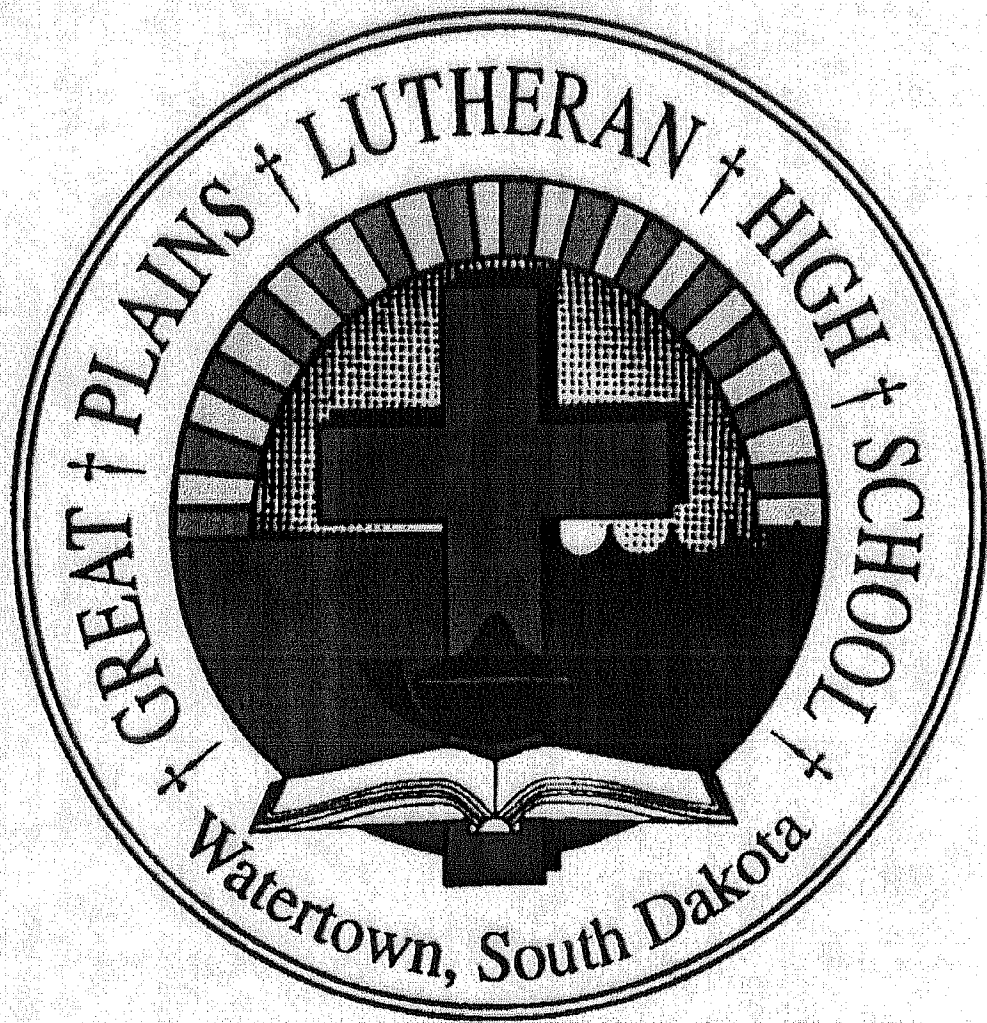


***Great Plains Lutheran High School: A
Dream, A Commitment And With God's
Help A Reality***



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Foreword

For some of you, this paper will rekindle cherished memories as you watched the whole formation of Great Plains Lutheran High School unravel. For others, this paper may inform you as to just how much effort and time was and is being poured into Christian secondary education in the Dakota-Montana District. Whatever the case may be, may the Lord's gift, Great Plains Lutheran High School, remind each of us that Christian secondary education is a privilege and a blessed responsibility.

I would like to thank the individuals who provided the resources for this paper. As with any aspect of history it is very hard to locate every bit of information on a given subject, such as Great Plains Lutheran High School. Accept my sincere apology if I have forgotten to include anyone or anything, who or which, might have played an important role in the history of Great Plains Lutheran High School.

Reed M. Degener

Introduction

I had the blessed privilege of serving as a Vicar in the Dakota-Montana District during 1996-1997. During that time I came to appreciate the rich history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod on the plains. The lay-people, pastors and teachers of the various congregations in the Dakota-Montana District have contributed generously to its history.

However, history is impossible without the guiding, patient hand of our gracious Lord in heaven. Great Plains Lutheran High School is the result of the Lord's grace. The Lord is the one who has made Great Plains Lutheran High School part of that rich history of the Dakota-Montana District. He is the one who planted the dream of an area Lutheran high school in the Dakota-Montana District. He is the one who meticulously sowed commitment into the hearts of individuals to follow his lead in reestablishing Christian secondary education in the Dakota-Montana District. The Lord is also the one who has made the corporate effort of the Dakota-Montana District a flourishing reality with the opening of the newest area Lutheran high school, Great Plains Lutheran High School.

The title chosen for this paper is: *Great Plains Lutheran High School: A Dream, A Commitment, And With God's Help A Reality*. The President of the Board of Directors initially echoed this title as a closing thought in his report at the 1991 annual meeting. Since that time the title has been used as a subtitle for various newsletters. This title has also serves as a motto for Great Plains Lutheran High School.

However, the title *Great Plains Lutheran High School: A Dream, A Commitment, And With God's Help A Reality* is more than just a title, subtitle or motto. It is a reflection. It reflects the sincere dedication and prayerful consideration of the Dakota-

Montana District made up of individuals determined to establish, conduct, control, manage and maintain a school for the sole purpose of providing Christian secondary education for teenagers.

The title also speaks volumes about the endless hours of planning that went and continue to go towards planning the “finished product” of Great Plains Lutheran High School. Through God-fearing commitment, what started out as a dream in 1979, has become a present reality.

Great Plains Lutheran High School is not an ordinary school, rather an extraordinary school. It is a school deeply concerned with the mental development of its students, but more importantly with its students spiritual development in their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This twofold purpose of Great Plains Lutheran High School makes it a unique school not only in the Dakota-Montana District, but also, in the world we live.

The Dakota-Montana District with its constituents dared to dream. The Lord has answered their dream. Great Plains Lutheran High School is a reality. Knowing what the gracious Lord has accomplished through his people, may those same people, as well as many others, prayerfully ask the Lord to guide Great Plains Lutheran High School to accomplish its purpose and mission:

Purpose Of Great Plains Lutheran High School

Great Plains Lutheran High School was established by the Great Plains Lutheran High School Association to provide a full-time Christian education through the high school years to young people. Great Plains Lutheran High Schools philosophy of education and its practices and policies are based upon the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God and centers on Jesus Christ to whom all the Scriptures bear witness. In this Christian setting young people are encouraged by the power and grace of God’s word to submit in grateful obedience to Christ Jesus as Savior and to grow in a life of joyful service to Jesus as Lord. Parents who enroll students should be aware of this Scriptural position and

confessional stance, and that by enrolling their children they are placing their children under its religious instruction.

Mission Of Great Plains Lutheran High School

The mission of Great Plains Lutheran High School is to assist Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregations, their families, and others in fellowship, nurture our youth for time and eternity by educating the total student - spiritually, intellectually and physically - in a caring Christian environment.

Chapter One: Great Plains Lutheran High School: A Dream

The Catalyst Behind The Dream Of GPLHS: Words may never properly describe the feelings of the individuals who had the opportunity to serve or be served at Northwestern Lutheran Academy. To many, the picture of a tidy, little campus planted along the Missouri River comes to mind when the initials “NLA” are echoed. This Academy might have been the tidy, little campus, nestled on the open plains of South Dakota, planted along the Missouri River, but the external beauty of NLA was only a fraction of its true beauty. There was much more to NLA. The beauty that engulfed the exterior of the NLA campus wasn’t nearly as enchanting as the beauty that protruded from within the walls of its buildings.

Having the privilege of a Christian secondary education, I can imagine what took place within the walls of NLA. Imagine students, for the most part attentive, listening as their professors share with them the Gospel gem of Jesus Christ, this world’s Savior from sin for time and eternity. Picture teenagers, brought together by a common faith, bumping shoulders and laughing as they walk the hallways of NLA. On the field and court friendly battles are staged in practice so, later on, these teenagers, as a team, could dismantle yet another foe. NLA was a beacon for Christian secondary education in the Dakota-Montana District. It served the Dakota-Montana District and many other districts of the WELS with God’s inerrant word for fifty-one blessed years. For this we thank our Lord!

Unfortunately the saying, “All good things must come to an end,” also held true for NLA. What took place in 1979 at the Forty-Fifth Biennial Convention of the

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod held in Watertown, Wisconsin, marked the end of an era of Christian secondary education within the Dakota-Montana District. The decision made at the 1979 Synod Convention to close NLA, left a lump of bewilderment in the throat of many. Some of the major concerns that led to the closing of NLA were written on the wall many years before the 1979 Synod Convention convened. What transpired at the 1979 Synod Convention wasn't entirely a surprise.

On the surface it may look as though closing NLA was poorly thought out. However, history tells us differently! As early as 1973 the Synod directed "That the board and administration of Northwestern Lutheran Academy be encouraged to bend their efforts increasingly to making this school a worker-training institution in the recognized sense of the word."¹ The primary purpose of the Academy in Mobridge was to equip students for service in the Lord's kingdom as pastors and teachers. By definition an "academy" is a preparatory school. Its curriculum is specifically geared to prepare Christian teenagers for a future in the pastoral or teaching ministry. By definition an "area Lutheran high school" is also a preparatory school. However, the purpose of an area Lutheran high school varies from that of an academy. The curriculum at an area Lutheran high school is primarily geared for general Christian education. Such a school grants a teenager a Christian education on a secondary level, even if the teenager has no aspiration of becoming a pastor or teacher. An area Lutheran high school serves yet another purpose. Should the teenager decide to become a pastor or teacher, the area Lutheran high school may have a special curriculum for that purpose. Northwestern

¹ *Proceedings of The forty-fifth Biennial Convention, p.77*

Lutheran Academy's primary purpose was to provide workers for the Lord's fields around the world, fields in desperate need of pastors and teachers.

The Synod, along with the board and administration of NLA, exerted their efforts to boost the number of students in the pastor and teacher curriculum during the 1970's. Unfortunately, numbers never lie. In the 1978-79 academic year at the Academy, of the 114 students enrolled, only 14 boys were enrolled in the pastor's course and 43 boys and girls in the teacher's course.² Of the teenagers enrolled at the Academy in 1978-79, only 50% of those teenagers were studying for what the Academy was specifically designed for; to train future pastors and teachers.

Another concern written on the wall long before the closing of NLA was its general trend of enrollment. At its peak the enrollment at NLA reached 133 students in 1975.³ Instead of the enrollment increasing, as was the hope, it was on a steady decline. As mentioned before, by the 1978-79 school year the enrollment settled to 114 students. This tumbling trend of enrollment was also a concern for our Synod. Although our Synod was very instrumental in keeping the doors of NLA opened for 51 years; both by supplying NLA with handsome sums of money for budgetary purposes, as well as, professors and instructors who were dedicated to train young people for the pastoral and teaching ministry, the Synod also had to exercise sanctified, Christian common sense.

As God would have all his redeemed children do; the Synod was obligated to exercise responsible stewardship of treasures entrusted to its care by the constituents of the Synod. For the Synod to run NLA within the parameters of faithful stewardship of

² *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-fifth Biennial Convention, p.20*

³ *Dakota-Montana District 1920 -1995 seventy-five Years Of God's Blessing, p. 148*

those treasures a minimum of 200 students per year attending NLA was required.

Considering the enrollment trend of NLA in the 1970's it would have been convenient to say, "The future will take care of our shortage of enrollment at NLA." But would God's people be using gifts and treasures from God for the benefit of his kingdom? The effort and study of the Synod, along with the board and administration of NLA, revealed that it would be very difficult for a mission district such as the Dakota-Montana District to maintain NLA for the specific purpose mentioned earlier. The enrollment trends of the 1970's gave ample evidence that NLA would never reach a steady enrollment of 200 or more students. As hard as it was to see NLA close, the Synod on behalf of its constituents, was acting as a faithful steward when it decided to close NLA

One more factor that played into the closing of NLA was the factor of demographics. The fact that the Dakota-Montana District would continue to be a mission district played the greatest role in closing NLA. The demographics of the Dakota-Montana District have been constantly changing since it became a District in 1920. For the most part the District has always been agrarian. With the inception of modern machinery to work the increasing acreage of farmland needed to feed a family the need for extra hands was alleviated. This alone has caused a change in the demographics of the Dakota-Montana District through the decades. Many ranchers and farmers did not have enough acreage to make ends meet so they moved to more populated areas to seek employment. Also, a good majority of male high school graduates no longer stayed back to help dad with the farming or ranching chores. Instead, many of these high school graduates attended college, earned a degree and put that degree to use in a more populated area boasting endless job opportunities. The move of people out of a rural

setting into a more populated one was, and will continue to be challenge facing the Dakota-Montana District.

The fluctuating demographics of the Dakota-Montana District could have been the main culprit in closing NLA. However serene the town of Mobridge continues to be, the migration of individuals and entire families to the eastern side of the Dakotas during the 1960's until the present has proven that location does matter. In the eyes of a Synod and a District extremely dedicated to Christian secondary education, Mobridge no longer was the best possible place from which to serve young people with Christian secondary education. This point concerning location will continue to surface throughout this paper.

The three reasons mentioned above: the purpose for operating an academy, the declining enrollment of NLA and the changing demographics of the Dakota-Montana District, seem to be three of the major reasons behind closing NLA. There are many other factors that played a role in the closing of NLA, however, the purpose for writing is not to reflect on the bitter-sweet memories of NLA, but to demonstrate the effort it took to establish Great Plains Lutheran High School. The closing of NLA sealed one chapter of history in the Dakota-Montana District. At the same time the closing of NLA served as the catalyst that opened a new chapter in the history of the Dakota-Montana District. Great Plains Lutheran High School is that new chapter in the history of the Dakota-Montana District.

Now in its second full year in operation, Great Plains Lutheran High School proves once again, our God is a gracious and very patient God. On the surface it may seem that organizing, planning, building and maintaining an area Lutheran high school is as simple as "eating pumpkin pie," but the people who poured their time,

effort, money and prayer into GPLHS would beg to differ. The road traveled in establishing GLPHS was at times a very tedious, arduous, and frustrating road. The people of the Dakota-Montana District could have been indifferent towards Christian secondary education, but they weren't. God blessed these people with a determination to fulfill a dream of retaining and maintaining Christian education for their teenagers. We must thank the Lord once again for intervening with his guiding, patient hand during the times of heartache surrounding the issues of NLA. Recognizing the Lord knows what is best for his Church and people, the Board of Directors of NLA, reported at the Forty-Fifth Biennial Convention,

The only consolation we have, the one truth that brings us strength in these trying days, is the knowledge that our gracious God in his infinite wisdom will guide his Church in ways beneficial to her spiritual welfare, will cause history to be written in a fashion that best serves the long-term interest of His people, will carry out His loving purposes among men with, and/or in spite of us and our not always reliable assessments of what is best for us and for our church. While we may neither agree with nor understand the direction in which things are heading as far as the future is concerned, we pray God's Holy Spirit to give us the strength and courage to say, "Thy will be done."⁴

Rallying around the Lord's will for his people, many in the Dakota-Montana District were resolute to retain Christian secondary education for their young people, in spite of what transpired in 1979.

Laying The Foundation For The Dream: When a assembly of people find their back against the wall, the assembly can take one of two routes. The assembly can go the route of indifference saying, "We can't do anything about it, so why even attempt," or it can go the route of saying, "We believe in this cause, and we will support it with every

⁴ *Proceedings Of The forty-fifth Biennial Convention, pp.55-56*

ounce of strength!” The latter route describes the character of those individuals dedicated to Christian education.

Christian secondary education could have very easily disappeared within the District after the decision was made in 1979 to close NLA. However, such a thought never entered the mind of a District made up of individuals who hold Christian secondary education close to their hearts. The constituents of the District, instead of fostering a feeling of indifference towards Christian secondary education, went on the offensive. With their backs up against the wall many of the individuals responded, “We have a privilege and obligation to retain Christian secondary education for our young people.”

This determined spirit was very evident in discussions that preceded the closing of NLA. Before the closing of NLA was written and dried in ink, the prospect of establishing an area Lutheran high school in the Dakota-Montana District was seriously entertained. In March of 1979, five months before the closing of NLA was made official, the Committee For Christian Secondary Education conducted a poll to evaluate how congregations across the Dakota-Montana District felt towards establishing and maintaining an area Lutheran high school in their midst. In this poll two simple questions were asked. Congregations were asked if they would be interested in preserving Christian education on the secondary level in the District should NLA be closed at the upcoming convention? And, if so, would congregations be willing to send a representative from their congregation to meet with the other congregation representatives to discuss this matter of an area Lutheran high school? The overwhelming response to these two questions was “yes.”

To me, as an outsider looking in, the poll mentioned above proves without a doubt, the people of the District were determined to retain Christian education on the secondary level. Some of the questions concerning an area Lutheran high school (ALHS) that were bounced off the attendees at the aforementioned meeting were well thought out questions. The questions ranged from, "Do we really want an area Lutheran high school in our midst?" "Can we afford one?" And, "will we be able to attract sufficient students for the operation of such a school?"⁵ The questions asked of each of the representatives were thought provoking questions. A simple "yes" or "no" would not do. What do such questions say about the people behind the questions? They tell a person, such as myself, many within the Dakota-Montana District would not stand by and watch Christian secondary education evaporate into the thin, prairie wind.

When this initial meeting, spearheaded by the Committee for Christian Secondary Education, did convene at the NLA campus on April 26th, 1979, it revealed the willingness to lay the foundation for an area Lutheran high school. Approximately 150 individuals, with nearly every congregation of the District represented attended the meeting. The whereabouts of an area Lutheran high school was one of the key issues discussed. Many attending this meeting were either from the Mobridge area or alumni of NLA. Considering this fact, it was quite apparent why many felt it advantageous to locate an area Lutheran high school on the NLA campus should NLA be closed at convention.⁶ The thought of starting an area Lutheran high school on the present NLA seemed like an obvious choice. The NLA campus was convenient. It would also be less

⁵ Report given by the Committee For Christian Secondary Education, March 4, 1979.

⁶ Report given on May 17, 1979 by Roger Frey to the Alumni of NLA.

time consuming to start an area Lutheran high school on a campus that already had the necessary facilities intact rather than starting from scratch. To top it off, expenses would be very minimal. As enticing as the NLA campus seemed for establishing an area Lutheran high school, the town of Mobridge, where NLA was located, wasn't necessarily the best possible location for an area Lutheran high school.

At this meeting it was resolved that the Committee for Christian Education be entrusted with the task of continuing to explore the possibility of operating an area Lutheran high school. On June 3rd, 1979, two months before the Synod Convention, this Committee called for Donald Zimmerman's advice as how to best lay the foundation for an area Lutheran high school. Being the Synod's consultant to groups planning an area Lutheran high school he stressed two points. First of all, to successfully establish an area Lutheran high school, a district needs the support of all of its called workers and laity. And secondly, in considering an area Lutheran high school, the constituents of a district must keep an open mind as to the best possible location for such a school.⁷

Mr. Zimmerman's advice of gaining the support of the entire District for the idea of an area Lutheran high school and locating this school in the best possible place didn't fall on deaf ears. The original "Dreamers" of an area Lutheran high school, from the Mobridge area went about establishing a steering committee. To get more people involved in the cause of an area Lutheran high school, the makeup of the steering committee was such that it consisted of men from the eastern and western parts of the District. At a glance the makeup of this initial steering committee may seem insignificant, but by my estimation, it was a makeup of monumental proportions that

⁷ Information taken from a report presented to the three District conferences in May or June of 1979.

played a huge role in laying the foundation for an area Lutheran high school. Had the steering committee consisted of men only from the Mobridge area the committee probably would have been able to gain the support of some congregations, but not all the congregations of the District. If the dream of an area Lutheran high school was to be a corporate dream of the District, the entire District, from Eastern South Dakota to Western Montana had to be involved, informed and prepared to give their input to this dream. With a steering committee made up of men from various regions of the District laying the foundation for the dream of an area Lutheran high school would have a better chance of gaining the support of the entire Dakota-Montana District rather than a small portion of it.

With the steering committee intact, it went about its business. The major contribution of the steering committee was a promotional pamphlet entitled, *Presentation To The Congregations*. The purpose for this promotional pamphlet was to build an interest and understanding of an area Lutheran high school. The pamphlet answered such questions as, "Why a Lutheran high school; who will be involved; and how will it operate?" *Presentation To The Congregations* also served as a site survey of the various major populations centers in the Dakota-Montana District. Seven sites were surveyed: Rapid City, Mobridge, Aberdeen, Watertown, Brookings, Sioux Falls and Bismarck. This survey was food for thought. People could decide for themselves where an area Lutheran high school would be most prosperous. As the title of this pamphlet conveys, it was meant to raise the awareness of the various congregations in the District. By November 3rd, 1980, this pamphlet had been presented to twelve congregations

(approximately 600 people). Another eighteen congregations were scheduled to receive this presentation at a later date.

Another monumental step in laying the foundation for the dream of an area Lutheran high school took place four months after the decision was made to close NLA. On December 1st of 1979 a meeting was held at Trinity Church, Aberdeen, South Dakota. Many important decisions about an area Lutheran high school were made on this day. At this meeting the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. (DMLHS) was formally organized by adopting Articles of Incorporation and bylaws (This title was replaced in May of 1991 with what now is Great Plains Lutheran High School). The steering committee was also asked to serve as the temporary board of control.

With a name, Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., and a surge of promotion to gain the support of the entire District, the foundation of a dream was laid. Consider how quickly the foundation for an area Lutheran high school was laid on the plains! It's truly an amazing feat. Already by November 3rd of 1980 a history of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., was presented to over 100 councilmen and pastors at St. Martin's Lutheran School, Watertown, SD! That is less than a year and a half after it was decided to close NLA. Anyone would have to agree; the constituents of the Dakota-Montana District concerned about Christian education on a secondary level were a resilient bunch! Sure, they could have pleaded indifference. They could have looked at the road leading to the organization of an area Lutheran high school and said, "No thank you, the road looks to long and bumpy!" They could have done this, but they didn't. Instead they looked to the very best of navigators, their Lord, to give them

guidance and reassurance! He would lead them down that seeming long road. He would pad the blow when the bumpy terrain seemed overwhelming.

This group on the prairie concerned about Christian secondary education prayed that the Lord would serve in yet another capacity, that of Foreman of the building crew. Holding the blueprint for what would be Great Plains Lutheran High School, the Lord had guided his crew to lay the foundation for the dream of an area Lutheran high school. It was now time for the Lord to direct this resilient bunch as they built the framework of this dream.

Frustration In Building The Framework For The Dream: While attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary I have worked for a building company. At first, the only incentive I had for working for this building company was the paycheck that paid the school bills. I've worked for this building company for three years now. I still have the same bills to pay, but my incentive for working has changed. I have come to realize, framing out a house can be very interesting; not to mention very time consuming and exhausting. As each 2x4 goes in place it gives a sense of accomplish, but there are quite a few 2x4s that go into building a house. Sometimes a carpenter puts up a 2x4 only to find out it has a huge crack in it, or is too warped to pass inspection; so the carpenter tears it out and tries again. There are many variables that accompany the building of a house. Some days there is frustration and other days everything seems to fit just right!

The point of my illustration isn't to give my life story, that might be rather dull. My point is that everything must have a frame if it is to stand and that takes work! This was also the case for the people of the Dakota-Montana District. If their dream for an

area Lutheran high school was to be successful, they had to structure their efforts in such a way that their dream would succeed. Like building a house 2×4 by 2×4, it was necessary for the people of the Dakota-Montana District to build the dream of an area Lutheran high school piece by piece. This process was time consuming and very exhausting. At times building the framework for this dream progressed very slowly, almost to a crawl. At other times many pieces were put into place in a relatively short period of time. Still, at other times, certain pieces of the framework were torn out and replaced by better ones. Some would argue, “It just took too long for Great Plains Lutheran High School to get up and running.” But something as precious as educating young people in Christ is worth taking extra time. Through the trying years the Lord kept his crew motivated and focused, even in times of frustration!

If you would ask many carpenters, “What were the most frustrating years as a carpenter?” Many carpenters would respond, “When I was doing my apprenticeship because a simple task for the more seasoned carpenters was, in reality, a strenuous task for me.” So it was with planning an area Lutheran high school on the plains. The thought of an area Lutheran high school seems pretty simple; you pick out some land, draw up a few blueprints for a campus, slap some buildings up, design a curriculum, call a few teachers, tell the students, “We’re open for business,” and presto! I think many in the Dakota-Montana District wish it would have been that easy. However, like the frustrated young carpenter, at times building the framework for the dream of an area Lutheran high school was very frustrating for those involved.

One area of frustration seemed to be how slowly the idea of an area Lutheran high school was developing. Already in 1982 the President of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., was reminding people “patience is a virtue.” Here is a clip from the Report of the President:

Are you patient? According to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, patient means, “Steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity.” So, I ask you again, “Are you patient?” Will you be patient for an area Lutheran high school? Will you stand steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity for this opportunity to provide a Christian education to the children of our district? God has commanded us in Ephesians 6:4, “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” What better way to nurture our youth than with a Christian high school. As we began the area Lutheran high school project over three years ago, we were told that many other groups had worked for about 10 years to establish a high school. I, for one, did not realize how long 10 years would be.⁸

By the tone of this report, it seemed that people were expecting what I described earlier, do this, build that and presto an area Lutheran high school. Maybe patience was wearing thin do to the fact that the people pushing for the high school were being to hard on themselves, “If other high schools were established in ten years, we are definitely capable of the same!”

The Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School President's Report in 1983 hints at the fact the desire for an area Lutheran high school was cooling off. It seems some felt that instead of operating our own school and bearing the brunt of the cost as an Association, why not make use of the schools that are already in operation, such as Nebraska Lutheran High School and Martin Luther Preparatory School. I believe what

⁸ Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. Report of the President, May 8th, 1982.

Roger Frey, President of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., said were wise words that still hold true today when considering Christian education, he said:

We often times ask what the value of a Christian education is. A dollars and cents value is impossible to place on it. A Christian education does not necessarily make better human beings or perfect people, but it does bring us closer to God, guiding us through our man-centered society on that pathway to heaven. In Proverbs 22:6 the Lord says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."⁹

The thought of leaving the responsibility of Christian secondary education to others outside the Dakota-Montana District was hinted at again in the 1984 Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. President's Report. But there were also other variables playing their part in this frustration at the time. Location for the area Lutheran high school was one of the variables. In 1984 there was a renewed effort by persons in the Mobridge area to utilize the former NLA property. Such an effort was understandable, the NLA campus had served its purpose for 51 blessed years, why couldn't continue to serve in that capacity? Unfortunately if the idea of an area Lutheran high school was to have a chance, everyone had to begin thinking with their minds instead of with their hearts. Considering the changing demographics mentioned earlier, the old NLA campus in Mobridge was not the best possible location for an area Lutheran high school. One individual with whom I talked likened the old NLA campus to a noose. As long as the NLA campus was available there would be no serious consideration as to the best possible location for such a high school. Thankfully the Lord got the ball rolling in the right direction when the NLA property was sold and used by the Central Indian Bible College.

⁹ Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., Report of the President, May 8th, 1983.

The other variable that played into the mix of frustration in 1984 was the request of Nebraska Lutheran High School. Nebraska Lutheran High School approached the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Board of Directors asking if they could solicit membership and financial support from the congregations in the Dakota-Montana District that send students to their school. Many within the Dakota-Montana District felt challenged, "How are we to go forward in our own plans of establishing an area Lutheran high school if a number of our people are supporting the efforts of a different area Lutheran high school." It seems from 1984 to 1985 there was a certain disunity among the constituents of the District. Some would be satisfied in encouraging the parents of the District to send their teenagers to an area Lutheran high school, or preparatory school already in operation. Others wouldn't be satisfied until the congregations of the District realized they had a privilege and responsibility to train their teenagers at their own area Lutheran high school. These two opposing thoughts came to a head in 1985:

Which is the best option? Our concern is for the students of the Dakota-Montana District. Will more of these students receive Christian education if we encourage them and/or provide scholarship funds for them to attend a neighboring school? Or will more students receive a Christian education by providing them with their own local school? Will we be content to let others make the educational decisions concerning our children? Do we care so little about Christian secondary education that we are not willing to provide it ourselves? If we provide our own school, can we do it at a cost that we are willing to pay?... What choice would God have us make? Will we establish a Lutheran **high school** or will we erect a **headstone** that says, "It can't be done?" That will make it much harder for any future group that is willing to provide Christian secondary education than we are.¹⁰

In 1985-1986 the cause for an area Lutheran high school seemed to be waning. Instead of pushing forward with the framework of an area Lutheran high school the idea

¹⁰ Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., Report of the President, May 4th, 1985.

seemed to regress or at best came to a stalemate. The Board of Directors was forced to examine alternatives to building an area Lutheran high school within the Dakota-Montana District. The main reason for seeking other alternatives was the lack of funds. I might be misspeaking as an outsider, but the feeling I get is that people were so wrapped up in deciding where the area Lutheran high school should be located, that they simply forgot it takes funds to continue the dream of establishing an area Lutheran high school. Case in point, financial support in both 1984 and 1985 was given in the amounts of \$15,000 each year. In 1986 financial support declined to \$5,000. This was an area of frustration because to keep the dream alive the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. needed about \$22,000 per year. The Board of Directors put the best possible spin on this decline in giving by crediting the decline to major capital improvements being made to the various congregations in the District and to the poor economic conditions in the District.

One final area of frustration before moving on to the bright and positive side of building the framework for the dream of an area Lutheran high school occurred after purchasing the land in Watertown, SD., the future sight of Great Plains Lutheran High School. This frustration was voiced in a letter entitled *DMLHS Skywriting*, written as food for thought for the Board of Directors. The point of this letter is best described by a comment made by a gentleman from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at the May 1990 delegate meeting. This gentleman said, "Even if you are working on the first step, you will naturally be looking to where you will be placing your foot on the next step." It seemed to the author of the letter *DMLHS Skywriting*, and I'm sure he was not alone in his thinking, that until the land for the Lutheran high school was paid in full no other step could be taken in fulfilling the dream of a fully function area Lutheran high school. The

author's point! We could be calling a development director, designing the campus and its buildings, doing enrollment surveys and establishing fund drive projects while we are paying off the land. If we wait six years to pay off the loan for the land before we take any further steps in planning, that is another six years without Christian secondary education within the District. The encouragement of this letter called for "forward planning" and not "Sitting on our Hands,"

We must come to grips with some well defined goals, realistic goals that can be attained. We need goals that are clearly stated and none of this fuzzy stuff, "Well we think it might possibly be 7-10 years, maybe less, but probably more." I think sometimes we are afraid to set goals because deep down we think this whole project may fail. If we honestly think a high school won't work, why are deceiving the people? If we really believe we will someday have a school, why don't we quite fooling around and press forward? Many folks become disgusted with all this waiting and indecision and even forget that DMLHS is still around... We know that the Lord will guide our planning and we pray daily that He will. But have we all accepted the fact that God might tell us, "No, a high school is not practical in your area." And then we will go on with our lives using the other resources He has given us for Christian education and simply appreciate the experiences we have had trying to start our own school. But, by all this sitting on our hands, are we telling God we want it OUR WAY and we'll only accept a "yes" from him? If we truly put our faith and trust in the Lord and move aggressively forward, we will not fail! God will not direct us in the wrong direction. We may not end up with a high school, but we will not fail to do the Lord's work!¹¹

Only being able to regurgitate what I have read and heard in preparation for this paper, I'm sure there were other frustrations that halted or brought the building of the framework for the dream of an area Lutheran high school to a slow crawl. However, I believe that sight location and finances were two of the largest frustrations behind the dream of an area Lutheran high school in the Dakota-Montana District.

Despite the many frustrations, at the very same time, many positive steps were

¹¹ From a Letter called *DMLHS Skywriting*.

taken in building the framework for an area Lutheran high school. Very often, because of our inherited sinfulness, we like to dwell on the bad instead of focusing on the good. Yet with the Lord, the Creator of the universe, nothing is impossible. Not even sinful mankind can stop him from carrying out his will. That was also the case when it came to the dream of an area Lutheran high school in the Dakota-Montana District. No one could determine the Lord's will for Christian secondary education on the prairie. Holding the blueprint for what would be Great Plains Lutheran High School, God as Foreman, patiently directed his crew of builders to build the framework of an area Lutheran high school according to his blueprint and timetable. We thank the Lord once again for his guidance and patience. Let's take a look at the committed spirit the Foremen gave his crew of builders as they went about built the frame work for an area Lutheran high school.

Chapter Two: Great Plains Lutheran High School: A Commitment.

As mentioned in chapter one, a carpenter may say that his apprentice years were the most frustrating. At the same time the carpenter may also admit that the first few years in his occupation were the most exciting. Every day he was absorbing new time saving tips and learning new techniques that worked better than the previous ones. Also, the first house he built still probably holds a special place in his heart because he helped put up the studs, he pounded the nails and installed the windows. It was an exciting time because that carpenter could say, "I built that." That first, finished house was a sense of pride!

Building an area Lutheran high school out of nothing also gave the people who constitute the Dakota-Montana District a sense of pride. Despite the many frustrating times, there were many more productive times. Piece by piece they built their dream of an area Lutheran high school. However unlike the carpenter above saying "I built that," the constituents of the Dakota-Montana District would say, "The Lord built it," we simply followed the blueprints of our Foreman, the Lord. Building the framework of what would be Great Plains Lutheran High wasn't easy; it was a task of monumental undertaking. It didn't happen over night. It happened in phases. Why did it happen at all might be a better question? Because the Lord had given a District and its people committed hearts that were up for the task. In this chapter I would like to take a look at the various phases that served as pieces of Great Plains Lutheran High School's framework and the commitment it took to put those pieces into place.

Phase One: Sight Location: The sight for the area Lutheran school was probably the most difficult and controversial piece in the framework of what is today Great Plains Lutheran High School. Many sights were considered, but for one reason or another all but one of the sights didn't work out. Much of my information for this portion of the paper comes from a pamphlet, *A History Of Great Plains Lutheran High School - In Touch With Time and Eternity*. This pamphlet gives a brief history of the events between 1979-1991.

The first sight considered by the Board of Directors was the former Watertown Business University located in Watertown, SD. At one time this facility had served as a hotel. After touring this facility in January of 1981, the Board of Directors decided not to pursue the purchase of this property. I don't know for sure what the reasons were for not pursuing this property, but obviously it was not part of God's master plan for Great Plains Lutheran High school.

In September of 1981 the Board of Directors toured the second facility. This second sight was also located in Watertown, SD. It formerly served as a Catholic girl's high school and was know by the name Harmony Hill Education Center. The Board of Directors must have been impressed by the facility because by November of 1981 the Board began compiling a proposal to open a high school at the Harmony Hill facility. In fact the Board was so serious a \$35,000 goal was set to call an administrator. In May of 1982, at the third annual meeting of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High, Inc. a proposal was presented and accepted by the delegates concerning the Harmony Hill property. However, all the effort of the Board of Directors and delegates was in vain because it was

made known in November of 1982 that the sight was no longer available. In some ways the unavailability of this sight might have put off the organization of an area Lutheran high school. But looking at positively, the unavailability of Harmony Hill allowed the delegates and Board of Directors to further organize and mobilize the District's efforts to organize an area Lutheran high school. The unavailability might have been a blessing in disguise in yet another way. It seems that Harmony Hill couldn't make it as a Catholic girls high school because it wasn't able to attract substantial enrollment from the Watertown area needed to maintain the school. Maybe the pattern of poor enrollment wouldn't have been a problem for the area Lutheran high school; nevertheless that would have been a very important consideration if the Harmony Hill facility had been available.

In January of 1983, the Board toured the third facility - the former School for the Blind and the local public school in Gary, SD. This property was strongly considered for the next two years. Even though the Gary congregation pushed for this sight, it never came to fruition. The buildings and location weren't just right. Many believed that a small district like the Dakota-Montana District wouldn't be able to support and maintain an area Lutheran high school. With this thought in mind, if an area Lutheran high school was to have any chance it had to be placed in the best possible location. The largest WELS population center nearest to Gary was Watertown, 40 miles away. Another consideration concerning the Gary site was the condition of the buildings and property in general. The layout didn't feel quite right. The buildings were old and with older buildings comes increased maintenance and extra expenses. The campus at Gary brought to mind the neighboring area Lutheran high school, Nebraska Lutheran High School,

located in Waco, Nebraska. Nebraska Lutheran High School was located in a small town, on an older campus and at times had problems drawing students.

In 1985, Aberdeen, South Dakota was given consideration as a possible sight for the area Lutheran high school. I get the feeling, from what I have read and heard, Aberdeen was considered for all the wrong reasons. First of all, it seems that Aberdeen was considered as a compromise between the people who felt the area Lutheran high school should be located in Watertown and those who felt that the area Lutheran high school should be located in Mobridge. Since Aberdeen was half way between Watertown and Mobridge everyone would be satisfied. Another thing that struck me about the Aberdeen sight is the sense of urgency to get an area Lutheran high school up and running. It is nice to see people eagerly pushing for Christian secondary education, but I don't think there was much long range planning that went into the Aberdeen sight. The thought was that an area Lutheran high school could be started in Aberdeen by renting modular units (24x60). These units would serve as dormitories, classrooms and a dining hall. Has eager as the Board of Directors and delegates of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School were to get a school up and running, modular units were only a temporary solution to a long term plan. Maybe that is why, when they really sat down and considered it, the movable campus in Aberdeen never came to be.

Mobridge was considered as a possible sight for over a decade (1979-1988). As I have mention numerous times, do to the changing demographics of the Dakota-Montana District, Mobridge no longer was the best possible sight from which to operate a school. Considering that the majority of South Dakota's population now lives in Eastern part of

the state, considering that West of Mobridge there is nothing but rolling plains and open pastures until you hit Rapid City, Mobridge was no longer the center of things. When the old NLA campus was sold to Central Indian Bible College, the Board of Directors toured the old Central Indian Bible College, the campus this college was vacating.¹² That tells me that NLA was a larger and better campus than what the Central Indian Bible College had before. One quote I read concerning Mobridge and the NLA Campus hits the nail on the head:

Certainly, if the synod were to give us the NLA campus, our costs for buildings would be very small. But, on the other hand, a school supported overwhelmingly by the district is much more important. The most wonderful campus on this earth would be useless to us without a total commitment of moral and financial support of the congregations of our district.¹³

If an area Lutheran high school was to be a success, the majority of the congregations within the District had to support every aspect of the school. I don't know if that would have been the case would have the area Lutheran high school been located in Mobridge.

In 1988 it was decided that Mobridge was no longer the best possible site for an area Lutheran high school. This left the Board of Directors and the delegates of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, with one possible site remaining, Watertown, SD. On May 7th, 1988, at the ninth Annual Meeting of Delegates, a resolution was passed directing the Board to concentrate on buying a portion of land in Watertown. In September of 1989 a special delegate meeting was held to make the final decision on purchasing a portion of land in Watertown. The proposal set before the delegates was to

¹² From a pamphlet entitled, *A History Of GPLHS - In Touch With Time And Eternity*, P.6

¹³ Quote taken from a report presented to the three District conferences in May or June of 1979.

purchase 40 acres of land (the Kluck land) located on the North edge of Watertown for a price of \$200,000 (\$5,000 per acre). The proposal was voted on and approved by a vote of 21 to 15. In January of 1990 the contract to buy the land was signed and a \$20,000 down payment was made. A seven year loan was taken out for the remaining \$180,000 dollars. In March of 1990 a fund raising campaign was developed called *Train A Child*. The goal for this money-gathering program was to raise \$75,000 in each of the next three years to pay off the remaining debt on the land.

The first piece in the framework of an area Lutheran high school was put in place. After the many years of frustrating attempts to locate an area Lutheran high school in the best possible place, the piece of land purchased could finally be called "The future home of our area Lutheran high school."

Any other group of people would have thrown their hands up in frustration and said, "We give up!" This was not the case for the constituents of the Dakota-Montana District. Instead of getting bogged down to the point of giving up on the whole idea of an area Lutheran high school, As Foreman, the Lord nourished his crew with his inerrant word, giving them hearts and minds committed to the reality of an area Lutheran high school.

Phase Two: Committed Individuals: Behind every successful plan there are committed individuals. I have witnessed what happens when people are not committed to a task. At the building company where I work, nothing delays a plan from coming together more than uncommitted workers. If five men are meticulously committed to putting up the framework of a house, and five men are more worried about lunch time

than making all the angles fit tightly in the framework; the house, as a whole, will be a slipshod attempt at craftsmanship. Contrary to the illustration just mentioned, the effort of establishing an area Lutheran high school on the plains of the Dakota-Montana District was not a "Every man for himself" mentality. It was a corporate effort with everyone pitching in. In the case of Great Plains Lutheran High School, there are a few noteworthy men who played an instrumental role in its framework. This portion of the paper is dedicated to these certain key men or groups of men who played a huge role in the early stages of what today is Great Plains Lutheran High School.

Pastor David Krenke, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Mobridge, South Dakota (1969-1979) spearheaded the effort of continuing Christian secondary education within the Dakota-Montana District. While serving in the capacity of President of the NLA Board of Directors he attended the meetings held in Milwaukee, WI. Which dealt with Christian secondary education. It was very evident to Pastor Krenke that the writing was already on the wall concerning the future of NLA. It would be very difficult to erase that writing. Instead of brooding over this writing on the wall, that NLA would eventually be closed, he showed an optimistic flare that Christian secondary education could continue on the prairie, even without NLA. Pastor Krenke was a major reason why the initial group in Mobridge, "The dreamers," began thinking about how they could secure Christian secondary education for the young people of the District, even if Mobridge and NLA were not part of that education. Even though the Lord called Pastor Krenke to another field of service in 1979, just when everything was coming to a head, the Dakota-Montana District can be thankful that the Lord supplied such an able pastor to address secondary Christian education at such a crucial time. When Pastor Krenke thought about

secondary Christian education, he didn't just think a year or two down the road, he was more concerned about ten, twenty or thirty years down the road. Would there be a Christian high school for the teenagers of the District in ten, twenty or thirty years? It is obvious that Pastor Krenke believed that secondary Christian education was essential. It is also obvious that he believe God would lead the congregations and individuals of the Dakota-Montana District to take the necessary steps needed to retain such education within the District.

Another pastor who played a key role in the early developmental stages of an area Lutheran high school was Pastor Weiser. Pastor Weiser was the pastor of Trinity Church, Aberdeen, SD. (1978-1982). Looking through the 75th anniversary book of the Dakota-Montana District, something hit me when reading about Pastor Weiser. During his time as Pastor in Aberdeen, the Lutheran grade school was opened. Certainly, the pastors before him planted the idea of an Lutheran grade school, but it was during Pastor Weiser's years at Trinity that the Lutheran grade school became reality.¹⁴ It is apparent, Pastor Weiser had a heart for Christian education. It was this same heart that motivated him to pour his efforts into the idea of an area Lutheran high school within the District. He was one of the three pastors on the initial Board of Directors, the other two pastors were Pastor Wayne Rouse of Clark, SD and Pastor Terry Yahr of Hettinger ND. He was also very instrumental in putting together proposals dealing with, site, housing, teachers, enrollment, curriculum and budget already as early as 1982. That same pastoral heart for Christian secondary education remains a part of Pastor Weiser to this day. I believe he is

¹⁴ This information is taken from the 75th Anniversary booklet of the DM District, P104

presently working very closely with Evergreen Lutheran High School, which is located in the state of Washington.

In November of 1984 Mr. Neil Scriver of Rapid City, SD came onto the scene. Mr. Scriver served as the Promoter for Christian Education, a position which he faithfully occupied until April of 1986 when the Lord called for his service at Shoreland Lutheran High School located in Somers, WI. Mr. Scriver promoted the efforts of an area Lutheran high school on three different levels, the congregational level, individual level and the student level. It was very important to touch all three of these levels if an area Lutheran high school was to have a chance on the plains. This approach was very important for one specific reason. Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School wouldn't be a high school established and maintained by the Dakota-Montana District. It would be a high school established and maintain by the member congregations of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association and individual members of that Association (Later the Association would be called what it is presently called, Great Plains Lutheran High School Association). For this grassroots approached of operating an area Lutheran high school to be successful, it needed full backing from the majority of the congregations & individuals within the District. Also for the operation of any high school, students were needed. It was part of Mr. Scriver's job to also stress the importance of Christian secondary education to parents who had young children. Even though efforts didn't bear immediate fruit, Mr. Scriver's efforts were not in vain because much of what is Great Plains Lutheran High School is a result of what he planted already in 1985 and 1986. One quote conveys how instrumental Mr. Scriver was during the years of frustration

mentioned earlier in this paper, “Neil’s deep commitment to Christian education and his dedicated service have become our light in the darkness of indecision.”¹⁵

Along with giving many presentations and spending countless miles on the road, Mr. Scriver also played a large part in producing the slide presentation, *Feed My Lambs*. This slide presentation was to be viewed by church councils and voters of the various congregations in the District. Its aim was to point out the short and long term importance of Christian secondary education. However, with any presentation or speech there are limitations. Some of the church councils and voter assemblies that viewed this presentation consisted of men who were board members of the local public high school. It is understandable for these men to have a deep rooted affection for the public high school in their area because they supported it, made important decisions concerning its future and sent their children to it. For this reason it was very hard for some of these men to see the importance of supporting another high school that was for many congregations a fair distance away. This was one of many hurdles Mr. Scriver had to deal with in an evangelical manner while promoting the efforts of establishing an area Lutheran high school on the prairie.

I had an opportunity to talk with Mr. Scriver over the phone. We had a wonderful conversation as we exchanged memorable stories about the time each of us spent in the Dakota-Montana District. Some of the names and events I brought up didn’t ring a bell with him and some of the names and event he brought up didn’t ring a bell with me! However, there was a common thread that did run through various stories we shared; the warmth that protruded from the hearts of the congregations and individuals of the

¹⁵ Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc., Report of the President. May 4th, 1985.

Dakota-Montana District. Mr. Scriver commented on how friendly and caring the laity, pastors and teachers were. I would have to agree! The Dakota-Montana District is a District that cares because its made up of sincere, caring people. They care about God's Word, his work and how that work is done on every level, even on the level of secondary education. In closing our conversation I asked Mr. Scriver, "Do you have anything else that will help me fill a few more pages?" In reference to Great Plains Lutheran High School and its Association he closed by saying, "The Lord will bless them."¹⁶ With that comment Mr. Scriver hit the nail on the head. The Lord has blessed the efforts of Great Plains Lutheran High School and will continue to do so in the future.

I have mentioned just a few of the men who played key roles in building the framework of Great Plains Lutheran High School. There are many more men who were just as committed to this framework. Unfortunately, because of time restrictions and my own personal limitations, I am unable to give a thorough history of every key individual. The gentlemen who stood up for the cause of Christian secondary education, those who served on the Board of Directors and the those who served as delegates all deserve a pat on the back, a firm handshake and a warm "Thank you" for the time and effort each of them poured into putting the pieces of Great Plains Lutheran High School firmly in place. Again, without these committed individuals the effort of an area Lutheran high school would have been an impossibility. We thank the Lord for such men!

Phase Three: Financial Commitment: Before a builder or contractor will consider constructing the framework of a house, the builder or contractor has to have a committed buyer or a market where there are buyers with the proper funds. For the

¹⁶ Taken from a phone conversation I had with Mr. Scriver on April 9th, 1998.

builder, there would be nothing worse than having to stop halfway through the construction process because the buyer is short on cash. Even worse, imagine if the builder constructed a house, but could not sell it because of a poor market!

The same could be said about Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School. To get this high school up and running it would take money. Since Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School was an association the weight of funding the school was to be carried by congregations and individuals committed to Christian secondary education within the District. No congregation or individual was obligated to support the high school. If a congregation or individual wanted to join in for the cause of funding Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, the congregation or individual became an associated member of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association. Should a congregation or individual join the Association, there was no set fee to be paid. Annually, each congregation was asked to give what it had determined to give and individuals were encouraged to give annual sums that were consistent with Christian giving.

Presently Great Plains Lutheran High School is still funded and operated by associate congregations and individual members in and around the Dakota-Montana District. Just how this Association is organized and controlled is best explained in blue promotional brochure entitled, *Great Plains Lutheran High School*:

Great Plains Lutheran High School is owned and operated by an association of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregations. The affairs of the Association are administered by a 15 member Board of Directors. Each congregation is represented by at least 4 delegates with voting privileges. The operating income for GPLHS comes from three sources: tuition, congregational support, and gifts through direct appeals and development activities.

An area Lutheran high school, established and maintained by an association of congregations and individuals, has its positives and negatives. On the positive side, an area Lutheran high school established and maintained by an association fosters a “Grassroots” mentality. Congregations and individuals who see their money, effort and time at work feel a sense of pride and partnership, “This is our school.” On the negative side, sometimes it takes years to accumulate a large enough supporting cast of congregation and individual members capable of carrying the financial responsibilities of establishing and maintaining an area Lutheran high school. In the case of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association, It took quite a few years for it to build a supporting cast capable of shouldering the costs

Considering the growth of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association¹⁷ it is interesting to look at the wider picture first. As of 1996 the Dakota-Montana District consisted of 78 congregations and 9,133 communicant members.¹⁸ These numbers have changed slightly since 1979, but not enough to make a huge difference. With these numbers in mind, it is interesting to note, there were only 39 individuals who belonged to this Association in 1979. In 1980 the numbers climbed dramatically, 78 individual members, 1124 communicant members and 10 congregations were members of the Association. Once in awhile an individual member would be called home to the Lord or a congregation withdrew from the Association, but for the most part membership steadily increased through the 1980’s into the early 1990’s. In 1991 the associate membership boasted 116 individual members, 3144 communicant members and

¹⁷ The Associations name was changed to Great Plains Lutheran High School Association in May of 1991.

¹⁸ Statistics taken from the *1996 Statistical Report Of The Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.*

17 congregations. In 1994 it increased to 117 individual members, 3660 communicant members and 19 congregations. As of 1998, 38 congregations and 6,400 communicant members have joined what is now called Great Plains Lutheran High School Association. These numbers, at first may not seem staggering, but when you consider that a third of the Dakota-Montana District's communicant membership and nearly half of its congregations belong to the Association, the numbers seem more impressive.¹⁹ In the future it is hoped that many more congregations and individuals within the District will join the Great Plains Lutheran High School Association; supporting it with prayer, time, effort, finances and students.

Another important development which played a huge role in the financial framework of establishing an area Lutheran high school was the ACT Fund, *Aid to Christian Training*. The way I understand, this Fund, which was organized in 1985 was to serve both short and long term goals. The short term goal of the ACT Fund was to give financial assistance to young people within the District who were attending an area Lutheran high school or preparatory school outside of the District until an area Lutheran high school could be established within the Dakota-Montana District. The long term goal was and still is to dispense this money to students attending Great Plains Lutheran High School who are in need of financial assistance. Another long-term goal of the ACT Fund is also to help out with general operating expenses. The purpose and use of the ACT Fund is best described by the guidelines mentioned below,

(Purpose) To provide an endowment fund whose income can be used to promote secondary Christian education within the Dakota-Montana District...**(Use)** The income shall be accumulated and added to principal

¹⁹ Three Minnesota congregations that are not part of the DM District are included in these numbers.

if not distributed. Until such time as DMLHS has a high school operating within the District, 50% of the annual income of the Fund shall be used for student aid for students from the District area attending any Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) area Lutheran High School or any WELS synodical school under the such guidelines as are established by the Board. After a DMLHS high school is operating within the District, all income shall be used for operating expenses of the DMLHS school, student aid for students of the DMLHS school, or be accumulated and added to principal.²⁰

Building the framework for anything can be difficult and time consuming. The framework for an area Lutheran high school was no less of a challenge on the plains of the Dakota-Montana District. Thankfully, the Lord's crew was up to the task. Piece by piece the framework of an area Lutheran high school was nailed into place. Land was located after an extensive search. Many individuals played key roles, keeping the dream of an area Lutheran high school alive, pushing that dream ever closer to reality. Then there was the financial commitment offered by various congregations and individuals deeply concerned about Christian secondary education. All three of the phases were important pieces in the framework, one missing piece would have brought the whole building process to a halt. Thanks must be directed to the Lord for serving in the capacity of Foreman. He is the one who rallied his crew to push forward and to wait patiently as the framework took shape piece by piece.

²⁰ Information from the May 4th, 1991 *Annual Delegate Meeting Workbook*

Chapter Three: Great Plains Lutheran High School: A Reality:

Progressing Towards Reality: Reality began by choosing a new name for what was presently called Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School. On May 4th, 1991, at the Twelfth Annual Delegate Meeting held at St. Martin's Lutheran School in Watertown, the Board of Directors issued two ballots to the voters. The first ballot asked if the new school should be called an "Academy" or a "High School." The second ballot offered various names for the new school: Dakota-Montana Lutheran, Midwest Lutheran, Great Plains Lutheran, Heartland Lutheran and Watertown Lutheran. We know what name was voted on and approved, Great Plains Lutheran High School. I believe with the majority of the voters that the name "Great Plains Lutheran High School" catches the geographic essence from Western Minnesota to the Western edge of Montana. There might be rolling plains, butts and mountains as you head further West, but for the most part Western Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana are one wide open plain. If you have ever graced these plains, you know you can stand at any given location and see for miles and miles.

Another progressive step towards the reality of Great Plains Lutheran High School was the encouragement of financial giving. In a sense many seemed to be saying, "We've made it this far with God's help, He certainly will give us the needed push to make Great Plains Lutheran High School a thriving reality. Part of the 1993-94 Working Agenda was pigeonholed for gaining financial commitment from every congregation in the District so that all could be a part of this new chapter of history in the Dakota-Montana District. Rallying around God's word, "I can do everything through him who

gives me strength,” (Philippians 4:13) Pastor Dennis Hayes of St. Martin’s in Watertown, encouraged everyone to take part in making Great Plains Lutheran High School a reality:

You will note that part of the 1993-94 Working Agenda is to encourage member congregations and individual members to consider, if they are not doing so already, regular contributions towards GPLHS. The board has no intention of telling associate members what they are to contribute but rather would like to encourage congregations to consider an amount and work towards increasing that amount each year. Starting at two or three dollars a communicant is a beginning. Such an action would, in a tangible way, show all the members of the association a sincere desire for GPLHS to become a reality and it would be an encouragement for the board as they carry out their responsibilities in the fear and love of God.²¹

Besides land payments there would be other expenses in the near future should GPLHS become a reality. Some of these foreseeable expenses were salaries for teachers, building projects and those little bills that seem to add up.

Another step taken in making Great Plains Lutheran High School a reality was the calling of an Administrator. After six returned calls for this position the Lord blessed GPLHS Association with Pastor Wayne Fischer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin who arrived on the scene in August of 1995. He was installed as Administrator on August 13th, 1995 At Bethlehem Ev. Lutheran Church in Watertown. Pastor Fischer’s main duties as Administrator were/are: 1) Promote Christian education by speaking to congregations, elementary schools and interested individuals; 2) Serve as coordinator by organizing and helping establish GPLHS. Along with these duties Pastor Fischer presently is also serving in many other capacities. One quote demonstrates Pastor Fischer’s love for Christ and Christian secondary education:

At times we must simply stand back in awe to behold the workings of God.

²¹ 1993 Report of the President of the Board of Directors.

Standing back in this way is truly a celebration of God's grace. At times we need to tirelessly work for the sake of God's youth to whom we minister. This, too, is a celebration of God's grace. Now is the time to acknowledge the greatness of our God and boldly step forward with this special ministry of excellence we know as Great Plains Lutheran High School.²²

Everything that has taken place to make GPLHS a reality is a reflection of God's grace. Pastor Fischer is correct in calling GPLHS a "Special ministry of excellence." May the Lord continue to invigorate all of His tireless soldiers to recruit young souls in need of such a ministry.

To operate an area Lutheran high school the proper facilities are also needed. After the 1994-1995 school year, Grant Elementary School, a public elementary school of the Watertown Public School system was vacated because a new public school facility had been built. Since GPLHS didn't have a classroom building of its own and the Public School District had no problem renting the building to GPLHS on a year to year basis, Grant Elementary School seemed like a logical place to begin conducting classes in the Fall of 1996. In its first two years of operation GPLHS has been carrying out Christian Education in this building. As for housing the out-of-town students? In its inaugural year GPLHS housed its out-of-town students off campus until a dormitory could be built on the 40-acre plot of land. The Students of GPLHS settled into the new 14,400 square foot dormitory in January of 1998, the second year of GPLHS existence.

Students are the key ingredients in the reality of any school. In February of 1996 there were 38 potential students, by May of 1996, 19 freshmen and sophomores had registered for GPLHS first year. 22 students attended GPLHS in its inaugural year. You

²² From an article written by Pastor Fischer entitled, *Excellence*. March of 1998.

might be asking, "Weren't there any junior or seniors who registered?" In the 1996-1997 academic year GPLHS opened with a two-grade format consisting of freshmen and sophomores. In the 1997-1998 academic year the junior class was added with the senior class to follow in 1999. There were a couple of reasons for this format: 1) Start up costs for GPLHS would be more manageable with two classes instead of three or all four classes; and 2) This step progression of incorporating classes would give GPLHS the time necessary to build a dormitory and classrooms capable of handling a larger number of students.

Two important dates also play a key role in Great Plains Lutheran High School's progress towards reality. The first of these dates is August 25th, 1996, the opening service of GPLHS. The theme for this service was *Great Plains Lutheran High School: Celebrate God's Grace*. Synod President, Karl Gurgel, delivered the Sermon. The sermon's theme was *Growing In God's Grace*. 375 people attended this opening service of GPLHS. At the conclusion of the service, one announcement rang with sweet irony, "Students, remember classes begin tomorrow morning at 8:00."²³ Why do I call this irony? Very often when school fires up for another year, students and parents alike take a deep breath knowing that for the next 9 months they are going to be very busy. However, on this given day people weren't necessarily thinking, "Here we go again," they were thinking, "Finally our dream, after 17 years has become reality." The first 9 months of GPLHS were going to be as memorable as the opening service!

The second important date didn't trail far behind. On January 31st of 1997 a Land

²³ From the *Dakota-Montana Newsletter*, October 1996.

Debt Retirement Celebration was held.²⁴ Over 200 people were there to celebrate and to enjoy coffee, hot chocolate and cookies. As Mr. Cameron Buri, President of the Board of Directors, handed the final land payment to Mrs. Leona Kluck, the previous owner of the land, cheers went up and the land officially became the property of GPLHS. Balloons were released, each with a message enclosed. This was a definite milestone in the history of GPLHS. It was also an opportunity again to thank the Lord for his guiding grace!

A Vision For The Future: We may not always know what God has in mind for the well-being of his redeemed children, yet granting each of us common sense, He allows us to set goals and grants us the means to attain those goals. GPLHS is still writing its chapter of history in the Dakota-Montana District. No one hopes that it is a long and prosperous history more than the people associated with GPLHS. Of course there will be unexpected obstacles and hardships along the way, but with obstacles and hardships also comes God's promise to shepherd the decisions of those who are near and dear to his heart.

Possessing this comfort, the Great Plains Lutheran High School Association, with its member congregations and individual members has forged ahead with Great Plains Lutheran High School's future. The major planning has to do with building projects. Heeding God's word passed on through the Apostle Paul, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11), the Great Plains Lutheran Association adopted a four phased/year building project entitled, *Building on our foundation*. When the fourth phase is finished it is estimated that 10 millions will have been invested in the campus. This is quite a huge undertaking for an

²⁴ For more on this Land Debt Retirement Celebration see appendix 3.

Association that consists of roughly 5,400 communicant members and roughly 37 congregations. Knowing that this is such a monumental undertaking there is no better place to begin than by digging a foundation deeply rooted in Christ and his word.

Phase one is already completed, student housing. Students occupied the 14,400 square foot dormitory in January of 1998. I haven't seen the building myself, but I'm told it is very attractive. I have lived in dorms for twelve years now. I know what an important role dormitory plays. It serves as the student's home away from home for 9 months out of the year. The dormitory rooms I stayed in during my high school and college years were about 12x9. The dormitory at GPLHS has large rooms measuring 12x20, perfect for making the student feel more at home. Also, instead of everyone sharing a common bathroom in the middle of the dormitory wing, the dormitory at GPLHS has a bathroom for every four students, another nice feature. There are also study rooms, rooms for practicing musical instruments, a laundry room and a visiting room so the students can watch television or visit with family and friends. It sounds like a nice building and serves the useful purpose of making the students feel right at home.

Phase two is the main building, the centerpiece of the campus. If it goes according to plan, the main building will be finished in the Fall of 1998 at the cost of roughly 4 million dollars. Presently there is a push to get this building finished. With the increased enrollment of the senior class and because there is the possibility that Grant Elementary School will not be available for the 1998-1999 school year there is a need for a building that can serve as classrooms and athletic facilities.²⁵ The layout of this

²⁵ Pastor Wayne Fischer, Administrator at GPLHS, recently informed me that Grant Elementary School would be used for the 1998-1999 school year. A meeting is scheduled for May 2nd, 1998 to discuss the future plans for the classroom building. Until then building projects are on hold. .

building is to be a two-story building. The first floor will be utilized for classrooms, eight at first with the possibility of seventeen additional classrooms. There will also be an auditorium on the first floor. The cafeteria, conference room and administrative offices fill up the remaining space of the first floor. The second floor is dedicated to athletics. It is envisioned that this athletic facility will contain two basketball courts that easily can be transformed into three volleyball courts. Around the parameter of the courts will be a running track. Rounding out the second floor are the locker rooms for the male and female athletes, lockers for the coaches and the public rest rooms.

Considering the cost, roughly 4 million dollars, and possible urgency of constructing this building should the Watertown Public School choose to use the Grant Elementary School for other purposes, finances and time are the two major issues facing the Association. On the financial end of things it is hoped that a large portion of the money needed for this building will be either given or committed by member congregations and individual members.²⁶ To keep costs at a minimum and to save time, volunteers are encouraged to lend a helping hand with the construction process. Something as simple as painting a room or cleaning up will save money and time. This type of volunteer service saved time and money when the dormitory was under construction. It is the hope of Administrator Wayne Fischer and anyone else connected with GPLHS that there will be as many, if not more, hands willing to pitch in on the construction of the main building. Finally and most importantly, pray the Lord of the harvest to lead His children to provide the needed resources of finances and time for this

²⁶ As of December of 1997 \$1.3 million has been committed and \$178,000 received.

monumental undertaking.

Phase three is set to be finished in the Fall of 1999. This phase includes the second dormitory that is an identical match to the first dormitory. Once this dormitory is finished the campus of GPLHS will be capable of housing 84 resident students.

Phase four of construction would be the athletic fields. This project is scheduled for completion in the Fall of 2000. The fields will include a baseball and softball diamonds, soccer fields, tennis courts and a football field surrounded by a running track.

Of course the building projects taking place on the GPLHS campus are important, but not of utmost importance. The most important aspect of GPLHS is what takes place behind the doors of GPLHS. Like any other high school, GPLHS has math, composition, history, geography and foreign languages along with a whole host of electives. But what sets GPLHS apart from any public school is its religion curriculum. The freshmen are required to take the course *The Heritage of our faith*, the sophomores *In Steps Of Jesus*, and the juniors *Living Christianity*. In the 1998-1999 school year the senior class will be added and so will the religion course *Practical Christianity*. Another wonderful sight taking place behind the walls of GPLHS is the camaraderie of young people laughing, bumping shoulders and most importantly sharing a common faith in Christ their Lord. What was lost in 1979 at the closing of NLA has again been found at GPLHS.

To round out this paper I would like to briefly describe the many and various newsletters and publications GPLHS has in circulation. The first of these is the *Minute Memo*. This is an every other month publication that updates the discussions and decisions made at the regular Board of Directors meetings. The *Focus* is a newsletter that covers the proceedings of the annual delegates meeting. This newsletter is published

once a year and is usually sent out in June. *The Confirmand* is a very important recruitment publication that is sent out to students within or around the District who are nearing high school age. This publication, I believe, is sent to the pastors of the various congregations, who distribute it to the young people of the various congregations. *Points To Ponder* is a bulletin insert which is sent out to all the congregations within the District. This bulletin insert's primary purpose is to highlight the importance of supporting secondary Christian education at GPLHS. *Heart To Heart* is an every other month newsletter that lets people in on the latest news at GPLHS. The publication of this newsletter began in September of 1997. I have to tell you it is a great way to let people experience what is taking place behind the scenes at GPLHS.

By all the various publications, newsletters and bulletin inserts mentioned above you can tell people can't keep the secret of GPLHS in, they have to let everyone know about the wonderful things taking place behind its doors. In the 1996-1997 academic year 22 teenagers attended GPLHS. This year, the 1997-1998 academic year, 33 students are attending GPLHS. The projected enrollment for the 1998-1999 school year presently stands at about 50 students. There are many exciting things happening at GPLHS. The student body is on the rise. The senior class will be added this next fall, which also means the first graduating class of GPLHS. The campus is taking shape year by year. Young Christians are again bumping shoulders and laughing as they walk down the hallways. Does it get any better than this?

When I began this paper I really didn't know if I would have enough information to write a paper. I don't have to say it, but I'm going to say it anyway, "I had more than enough to write about!" What is provided in this paper is only the tip of the iceberg when

it comes to the rich history of GPLHS, but it's a start. It is truly amazing to see how the Lord works. Nearly nineteen years ago NLA was closed. Over these nineteen years the Lord has patiently guides his people to reestablish Christian secondary education on the plains. Why the Lord does the things he does we may never know. But what he does do is always for the praise of his name and the well being of his Christian family.

GPLHS may not be nestled on a hillside, overlooking the Missouri River, but its purpose is the same as its predecessor, to give young people a firm foundation that will carry them through the unknowns and hardships of this life. That firm foundation is our Lord, Jesus Christ who offers this promises to each of his dear children, "Never will I live you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). The scenery has changed, the buildings are different, the faculty is new, but the need remains the same. Young people need to be reminded everyday that they have a Savior who loves them and cares what happens in their lives. GPLHS takes care of this spiritual need of the young people in and around the Dakota-Montana District and in the process offers a well-rounded education second to none. Great Plains Lutheran High School began with a dream, but has become a reality! We thank the Foremen, Jesus Christ, for leading the way and guiding his faithful crew thus far. May Christ continue to guide the endeavors of GPLHS as it continues to write its own chapter in the history book of the Dakota-Montana District.

Appendix One:

Great Plains Lutheran High School Watertown, South Dakota School Seal

The gold ring encircling the seal represents the eternal life which believers enjoy through faith in their Savior.

The empty cross in the middle of the seal represents the crucified yet living Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the center of our students' education, as well as all of our school's activities. It is the faith in that crucified yet living Savior which provides a focus for our ministry to young Christians at Great Plains Lutheran High School.

The open book represents the Scriptures. God's inspired and inerrant Word provides the firm foundation for the training the students receive at Great Plains Lutheran High School. The book is open, because God's Word is the source of absolute and lasting knowledge. The "lamp of learning" rests on that open book. The lamp represents the fact that the instructors at Great Plains Lutheran High School present all subjects from a scriptural viewpoint. Students participate in curricular and extra-curricular activities in the light of that same Word of Life.

The bright sun is rising on a new day. The new day originally represents the advent once again of secondary Christian education within our Dakota-Montana District. Now that Great Plains Lutheran High School is in operation, the sun represents each new day of grace God shares with His people who attend this school, as well as those people who come into contact with that grace through this school.

The green plain on the left and the blue waves on the right represent the topography of the immediate area and also reflect the name – Great Plains Lutheran High School. West of Watertown are the vast plains which eventually rise to meet the Rocky Mountains of Montana and Canada. In Watertown (and also to the east into western Minnesota) are the glacial lakes and rolling terrain which characterize the area.

Children from the Dakota-Montana District's Lutheran elementary schools and Sunday schools submitted ideas which contributed to the overall concept of the school seal. Steve Randall, an architect from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Alan Uher, a teacher from Watertown, South Dakota, compiled the children's ideas to synthesize the present design.

Appendix Two:

Course Descriptions

Freshmen Courses

<u>Required</u>	<u>Electives</u>	<u>Lake Area Multi-District</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Heritage of our Faith2. Language Arts 93. Math (Applied Math 1, Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry)4. Physical Science5. Music6. Christian Wellness	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. World Geography2. Computer Skills3. German I4. Latin I5. Spanish I	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Agribusiness2. Science & Natural Resources

Sophomore Courses

<u>Required</u>	<u>Electives</u>	<u>Lake Area Multi-District</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In Steps of Jesus2. Speech and Composition3. Math (Applied Math 2, Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry, Advanced Algebra/Trigonometry)4. Biology5. Physical Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. World Geography2. World History3. Choir4. Computer5. Applications6. German I & II7. Latin I & II8. Spanish I	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Agribusiness2. Science & Natural Resources

Junior Courses

<u>Required</u>	<u>Electives</u>	<u>Lake Area Multi-District</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Living Christianity 2. Language Arts 11 3. Physical Education 11 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. World Geography 2. World History 3. Algebra 4. Geometry 5. Advanced Algebra 6. Choir 7. Chemistry 8. Computer Applications 9. German I & II 10. Latin I & II 11. Spanish I 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agribusiness 2. Science & Natural Resources 3. Automotive Technology 4. Business Computer Technology 5. Building Trades 6. Drafting 1 & 2 7. Electronics 8. Health Occupations 9. Machine Tool Technology 1 & 2 10. Welding Technology

Senior Courses (possible courses – senior class to be added in Fall of 1998)

<u>Required</u>	<u>Electives</u>	<u>Lake Area Multi-District</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practical Christianity 2. Language Arts 12 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accounting 2. Pre-Calculus 3. Physics 4. Physical Education 5. Band or choir 6. Computer Applications 7. American History 8. Economics 9. Government 10. German 1, 2 & 3 11. Latin 1, 2 & 3 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agribusiness 2. Science & Natural Resources 3. Automotive Technology 4. Business Computer Technology 5. Building Trades 6. Drafting 1 & 2 7. Electronics 8. Health Occupations 9. Machine Tool Technology 1 & 2 10. Welding Technology

Appendix Three:

Land Debt Retirement Celebration

Friday, January 31, 1997 • 1:15 pm

Future Site of Great Plains Lutheran High School Campus • Watertown, South Dakota

Pastor Wayne Fischer *Administrator • Great Plains Lutheran High School*

Great Plains Lutheran High School Choir *"In Thee, O Lord"*

Mayor Brenda Barger *Mayor • Watertown, South Dakota*

Pastor Robert P. Hankwitz *Development Director • Great Plains Lutheran High School*

Welcome of Our Savior • Brookings, South Dakota as a member congregation of the
Great Plains Lutheran High School Association

Mr. Cameron Buri *President • Great Plains Lutheran High School Association Board*

Balloon Release

"We are happy that you could be part of our special day. 'The mission of Great Plains Lutheran High School is to assist Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregations, their families and others in fellowship, nurture our youth for time and eternity by educating the total student – spiritually, intellectually and physically – in a caring Christian environment.' Over 5,400 WELS Lutherans from 30 congregations in the Dakota-Montana District (North and South Dakota, a portion of Wyoming and the south central provinces of Canada) and the western portion of the Minnesota District of our Synod have taken on the support of this ministry. In the first year of operation, God blessed us with 22 students in ninth and tenth grades educated by three full-time instructors and two part-time instructors. God willing, we are looking forward to completing a new \$7.5 million campus including main building, student housing and athletic fields within four years on this land we, by God's grace, paid off today."

Refreshments

Hot Chocolate, Coffee, Cookies

Appendix Four:

**Great Plains Lutheran High School Tuition & Fees
(1997-1998)**

Associate Members

1 st Student	\$2,400/year
2 nd Student	\$1,835/year
3 rd Student	\$1,250/year
Additional Student	\$300/year

Other Students in Fellowship

Per Student	\$3,090/year
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All Other Students

Per Student	\$4,215/year
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Multi-District Course (Optional)

Per Student	\$750/year
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Piano, Instrumental, Vocal Lessons (Optional)

Per Student	\$300/year
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Room & Board (Each boarding student)

Per Student	\$2,000/year
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Appendix Five:

Great Plains Lutheran High School's Computer System

19 Computer

- 12 in the computer lab
- 4 in the office
- 1 in the library
- 1 in Mr. Diersen's office
- 1 in Mr. Falak's office

4 Laser Printers

- One is shared in the office.
- One is shared in the computer lab.
- One is dedicated to our Administrator.
- One is dedicated to our Financial Assistant.

1 File Server

1 CD-ROM Server

All are networked with Novell 4.1 and 10 base-T cabling 10mbs and 100mbs nics

The 19 Computers have:

120MHZ Pentium
16 MB of RAM
850 MB Hard Drives
15" Monitors
Windows 95
Microsoft Works

Our Novell Server has:

120MHZ Pentium
32MB of RAM
850 MB Hard Drive
3 Network interface cards

Our CD-ROM Server has:

120MHZ Pentium
32 MB of Ram
850 MB Hard Drive
Three 6 disc CD-ROM changers for a total of 18 CD's on line to all computers
Four popular encyclopedias and two dictionaries plus more, as much of our library will be "ELECTRONIC"

One of the computers in the lab will be on the internet.