How often we have experienced in New Ulm that such young people who came to us only to receive a general high school education later decided to be trained as a pastor or teacher. And even if not that! If we educate our future church members in our own schools in our spirit, we thereby establish pillars for the church. <sup>3</sup>

A significant factor in establishing NLA was the Moussa Report, which was presented to the 1927 Synod Convention:

If we were able to stock our congregations with members who have attended our own academies, we could be sure of more understanding and zeal for our schools.

The Moussa report went on to recommend:

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>4</sup>

This same 1927 Synod Convention authorized the establishment of Northwestern Lutheran Academy. Reading these early documents shows that NLA was designed primarily to provide a Christian education on the secondary level for the young people of the Dakotas. Complaints in the 1970's that NLA never produced a significant number of workers for the church fail to recognize that the school was not originally designed to be a "feeder" school.

The Academy did offer pastor- and teacher-training courses as well as the general course. The 1978-79 school catalog states this dual purpose: "In keeping with the ever-increasing need

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3) "A Restudy of NLA's Role in the Educational Program of the WELS," p. 3.

4) Ibid., p. 4.

for future workers in the preaching and teaching ministry, the Academy endeavors to recruit and provide training for such prospective workers. At the same time, in line with the reasons for its establishment, it desires to make a general Christian education on the secondary level available to parents who desire such an education for their children."

How unique was this design? A comparison with the other synod academies is revealing. When Michigan Lutheran Seminary was reopened in 1910, it was a preparatory school offering the first four years of a ministerial preparatory course. "Students desiring to ready themselves for the Joint Synod's teachers' college at New Ulm, Minnesota, or those who wished merely to acquire a general secondary education could also attend."<sup>5</sup> Current MLS policy is acceptance of general education students only for the first 2 years. If at that time they have not definitely committed themselves to full-time church work, they may remain in school but must provide for their own housing. The MLS school catalog (1978-79) says that "its obvious primary function is to assist in preparing students for full-time service as pastors or teachers in the Wisconsin Synod."

Martin Luther Academy (now Martin Luther Preparatory School) showed a similar development of policy. The 1978-79 school catalog reads as follows:

Martin Luther Academy offers four years of academic training. The courses offered below are designed primarily as preparatory to college work for those intending to enter the teaching or preaching ministry of the WELS. Since this is the main purpose of the

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5) WELS Historical Institute Journal, Fall, 1983, p. 35.

school, preference is given applicants who are preparing themselves for either the teaching or preaching ministry.

Courses are, however, also offered for those wishing Christian education on the academy level. For lack of dormitory space, however, these courses are offered only to general-education students who do not require dormitory facilities.

In 1979, MLA moved to its new campus in Prairie du Chien. The 1979-80 school catalog dropped the last paragraph of this quotation, and by the time of the 1983-84 catalog, only the first two sentences of the first paragraph remained.

The fact that NLA continued to offer a general course led some people to propose that the Academy become a district-supported high school. But the geography around Mobridge showed how unrealistic this proposal was from the start. Figures supplied by the area Lutheran high schools in Wisconsin show that they draw their students and support from a radius of about 25 miles. The number of communicants supporting these schools ranges from about 6500 to 15,000. In contrast, within a radius of 25 miles from Mobridge there are only 546 communicants.

Part of the complaint about NLA was that it caused too much of a drain on synod finances. But based on figures supplied at the 1969 Synod Convention, the entire budget of NLA would permit the Home Mission Division to open one new mission per year.

In its 1972 study the NLA Board of Control recommended that the Academy be allowed to continue a dual role in its educational program. The board gave the following reasons:

1. The dual role of NLA has been part of its tradition since the school's founding.

2. Conditions in the Dakotas have not changed to the extent where an alteration in the school's role would be warranted.

3. The emergence of Christian day schools in the Dakota-Montana District would appear negligible in the foreseeable future.

4. The widely prevailing sentiment in the Dakota-Montana District is that the school continue in its present role.

5. Christian education on the secondary level should not be relegated to an exclusive privilege of young people living in areas where there is a heavy concentration of Wisconsin Synod members.

6. In terms of total gifts and offerings of Wisconsin Synod people, the cost of maintaining NLA is not injurious to the total program of the Wisconsin Synod.

In 1973 the Synod Convention resolved to rescind the resolution passed by the 1927 Convention which stated that the Academy was to be supported solely by the Synod. The Synod Convention (1973) also encouraged NLA to "receive direct support for its general education program from individuals and congregations associated with the school." <sup>6</sup> The 1974 Dakota-Montana District Convention agreed to bring this matter before the local congregations, although the District also expressed concern about the ambiguous wording that was used to describe the area from which the Academy was to solicit support.

In 1974 the NLA Board of Control issued a statement of Objectives and Policies that reflected the resolutions which had been passed at recent synod conventions. In the objective to be a worker training school the Board listed these policies:

1. To provide a course of instruction which will

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6) 1973 Proceedings, p. 51.

enable our graduates to enter our worker training colleges properly prepared.

2. To remain sensitive and alert to the educational needs of the Synod.

3. To encourage all applicants to establish as their goal the work of the ministry in pulpit and classroom.

4. To encourage qualified general education students to give serious consideration to entering full time church work.

5. To enable our students whenever possible to visit our synodical colleges and seminary.

6. To welcome and work in close cooperation with recruitment officers from our worker training colleges.

For the general education course the following policies were listed:

1. To accept general education students only after priority has been given to students planning to become pastors or teachers in the Synod.

2. To provide courses in career education to the extent that this can be done with available manpower and without extra expense to the Synod.

Also addressed in this report was the objective of soliciting direct financial support for the general education course.

The key policies in carrying this out were these:

1. To encourage congregations in the Dakota-Montana District and other interested congregations to remember our school in their offerings to the Lord.

2. To provide speakers and student groups for services and other occasions which are designed to promote a greater interest in our school.

3. To make available offering envelopes and memorial wreath folders designed to receive special offerings.

4. To attend and present reports on the Academy's operation and activities to the various conferences and meetings held throughout the Dakota-Montana District.

The 1975 Synod Convention did not have very much to add

to the topic of solicitation of funds by the Academy, although it did supply these guidelines: This solicitation was to be directed toward congregations within the district, and also toward congregations outside of the district represented by students in the student body. These guidelines also stipulated that any support thus received would cause a corresponding reduction in the school's budget or in the capital improvement allocation.

The 1975 convention also directed its attention to a Master Plan for facilities which had been drawn up, and urged the CHE to "give special consideration to carry out this program according to schedule if at all possible." 7

The story of the Master Plan for capital improvements at the Academy needs to be included in this history of the closing of NLA. The physical plant at the Academy consisted of five major buildings: a gymnasium-administration building, the girls' dorm, boys' dorm, dining hall-student union, and the music hall, which was known as the "White Building." The Master Plan called for the construction of a new gym, a new music facility, remodeling the present gym into classroom space, and razing the White Building. Later phases of the Master Plan were to have added a new boys' dorm, and still later a new girls' dorm and a second boys' dorm. The first phase (a new gym and music facility) had a 1977 price tag of \$640,000.

The need for a new gym and especially a new music facility was so great that this phase was referred to not as an expansion

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7) 1975 Proceedings, p. 55.

program, but rather as an alleviation of critical needs that existed with the current enrollment. The White Building (the music hall) was built in 1906 for Mobridge (public) High School. It was moved to the new NLA campus in 1928. By the mid-1970's this building had received a hazardous fire rating. The state fire marshall had unofficially condemned it. (Official action would have meant a forced eviction from the building.) The fire marshall did not officially condemn the building because he was assured that plans for the replacement of the building were being studied.

The gymnasium, built in 1954, was not a hazardous facility, but it was an inadequate one. It was undersized. The basketball court was not even considered adequate for a junior high school. Lay-ups were difficult because the end walls were only a few feet beyond the end line. Many injuries resulted from congestion on the floor, and many problems were caused during games because of the proximity of the spectators next to the court.

The 1975 Synod Convention stated that the CHE should carry out this program if at all possible. But by early 1977 the CHE was indicating serious reservations about any kind of capital outlay at Mobridge. In January of 1977 the executive secretary of the CHE gave a report (to CHE) which questioned the necessity of a building program at NLA: "Do we possibly have some questions regarding the continued role of this school? If the school is to continue in its role, there is no doubt about the needs, which are modestly presented. If we tend to hesitate, is our hesitency a reflection of concern for the very existence of

the school? I am not dictating the answers, but I feel strongly that we should face the issues squarely."

The "facing of issues" had already begun to take place. An earlier report by the Planning Program Committee to CHE contained material that was disputed by the NLA Board of Control.

Planning Program Committee: WHEREAS the WELS in its statement of purpose, objectives, and policies announces that its third objective is "to provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, and universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions; and WHEREAS the WELS statement of purpose, objectives, and policies contains nothing which can be construed as a commitment to a comprehensive program of financial support of general education; . . .

To these points the NLA Board of Control responded thusly:

We hold that the Program Planning Committee was highly selective in the objectives of the WELS which it cited. Our Board could be similarly restrictive by pointing out that the WELS also lists among its objectives: "To foster and support continuing Christian education for all members." . . . Practically speaking, NLA is the only school to which members in the western districts of the Synod can send their children for a general Christian education on the secondary level. To that end, NLA serves "all members."

The NLA Board also quoted the WELS policy "to promote Christian education through elementary and secondary schools maintained by congregations." NLA was obviously an exception to this rule, but not the only exception. Any mission congregation with a Christian day school was also an exception to this policy.

Referring again to the Planning Program Committee report:

WHEREAS argumentation and data currently advanced fail to demonstrate that the Synod should be involved in general education per se despite the exception and commitment it made nearly 45 years ago in the case of NLA;. . .

The NLA Board strongly questioned the use of the word "exception"

and asked, "What documentary evidence does the Program Planning Committee have in stating that the Synod made an 'exception' when it authorized the establishment of NLA? The founding of this school was not an exception, but was in line with the principles expressed in the 'Moussa Report' of 1927."

The Planning Program Committee states:

WHEREAS the Synod's obvious higher educational commitment lies solely in the training of full-time workers for the church; and

WHEREAS the dual educational role assigned to NLA 45 years age cannot be the basis for extending and augmenting its general educational role to almost double its present size, particularly in view of the capital funds necessary to staffing and facilities and particularly in view of the pressing staffing and facility needs of synodical institutions devoted almost exclusively to worker-training; . . .

The NLA Board responded by saying that these two points contradict each other: "To state that the Synod's higher educational commitment lies solely in the training of full-time workers for the church appears to preclude the presence of any general education student at any synodical school. . . .It is a matter of record that general education students are in attendance at other synodical schools."

The Program Planning Committee: WHEREAS the CHE would be remiss in its responsibility to the total program of the church if it were to advocate that the Synod become substantially more involved in general education not included in its avowed purposes, objectives, and policies; . . .

The response of the NLA Board: "We voice an opposite concern-- whether the CHE would be remiss in its responsibility if it forced this school to remain in a position where it had to remain a small school, replete with all of the problems associated with a school of small size. The school would be forced to

accept no more than about 125 students, if the recommendation of the Program Planning Committee is adopted. All efforts toward growth would be thwarted. We feel that the CHE would not want to have the responsibility of this decision upon its conscience."

The Program Planning Committee offered the following resolutions:

That the CHE recommend to the Synod that NLA be assigned no greater a role in general education than it is currently assuming on the basis of its historical development; and  
That the board and administration be encouraged to bend their efforts increasingly to making NLA a worker-training institution in the recognized sense of the word.

The response of the NLA Board:

The Academy is asking for no greater role, rather a continuation of its dual role. About 50% of its students are enrolled as future workers. We are simply asking for a continuation of this role, with the desire to grow to the point where a maximum of 200 on-campus students can be accommodated.

A difference of opinion had developed between the CHE and the NLA Board. The extent of this difference became apparent at the 1977 Synod Convention. In a lengthy report the CHE presented far-reaching recommendations concerning the entire academy system of the Synod. The recommendations concerning NLA were as follows:

1. That the Synod instruct the CHE to plan the removal of NLA to a new site, with preference shown toward the Southwest or West Coast.
2. That the CHE together with the Board of Trustees investigate the possibility of offering the present facilities at no cost to the area for possible operation of a resident high school supported regionally rather than by the Synod as a whole.
3. That the CHE be instructed to bring to the 1979 convention of the Synod specific recommendations regarding site, construction costs, and plans for the imple-

mentation of the move. 8

The Synod Convention did not accept or reject these recommendations. Instead, it directed the CHE and the districts affected by these recommendations to study these proposals and bring their own recommendations to the 1979 convention. The Synod did resolve in 1977 that "all resolutions of previous synod conventions in respect to the synod academies' plans for expansion and future needs be suspended until the CHE and the Synod reach a decision in respect to the future of these schools."

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This action came as quite a shock to the Board, faculty, and students of NLA. Troubling thoughts about the very future of the school replaced the pleasant thoughts about the possibility of building a new gym or a new music building.

The NLA Board of Control responded to the resolutions of the 1977 Synod Convention by submitting to the Dakota-Montana District a report entitled, "The Future of NLA." This report, which was read at the 1978 Dakota-Montana District Convention, listed several options for NLA, and the pros and cons of the various options.

**Option #1: Relocate the Academy.**

PRO:

1. The Synod could possibly have an academy in an area with more Christian day schools and therefore with the possibility of more worker-training students.
2. It would remove the Academy from an area against which some people in the Synod may have a bias.
3. It would eliminate an academy which in the minds

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8) 1977 Proceedings, p. 59.

9) Ibid., p. 70.

of some has a poor image because they have never seen the school and have been influenced by distorted descriptions.

4. It would remove the Academy from an area of sparse population, for which some also predict further decline.

5. It would remove the Academy from a district that has a small potential for students.

6. It would relocate a school that has produced relatively few pastors and teachers and has a high cost-per-student ratio.

7. It would remove the Academy from an area where a rapid turnover of pastors makes difficult the establishment of a strong recruitment base.

8. It would remove the Academy from an area where many pastors are young and in many cases move away before their children have reached high school age.

9. Worker-training students from the Dakota-Montana District could be served by other preparatory schools.

10. There has been a lack of substantial enrollment growth despite major recruitment efforts.

CON:

1. The removal of the school would call into question that spirit which for fifty years regarded NLA as a unique mission activity in the area of Christian secondary education, which was accounted worthy of the cost.

2. The Synod would be withdrawing support in an area where small, old congregations cannot support Christian day schools and where congregations in population centers are young and just beginning to grow.

3. Secondary Christian education would not be available to most young people of the Dakota-Montana District.

4. It would ignore the sizable capital outlay which has been built up over a period of fifty years and thus would be at best questionable stewardship. Though the real estate is valuable, it is doubtful that the property as constituted is highly marketable.

5. It would necessitate a huge outlay of money to erect a new school plant as a replacement.

6. It would eliminate the positive benefits which have developed in an established school, e.g. a cohesive faculty and the traditions which have developed over a long period of time.

7. An important rallying point of the Dakota-Montana District would be lost.

8. Many years of hard work and effort would be lost.

9. Potential future workers for the church would be lost.

10. There are no available statistics to indicate that a new location would provide more worker-training

students for the Synod.

11. It would remove an academy from an area where students are not subjected so openly to the temptations and vices of the world which are found in more grotesque form in metropolitan areas.

This was the first option listed by the CHE in its report. The obvious problems involved with this option made it impractical from the start, especially since the CHE seemed to be in the business of cutting back the synodical academy program, rather than expanding it to the western or southwestern part of the country.

**Option #2:** Accept the proposal of the CHE which calls for offering the present facilities at no cost to the area for possible operation of a resident high school supported regionally rather than by the Synod as a whole.

PRO:

1. The Synod would be relieved of financial responsibility for the Academy.
2. The school would be governed and operated in such a manner as the District would desire.
3. The curriculum could be expanded for a general education track, making vocational courses available.
4. The District would be receiving a gift worth much money.

CON:

1. For the District to support the Academy, income for budgetary operations alone would require additional offerings from district congregations 1125 miles to the northwest and 340 miles to the southeast of the Academy in the amount of \$30.54 per communicant. Or if support were to come from congregations within a 120-mile radius of the school, it would mean \$76.61 per communicant. Financial support of such proportions would be totally unrealistic.
2. An increase of \$30.54 per communicant member in the district would raise the average communicant giving for all purposes to \$173.76. If the average communicant giving in the Minnesota District would be raised to this level, there would be an increase in offerings of \$1,139,517. This would fall only \$73,503 short of covering the entire net budget of \$1,213,020 for DMLC and MLA. If the average communicant giving of the Western Wisconsin District would be raised to

this level, there would be an increase in offerings of \$1,565,925. This would cover the entire net budget for NWC and NPS. It would also cover the entire net budgets of Lakeside Lutheran High School and Luther High School, with \$440,000 still remaining.

3. The dramatic increase in offerings per communicant member for budgetary operations alone would still make no allowance for the replacement of outdated buildings or the erection of new facilities.

The financial restrictions involved in District operation of the Academy were strong enough to preclude any serious attempt to run such a program at Mobridge.

Option #3: Offer to the CHE and to the Synod the proposal that NLA be removed from the Synod's Educational Institution Building Fund (EIBF) - Major Projects, but ask the Synod to continue to control NLA as a worker-training school.

PRO:

1. The Synod would be relieved of any new building construction at NLA.
2. The building program at NLA would not interfere with the critical facility needs that exist at the other synodical worker-training institutions.
3. This would enable the Academy to remain in operation at its present location.
4. This option could provide the opportunity of changing the sequence and direction of the building program, as well as the opportunity to investigate other alternatives. This might be found feasible to avoid frightening members of the District with a gigantic building program.
5. By remaining under the direct control of the Synod, the worker-training program of the Academy would continue to receive primary emphasis.

CON:

1. The CHE and/or the Synod could reject the proposal.
2. It would have to be asked whether the District would show enough interest in the school that it would be able to undertake a sizable building program.
3. It would have to be asked whether the District would be able to operate quickly in this area in view of the critical condition of the present music facility.
4. It would have to be asked whether the District would be able to operate in haste to meet the pressing needs and overcrowded conditions with which the athletic department must contend ~~in~~ in its present athletic

facility.

5. The Synod would be expected to continue subsidizing general education students at the rate of \$2,000 per student.

6. To adopt this approach might well be only the first step in a continuing process of cutting the school from all type of synodical support.

7. The District would be assuming a sizable financial burden.

8. The Synod would ultimately determine the priority of the building program, and all final decisions would rest with it.

In spite of the problems that were involved with this proposal, most of the people associated with NLA felt that this was the best choice. Unfortunately, it appeared that the CHE never gave serious consideration to this option. And yet when the time came to write a resolution to close the Academy, one of the reasons used by the CHE was that a continued operation of NLA would require an extensive and expensive building program.

Option #4: Maintain the status quo.

PRO:

The Synod may decide to reject the recommendation of the CHE to remove the Academy to a different site. In this event the school would continue to be operated as in the past. The Master Plan drawn up for the school's building needs would under such circumstances remain in effect.

CON:

1. The Synod could well choose to accept the recommendations of the CHE to remove the Academy. It would then be lost to the District.

2. Agitation and criticism concerning the Academy's building program, particularly as it would interfere with the building programs at other schools, would continue.

3. The building program of our school, as past experience has shown, could be delayed indefinitely.

These options, along with the full report of the NLA Board of Control, were sent to the members of the Dakota-Montana Dis-

trict. A special district convention, called by the district president, was held in January of 1978. This convention recommended that the district "assume the responsibility for implementing the Master Plan" <the building plan for NLA> and that "every congregation declare the extent of its intended support for the replacement of the present music facility." 10 When the regular District Convention was held in June of 1978, the results of this survey for intended support were given. The four-year total (1978-1981) of this intended support for NLA, listed in minimal amounts, was \$177,500. 11

The next report made by the Program Planning Committee of the CHE came in October of 1978. Citing the lack of evidence that NLA would become more productive in worker training, and the lack of evidence that it could in the future attract 200 students, the subcommittee recommended that the school be once again offered to the Dakota-Montana District for use as an area Lutheran High School run by the District, and that if the District declined the offer, the Synod take steps to close the school and dispose of the property.

The CHE read this report, but then tabled it until the January meeting. It was becoming apparent that the 1979 Synod Convention would have a proposal before it that would recommend closing the Academy.

The Academy faculty responded to this situation by requesting a special synod convention, so that a decision about the

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10) Dakota-Montana District Convention Proceedings, 1978, p. 24.

11) Ibid., p. 27-29.

Academy's future could be made before the time of the regular August convention. The problem was that August is a very late time to decide whether a school should start a new school year at the end of that same month. The Academy faculty made this request in December of 1978. Because of the logistical problems involved with calling a special synod convention, the COP turned down the request.

The next CHE meeting came in January of 1979. At this meeting the committee accepted a revised report of the Planning Program Committee which resolved "That NLA discontinue operation as a synodical institution, effective with the completion of the 1979-1980 academic year." <sup>12</sup> The NLA representatives on this panel voted against this proposal and submitted a minority report which expressed an opposite view. The gist of this minority report read as follows:

WHEREAS 1) the operation of NLA and its recruitment efforts have been constantly hampered as a result of inadequate and outmoded facilities; and  
WHEREAS 2) petitions from the Academy to resolve these facility needs have been repeatedly denied; and  
WHEREAS 3) specific steps have been taken to ascertain the extent of the financial support the congregations of the district would be willing to provide for the school's building program; and  
WHEREAS 4) the response of the district has indicated a level of support which could result in the immediate erection of a new music facility, which conceivably could be paid for within a period of three or four years; and  
WHEREAS 5) the erection of other needed facilities could be undertaken by the district in subsequent years; and  
WHEREAS 6) the existence of a small academy in the Synod would serve a very wholesome purpose; and  
WHEREAS 7) repeated references to the possible moving or closing of NLA have been very damaging to the morale of the school, its students, faculty, and particularly its recruitment efforts; therefore be it

**Resolved,** a) That NLA be retained by the WELS as a worker-train-

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12) 1979 BoRaM, p. 20-21.

ing institution, permitting it thereby to continue functioning as an effective arm of the church; and be it further Resolved, b) That the Synod accept the offer of the Dakota-Montana District to take over the Master Plan of NLA, an offer which would cover the cost of all major capital expenditures; and be it finally Resolved, c) That the WELS continue to subsidize the budgetary operation of NLA, as it does with all other synodical worker-training schools.

Both the majority and the minority reports came before the Synod Convention of 1979. There was not very much suspense as to what the decision would be. The 1979 BoRaM had already included a resolution from the Coordinating Council which stated that if NLA was indeed closed by the action of the convention, this action should be effective immediately in 1979, not after a "lame duck" school year. The synod did vote to close the Academy, listing the following reasons: "It has proved to be very difficult to transform NLA into a full-fledged synodical worker training school; the per student cost of training students at NLA is generally double the cost at other synodical academies; continued operation of NLA would require an extensive building program; and the Synod is obligated to exercise responsible stewardship over the financial resources entrusted to it." 13

The implementing resolutions for closing NLA were mostly anticlimatic. The NLA campus was offered to the Dakota-Montana District for use as an area Lutheran high school; this proved to be infeasible. The remaining NLA faculty members were called to positions in the faculty of the new Martin Luther Preparatory School in Prairie du Chien. The NLA underclassmen were given

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13) 1979 Proceedings, p. 77.

the opportunity to complete their secondary training at MLPS or another synodical school. The NLA student academic records were stored at MLPS.

The combination of high finances and low enrollment were the two chief reasons the CHE gave for closing NLA. A small Academy meant a high per student cost ratio; expanding the school's facilities to accept a larger enrollment would have meant a large outlay of capital funds. This was almost a Catch-22 situation. The Academy could not grow larger without new facilities, and it could not cut the per student cost ratio without growing larger.

This dilemma was never publicized. The 1979 Post-Convention Issue of the Wisconsin Synod Herald was inaccurate when it described the situation at NLA with these words: "Designed for 220 students at optimum operating level, the school had an enrollment of 114 last year." With an enrollment of 114 the Academy was making full use of the facilities it had.

The low enrollment which was part of the reason for closing the Academy could be attributed in general to the sparse population of the northern plains states. Local problems in the state of South Dakota itself also made for a small enrollment. Several larger WELS congregations in the state were split when the CLC was formed in the early 1960's. For many years there were no WELS congregations at all in some of the larger cities in South Dakota. By the time congregations were started in cities such as Huron or Sioux Falls, it was too late to help the Academy. The Dakota-Montana District had mostly young pastors as its

members; hence there were few "p.k.'s" (=pastors' kids) of high school age.

The bottom line is that the number of students from the Dakota-Montana District could have been higher. If the District had flooded the Academy with applications in the final two years, the Synod may well have voted to continue running the school, at least for a little while longer.

But in spite of all these problems, it is the biased opinion of this author that the Academy should not have been closed. In an age when other church bodies are getting out of the business of providing Christian education for their youth, the closing of a synodical academy at the very least could give the impression that the Wisconsin Synod agrees with this notion.

Finally, a prediction: Budgetary problems and shortfalls are certainly not rare in these days of high inflation and high interest rates. The next time a severe shortfall happens, one way of saving money would be to close another synodical academy. It has already happened once, and it may well happen again.

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