

A Christ-Centered Education for a Christ-Centered Life:

The Founding of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School

Timothy A. Henning
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Senior Church History
Professor Edward C. Fredrich II
April 30, 1991

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 W. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

"A Christ-Centered Education for a Christ-Centered Life." This original motto of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School (MVL) reflects a long-standing attitude in the New Ulm, Minnesota, area. For over 100 years St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Ulm has operated a Lutheran elementary school. Christian day schools have been common in the area for a long time, at places like Gibbon, Fairfax, Nicollet, Sleepy Eye and Arlington, among others. Since 1884 Martin Luther Academy (MLA) and Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) had made it possible to obtain a Christian day school teaching degree without leaving the area.

But in the late 1970's this tradition of complete Christian education was threatened. The DMLC/MLA campus was overcrowded. Academy-College student body relationships were strained. The synod recognized that something needed to be done. That something turned out to be moving the academy to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, in 1979. It was at this time that MVL was planned, opened and took its place as the Lutheran High School in the New Ulm area where young Christians could receive "A Christ-Centered Education for a Christ-Centered Life."

The Stage is Set.

The idea of an area Lutheran high school was not totally new to the Minnesota River Valley in 1977. In fact, as early as 1960 preliminary planning was undertaken by congregations in the New Ulm-Mankato area. However, "at that time the withdrawal of some area churches and membership into the

C.L.C. brought an end to further study of an area Lutheran High School."(1) The C.L.C. congregations eventually formed their own high school, Immanuel Lutheran High School, in Mankato. The presence of Bethany Lutheran High School, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's companion to Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary in Mankato, and MLA in New Ulm kept the any further attempts to begin an area Lutheran high school from materializing.

As far as WELS members were concerned, the future of MLA seemed quite secure in 1962. In a special convention held from November 7-9 of that year, the synod recognized that crowding was already becoming a problem on the hill. An enrollment of 900 at DMLC alone in 1970 was predicted.(2) Recognizing this problem, construction of dormitory space on the campus was approved. In addition, resolution number three of that convention recommended that the preparatory school in New Ulm be relocated on its own campus in close proximity to its parent school.(3) But due to the circumstances following the suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod, this plan never materialized. With more dollars required to set up our own foreign mission program, the prep school campus situation was put on a back burner.

But in the mid-1970's it became quite clear that something had to be done about the overcrowded campus on the hill. The enrollment at the two schools was coming closer and closer to the capacity of 1225. In fact, the projected combined enrollment for the two schools for the 1977-78

school year was reported to the 1977 Synod Convention as 1098.(4) Based upon these reports, the convention in resolution fifteen directed the Commission on Higher Education to study the prep school situation and report to the 1978 district conventions and to the 1979 synod convention.(5) Eleven months later, the synod, in a special convention held July 11 and 12, 1978, at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, voted to purchase the former Campion High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and move MLA there.(6)

This move of the Academy, combined with the closing of Bethany Lutheran High School in 1969, left the New Ulm-Mankato area, an area with a large concentration of WELS and ELS members, without a Lutheran High School to serve its youth. It was against this background that, under the Lord's blessing, Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School was born.

The Solid Foundation is Laid.

The possibility of MLA moving out of the New Ulm area prompted Lutherans in the New Ulm Conference to take action. In an informal discussion at a conference in the fall of 1977, Prof. Frederick Manthey of MLA advised the circuit pastor, Rev. Thomas Henning (my dad), that if we wanted to keep a Christian secondary education in the area it was time to start taking action.(7) Late in February 1978, the impetus came for the planning to begin. The word was out that the Commission on Higher Education was looking at the Campion campus for MLA. Several laymen approached Rev.

Henning during a grade school basketball tournament game at the DMLC gymnasium and asked what the proper course of action would be.(8) As a result, the *Area High School Exploratory Committee* was born.

The committee, appointed by Rev. Henning held its organizational meeting on March 4, 1978. One of the members of this committee was Pastor (now Seminary Professor) Leroy Dobberstein of St. Paul's in New Ulm, Rev. Henning's associate. Gene Rodewald (father of Rev. Duane Rodewald) was elected chairman, Ken Brueske, secretary and Don Beilke, treasurer. Other members of the committee included: Steven Strieter, Ray Mielke, Harold Runke and James Janicke. The efficient planning which characterized this committee began at its very first meeting. Each member contributed ten dollars to begin a treasury. The committee voted to purchase twelve copies of the WELS Board for Parish Education manual Planning for Lutheran High Schools. It was decided to concentrate efforts on the fifteen WELS congregations, and 8,000 communicants within a thirty mile radius of New Ulm. Three subcommittees were formed: The "Statement of Purpose Committee," The "Profile Sheets of Information form Congregations Committee" and the "News Releases Committee."(9)

The careful planning continued at the next exploratory committee meeting. Three new members were accepted to the committee including Rev. Oliver Lindholm of St. Peter's, St. Peter, and Teacher David Nack of St. John's, Fairfax. It is

ironic that neither of these congregations would become members of the original association. The committee decided that all of their meetings would be open to the pastors and male teachers in the area. The committee members were asked to interview several members of their congregations to get a feel for what people thought of the idea. Other members were asked to investigate enrollment trends at the public high schools of the area. The results of these investigations, along with the report of the "Profile Subcommittee" would be vital in making an intelligent decision about starting a Lutheran high school.(10)

The most important action by the committee at their second meeting was to adopt their statement of purpose. The statement adopted follows. In the light of the WELS Board for Worker Training recommendations coming before the synod convention this year, note that from the very beginning MVL has been place a high value on in preparing pastors and teachers for the synod, as expressed in number six below.

Statement of Purpose

It is our firm conviction that an area Lutheran high school is both desirable and necessary in order to:

1. Assist parents in their God-given responsibility of providing Christian education for their children.
2. Enable children to continue on the high school level the Christian training received in our Christian day schools.
3. Enable children who have not had an opportunity to attend a Christian day school to receive formal Christian education on the high school level.
4. Provide for the spiritual needs of our youth as they continue to develop mentally, physically, and

emotionally.

5. Give our children a thorough Christian training as well as provide both academic and vocational training on the high school level.

6. Offer the necessary courses for those who wish to prepare for the preaching and teaching ministry.

7. Encourage the development of proper Christian relationships at this highly important and impressionable state of our children's development.

8. Provide influence and experience which will encourage our youth to be workers and leaders in our home congregations.(11)

As Lyle Wichmann of St. Paul's in North Mankato joined the committee of twelve members, feedback was heard from the congregations of the area.

Individual interview results were presented by all committee members present. Some highlights of those reports include:

- a) Very little negative but generally conservative attitude about financial support.
- b) About two-thirds indicating their belief that an area high school could only work if MLA moves while one-third felt that there was room and need for both.
- c) Depending on distance from New Ulm (assumed location in most instances) there was hesitation about transportation and boarding problems.
- d) Some expression of concern about alleged deterioration of discipline and standards in public schools... thus support for the area high school concept.
- e) Generally favorable comments toward assumed curriculum offering more electives (than MLA).
- f) Some comments again suggested idea of "hybrid" academy and area high school.
- g) Almost unanimous resistance to idea of moving MLA to Prairie du Chien.(12)

The enrollment committed reported the following:

- a) All (school) districts have already experienced a decline in enrollment.
- b) Most are looking for it to go lower until 1986, then level off.
- c) Consolidations seem inevitable for smaller systems around 1980-81.
- d) From high in 1972 through 1986, declines range from

14% in New Ulm to 25% for some smaller systems.(13)

The next few meetings of the committee were attended by Mr. Don Zimmerman of the WELS Board for Parish Education (BPE), who served as consultant for the early work of the exploratory committee. The committee met following the Minnesota District convention on June 27, 1978. This was the last meeting for Rev. Dobberstein who accepted a call to Algoma, Wisconsin. He was replaced by Rev. James Schmidt of Morgan.(14) This was also the last meeting held before the special synod convention. The reports from the district conventions made it evident that the constituency of the synod favored the move of MLA. Teacher Harold Runke and James Janicke were asked to write a bulletin insert entitled "What Going to Happen if MLA Moves?" This bulletin insert never made it to press. The decision to move MLA was made in Watertown 15 days later, July 12, 1978.(15)

Now it was time for the Area High School Exploratory Committee to kick into high gear. Meetings of pastors and teachers of the area were held at Fairfax and Nicollet in the middle of August. Fifty-three attended at Fairfax and recommended further study. Thirty-three attended at Nicollet and moved that the committee proceed with speed. Based upon the favorable results of these meetings, informational meetings were scheduled for the members of area congregations. These meetings would be held at St. John's, Fairfax, Trinity, Nicollet and St. Paul's, New Ulm in September.(16)

All Systems Go!

The exploratory committee meeting on September 26, 1978 was a pivotal one in the founding of MVL. The committee met to discuss the three informational meetings. The meetings were attended by a total of 455 people. The following evaluations were made: "Positive questions and attitude... Good examples from people who either attended or worked in other Area Lutheran High Schools... No negative feeling as to finances not being available."(17) The committee then discussed a nine question "Go-or-No-Go" checklist. The nine basic questions were concerning "1) Enthusiasm of group, 2) Fund raising of exploratory work, 3) Understanding of purpose, 4) Finances to operate, 5) Facilities, 6) Enrollments, 7) Support of pastors and teachers, 8) Parent interest, 9) Lutheran Community support."(18) After discussing the checklist, the committee unanimously voted to go ahead with further study. Following the vote, the members agreed to visit the October voters' meetings of the area congregations to inform them of their decision and request that each congregation elect a delegate to represent the congregation in the election of the *Area High School Steering Committee*.(19)

After eight months and twenty days the work of the exploratory committee was completed. On October 24, 1978 the committee was disbanded at a meeting of exploratory committee and eleven delegates from ten congregations. This body

elected the fifteen man *Steering Committee*.(20) Gene Rodewald was again elected chairman of this committee, Prof. Morton Schroeder, vice chairman, Ken Brueske, secretary and Ray Meilke, treasurer. The committee then invited Dr. James Raabe of Luther High School, Onalaska, Wisconsin, to attend the next meeting as consultant.(21)

The steering committee left no questions unasked. The answers started to become clear in January of 1979. The site subcommittee looked for a place to hold classes and St. Paul's, New Ulm offered the use of extra classrooms in their facilities at the cost of \$100 per student.(22) The financial subcommittee investigated how to pay for the school. They concluded that to support a student body of 200, the average communicant contribution would need to be \$12.50, or .24% of gross taxable income as calculated from the State Department of Revenue average income for the area.(23) The enrollment subcommittee found out that there were 250-300 children in the area congregations who would be entering ninth and tenth grade, the grades with which the school would start the next fall. Fifty of them expressed interest for the 1979-80 school year. The instruction committee came up with a proposed first year curriculum.(24) Based on this information, the steering committee cast another unanimous "full speed ahead" vote.(25)

Then it was all up to the congregations. They were asked by the steering committee to hold a special voters' meeting before March 18, 1979 to vote on joining the proposed

high school association. The steering committee sent each congregation a document with the heading, "You are About to Consider Beginning One of the Most Worthwhile Investment Programs You'll Ever Find." This document explained exactly what an area Lutheran high school was, the biblical basis for Christian education, the curriculum and finally the cost.(26) In special voters' meetings, ten congregations voted to be come charter members of the association.

Charter Member Congregations of the MVLHS Association:

Courtland, Courtland
Immanuel, Gibbon
St. John's, New Ulm
St. John's, Sleepy Eye
St. Mark's, Mankato
St. Paul's, New Ulm
St. Paul's, North Mankato
Trinity, Nicollet
Zion, Brighton Township
Zion, Morgan(27)

Within a few months Zion of Winthrop joined as the eleventh member congregation.

"A spirit of enthusiasm prevailed throughout the first official meeting of the delegates representing the 10 members of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association."28 This enthusiasm led to the unanimous vote to open the school in September 1979 if at all possible. After adopting a constitution and bylaws the delegates elected a Board of Directors with officers Gene Rodewald, chairman again, Rev. Lloyd Hahnke, vice chairman, Gene Slettedahl, secretary and Herbert Berg, treasurer.(29) Finally, the delegates gave the board authority to call three full-time teachers, beginning with a principal who was to be called within seven days.30

The board extended the call to Prof. Jerome Birkholz of Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Becomes a Reality

After Easter in 1979, the high school began to take shape. After much discussion, the board or directors chose the name "Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School." The name aptly describes the area served by the school from Fairfax and Morgan to Mankato. Within a week, on April 20, 1979, Mr. Birkholz announced that he was accepting the call to be the first principal.(31) From the time he accepted his call until now Mr. Birkholz's enthusiasm for MVL has never dimmed.

The spirit of support for the high school was demonstrated at an open house held at St. Paul's school, MVL's temporary home, on Sunday, May 13. "In the opinion of many who were able to be present on Sunday, May 13th, the presentation, the presence of Administrator Birkholz, his contacts made with parents and students, the optimism evident among the more than 150 who came, all was overwhelmingly gratifying."(32) Many applications were for enrollment were received that very day, the first being from Miss Greta Anderson, who beat me to the punch by mere minutes. In all twenty-nine students, twenty-one freshmen and eight sophomores applied within a few days of the open house.(33) To top it all off, the second full time teaching position was filled by Mr. Michael Bode of Manitowoc Lutheran High School. He accepted the call to be the math/science/athletics teacher in late May.

In July preparations for the beginning of the school year were in full swing. Mr. Birkholz was making arrangements for classes to run smoothly. Mr. Bode was making contacts with athletic directors in the area in order to set of schedules for the sports teams and ordering textbooks and science equipment. One hundred desks were purchased from the Nicollet school district at a cost of \$100 for future use. Typewriters and desks were ordered for the business classroom. Lockers were ordered and delivered. MVL's home was ready to receive its new students at the end of August.(34)

By August 1, the Lord blessed MVL with its third full-time instructor to complete the staff. Rev. Victor Weyland of the late Northwestern Lutheran Academy, closed by the synod after the 1978-79 school year, accepted the call for religion, history and languages.(35) He was entrusted with the task of setting up the pastoral training track which has produced six Seminary students so far, three of whom will graduate this spring. Mrs. Edward (Patricia) Meyer was called to be a part time instructor for typing. Rev. James Schmidt of Morgan was called to assist in the religion department. DMLC students Robert Kramer, Randall Kramer, Michael Pfeifer, and Steven Grosinske assisted in the music department. DMLC student Thomas Libka served as soccer and basketball coach.(36)

MVL officially became a reality on Sunday night, August 26, 1979. On that hot, late summer evening, MVL held is

opening service and faculty installation at St. John's Lutheran Church in New Ulm. While Martin Luther Preparatory School was getting under way in Prairie du Chien, the school which filled the void it left was also getting under way. Rev. Norval Kock of St. John's, New Ulm, preached the sermon and Rev. Lloyd Hahnke of St. Paul's, New Ulm, officiated at the installation. A joint choir from association congregations supplied music under the direction of Mr. Frederick Blauert.(37) The writer of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran Hi-Lites described the service:

On Sunday, August 26th, St. John's Church in New Ulm was filled with the many Christians who had come to thank and praise God for all his blessings that he had showered upon the establishment of the Christian area high school. The anthems of the choir, the words of Scripture proclaimed from the pulpit, and the singing of the congregational hymns of worship were the high points of the joyous occasion. With the installation of three full time faculty members and the enrollment of forty-five Christian students, the school year was ready to begin on Monday morning.(38)

On the next morning, MVL opened its doors with forty-five students, sixteen sophomores and twenty-nine freshmen, including present Seminary seniors Keith Wessel, Stephen Raddatz, and Timothy Henning. This enrollment was a record for first year WELS area Lutheran high schools.(39)

Every effort was made to make MVL feel like a "real" high school. Extracurricular activities were included from the very beginning. On October 21 the choir and band made their first public appearance and Zion Lutheran Church, Morgan. On the weekend of November 11, sixteen singers participated in the WELS National Choral Festival. Student

government organizations were formed. Sports teams began competition in the fall of 1979, establishing a winning tradition from the start. The soccer team was undefeated that year. The girls volleyball team compiled a 4-2 record.(40) This was followed by a boys' basketball team with a 13-3 record, and girls team with a 9-4 record.(41) Baseball, softball and track teams competed in the spring. During the year the students chose school colors (Columbia Blue, Navy Blue and White), and nickname (Chargers).

Home, Sweet Home.

While the students and faculty were enjoying the successful first year of the school, the board of directors was working hard to find a permanent home for them. As early as June in 1979 the site subcommittee was examining property in the New Ulm and Nicollet areas. Inquiries were made with the Skyline Corporation about the purchase of their former mobile home factory for conversion into a school. Inquiries were also made with the synod concerning the property formerly envisioned as the campus for MLA. \$5000 was approved for the purchase of an option on any land judged worth investigating for building.(42)

In order to fund the building of a permanent home, the MVL board set up a special fund drive called *Our Growing Blessing*. Through a series of pamphlets, a three phase program was introduced to the congregations in the fall of 1979. The goal of Phase I was to raise \$250,000 for the purchase of a site and for planning of the building. Phase

II was intended to raise \$500,000 in contributions and member loans to make a down payment on the building. Phase III, which is still going on, is a twenty year pay off of member loans.(43)

Phase I began with a special thankoffering on November 11, 1979. Over \$32,000 was given for the building fund.(44) This was followed by part B of Phase I, a compilation of anticipated offerings for November 1979-November 1980. Finally Phase I, part C implemented a member loan program to reach the goal of \$250,000.(45) Phase I was an outstanding success, and within months of the beginning of the 1980-81 school year the goal was reached.(46)

While the members of the association were responding to the opportunity for the thankoffering, the site subcommittee continued to search for a site. The Skyline and Synod properties did not work out. Thirteen other sights were considered. Most consideration in spring of 1980 was given to a seventy-seven acre parcel of land on U.S. Highway 14 between New Ulm and Courtland. After soil tests were completed, and the problem of an apparent lack of water at the sight was solved, the delegates voted to purchase this site at a cost of \$140,000.(47)

Planning for the building continued through the spring and summer of 1980. Mr. Ernst Ibs of Bentz-Thompson and Associates of Minneapolis, the same architect who designed St. Paul's Lutheran School in New Ulm, was selected as architect for the project.(48) He drew up plans for 32,000

square foot building which included five classrooms, two science labs, offices, locker rooms, a small lunch room and a small library. The center of the building was a 124 x 96 foot gymnasium with a 44 x 70 foot stage. The gymnasium was destined to be the gathering place for Lutherans throughout the Minnesota River Valley.(49) The total cost of the project: \$1.5 million.

Every delegate was well aware of that price tag on September 18, 1980. After prayerful consideration, the assembly of delegates voted 42-2 to begin construction.(50) Trusting that the Lord would provide the funding, construction was authorized to begin two days after the meeting. Official ground breaking was held on October 12, 1980. The Lord provided a mild winter so that construction could continue uninterrupted during the long Minnesota winter.

The Lord also provided the funding to make the building possible. During the 1980-81 school year, three more congregations joined the association. They were St. Peter's, St. Peter, Zion, Sanborn, and St. Paul's of St. James.(51) Over \$450,000 in member loans were gathered in addition to \$147,000 in gifts by November of 1980.(52) The total capitol fund balance at the end of 1980 was \$595,000.(53) When all of the numbers were computed member contributions totalled \$251,768, member loans \$863,333, and loans from banks \$400,000. In addition, money was saved as volunteers painted all of the walls except for the hallways and

gymnasium. (I painted the faculty room all by myself.)

What a joyful day September 6, 1981 was for the students of MVL. After only two years in temporary quarters, the high school began classes in its very own building. The date was a week later than planned, due to a labor dispute late in the construction project. Spirits were high in the student body of 119 as they enjoyed the elbow room in a building designed for 175-200 students after sharing quarters with the children of St. Paul's Lutheran School. Graduates of St. Paul's in the MVL class of 1983 were especially thrilled to move on to a new building after occupying St. Paul's for ten straight years. The first week of school was filled with the preparations for the dedication service less than a week away.

Over 1000 Lutherans from the Minnesota River Valley gathered to thank God for his many blessings and to dedicate the new building to his glory on September 13, 1981. An adult festival choir was formed from the association congregations. Likewise, a children's festival choir was assembled for the occasion. These two choirs, along with the MVL Student Choir provided fitting praise to the Lord who had granted such rich blessings. Rev. Robert Voss, executive secretary of the WELS Commission on Higher Education preached on Matthew 16:26. His sermon reflected on all of the sacrifices which the members of the association had made and concluded, as his theme stated, "It's Worth It!"(54)

With the dedication of the new building, MVL really came

into its own. No longer could people call it St. Paul's Lutheran High School because it was not located there anymore. No longer could people call it New Ulm Lutheran High School because it was outside the city limits, outside of the county, and closer to Courtland than New Ulm. MVL had its own building. People could point to it with pride and say, "That's our school!" Now that it had its own building, people knew that MVL was there to stay.

Our Growing Blessing.

While the building was being built, so was the student body and faculty. Eleventh grade was added to the school for the 1980-81 school year. Enrollment was up to 79. A two room annex was moved to the St. Paul's school grounds to provide the extra room needed. Rev. John V. Moldenhauer (Latin, Religion) of Johnson, Minnesota, and Mr. Paul Willems (Science), of Manitowoc Lutheran, accepted calls to teach beginning in 1980. When the fourth year was added to the school for 1980-81, the enrolment soared to 119 as the students looked forward to the new building. In 1981 Mr. James Bauer (Athletics, Religion) of Watertown, Wisconsin, and Mr. James Hermanson (Music), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were added to the full time faculty.(55)

After a successful first year in its new home, MVL held its first commencement excises. On May 26, 1982, twenty seniors received their diplomas at a service held in the gymnasium. As the school yearbook reported, "The pouring rain was unable to dampen the excitement of the first

graduates and the assembly of approximately 700 relatives and friends."(56) One year later, on May 21, 1983, MVL said good-bye to the last of the forty-five original students as the first four year class of MVL graduated. Speakers for the class of 1983 were Keith Wessel and Stephen Raddatz, both of whom were about to begin the eight year training course for the preaching ministry.

Throughout its history, MVL has place a high priority on preparing ministers for the church. It was one of the purposes proposed by the exploratory committee in March of 1978. *The Philosophy of Curriculum Development* adopted by the board of directors in 1979 states: "In pursuing this curriculum, students should grow in Christian character as they gain expected skills for various vocations and secure academic foundations for further education including study for full-time work in the church."(57) From the very beginning, MVL has offered the Latin and German courses necessary to enter Northwestern College, and all of the college preparatory courses needed for entry into DMLC. Beginning with its very first graduating class, MVL has sent a steady stream of graduates up the hill to DMLC. In 1983, four graduates followed the road to Northwestern. Three of these (Timothy Henning, Stephen Raddatz and Keith Wessel) will be entering the ministerium of the WELS this year. Several others have followed in their footsteps. Other graduates have assumed, or soon will assume, leadership positions in their home congregations. In this way MVL is a

blessing to the church at large.

The MVL faculty has undergone several changes since the move into the new building. None of the original three full time faculty members is still teaching. The Lord called Rev. Weyland home to his eternal rest on December 21, 1981. In 1983 Mr. Bode left the faculty. At the beginning of this year, Mr. Birkholz assumed the nonteaching role of Association Coordinator and gave up the principal's duties. As the student body grew over the years, the faculty grew with it. The faculty presently stands at fourteen full-time teachers.

God has blessed MVL with an ever growing enrollment. From the forty-five original students in 1979, the student body has grown to 200 in 1990-91. As MVL began its tenth year of operation in 1988-89, the enrollment of 193 represented fully one-third of the available high school age students in the association.(58) An amazing blessing, indeed!

The MVL Association has grown as well. The association which began with ten congregations in 1979 now numbers eighteen, sixteen from WELS and two from ELS. The members of the association have shown their commitment to Christian Education in two major thankoffering programs since 1983. The *Challenge of Growth* offering in 1983-84 funded the purchase of school busses, lighting and expansion of the parking lot, and moving and remodeling the annex classrooms used previously at St. Paul's. The *Together We Stand* program

begun in 1985 was a forty-four month plan to retire \$1,000,000 of the capital debt.(59)

How did this success come about?

The Lord certainly has blessed Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. This comes as no surprise. This is what the various committees and boards asked for when they opened and closed every meeting with prayer. This is what they counted on as they included short Bible messages in each issue of Hi-Lites. This is what the association believed in when they devoted themselves to training their children in the way of the Lord. This is what the members of the association banked on as they committed themselves to a \$1.5 million building program within two years of incorporation.

The thorough planning of the original committees contributed immeasurably to the early success of MVL. The school was not opened as a knee-jerk reaction to MLA moving. The exploratory committee, the steering committee, and the original board of directors did nothing without first exploring all of the possibilities and considering the consequences of their actions. Thanks be to God for providing MVL with such fine leaders.

A major factor in making MVL a truly area Lutheran high school was the implementation of a transportation program. MVL would not do students any good if they could not get there. Way back at the second meeting of the exploratory committee, March 22, 1978, consideration was given to the transportation factor.(60) For the first year of operation,

students who lived outside of the New Ulm School District, who could not enjoy state-funded busing, received a \$110 discount on tuition.(61) In February 1980 the association purchased its first "bus" -- a 1977 Dodge Maxi-Van, with an official capacity of fifteen.(62) (Unofficially, 26 students stuffed themselves into it on Arbor Day, 1980.) From there the fleet grew to its present size of 3 full size school busses and several Ford Vans. The busses pick students up in the morning, and return them home after school and activities in the evening. There is no additional charge for students to ride the bus.

The final factor in the success of MVL can simply be summarized as school spirit. This school spirit is evident in the lay members of the association. It was a group of laymen who first approached Rev. Henning about beginning a high school. It was laymen who did most of the exploratory work for the school and building. It was dedicated lay people who gave the generous gifts needed to get the school off the ground. Nine of the fifteen members of the board of directors are laymen.(63) One needs only to attend a *Booster Club* chile dinner to see how the high school has brought the lay people of the Minnesota River Valley together. Before 1979 there was little interaction between the congregations in the area. Now they work together supporting their school.

The pastors and teachers of the area reflect the school spirit as well. The pastors meet from time to time throughout the year for study and discussion about the operation of the

school. Pastors and teachers have been the main recruiting tools whose encouragement has led one-third of their students to continue their Christian education on the secondary level.

The parents of the students can never be overlooked when evaluating MVL school spirit. One family even moved to New Ulm from South Dakota just so that their children could attend MVL! Their continued prayers on behalf of their children's school have been powerful. Their financial support of tuition and additional offerings show the value they place on the aid which MVL gives them in raising their children to be mature Christians. The value of the time and effort they put in as volunteers at the school, especially in the early years, cannot be measured.

Last, and certainly not least, the school spirit of the students must be mentioned. Even when MVL was a "no frills, stripped down" version of a high school, the students embraced it with love. It was their school. The traditions were theirs to start. An article by Keith Wessel in the first issue of the student newspaper, The Charger, summed up how many of the original students felt:

If you would come here on an ordinary school day, you would see that our student body is a closely banded one. You don't see Sophomores ordering Freshmen around, or fighting in the halls. You would notice that it is a very pleasant atmosphere. The place is as clean as a high school could keep it, although it gets a little messy sometimes.

Minnesota Valley has almost all the advantages of a regular high school. We are in the midst of the basketball season, and by next year we should be in an athletic conference. The spirit at games is great, and we really stand behind our teams, such as when boys cheerlead at the girls games. It's great!

The whole student body is really looking forward to the time when we can have a building of our own. Plans have already begun and sometimes Mr. Birkholz takes time out to tell us what it will be like.

Hopefully in future years, we will have a large student body and be established as a major area high school. It's a little different now, but it is still great to be part of a brand new high school, an area Lutheran high school.(64)

The school spirit displayed by the original students has continued through the years. In general, students have been cooperative and supportive of their school. This spirit was recognized publicly when MVL received the Sportsmanship and Spirit award at the 1987 Minnesota State High School League boys' basketball championships, in which the team won third place. It is this kind of school spirit which makes MVL a special place.

Conclusion.

Permit me a few personal observations at this point. I am sure it is evident to you, the reader of this paper, that I have a special place for Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School in my heart. It is with great joy that I look back at the early years of MVL. The memories I have are too many to begin to relate. I can only thank God that he gave me the opportunity to grow along with the growing blessing of MVL. I can only praise him for the good education I received there, both inside and outside the classroom. I can only pray to him, that he would continue to bless the work of MVL, so that generations to come can go there and receive A *Christ-Centered Education for a Christ-Centered Life.*

ENDNOTES

1 Letter to Area Pastors, (New Ulm, Area High School Exploratory Committee, Spring, 1978).

2 Proceedings of the Special Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, November 7-9, 1962, p.39.

3 Ibid., p. 58.

4 Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, August 3-10, 1977, p. 50.

5 Ibid., p. 68.

6 Proceedings of the Special Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, July 11-12, 1978, p. 39.

7 Rev. Thomas Henning, interview at home in New Ulm, Minnesota February 9, 1991.

8 Mr. Jerome Birkholz, interview at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minnesota, February 9, 1991.

9 Minutes of the Area High School Exploratory Committee, March 4, 1978.

10 Ibid., March 22, 1978.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., April 20, 1978.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., June 28, 1978.

15 Proceedings, July 11-12, 1978, p. 39.

16 Minutes, August 23, 1978.

17 Ibid., September 26, 1978.

18 Ibid.

19 Bulletin Insert, (New Ulm: Area High School Exploratory Committee, October 1978).

20 Minutes, October 24, 1978.

21 Minutes of the Area Lutheran High School Steering Committee, October 24, 1978.

22 Ibid., February 4, 1979.

- 23 Financial Capability Report, (New Ulm: Area Lutheran High School Steering Committee).
- 24 Minnesota Valley Lutheran Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1979.
- 25 Minutes, February 4, 1979.
- 26 You are About to Consider Beginning One of the Most Worthwhile Investment Programs You'll Ever Find! (New Ulm: Area Lutheran High School Steering Committee, March, 1979).
- 27 Growing in Grace: Ten Year Anniversary. (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1989).
- 28 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 3, March 1979.
- 29 Growing in Grace.
- 30 Minutes of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association Assembly of Delegates, March 27, 1979.
- 31 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1979.
- 32 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1979.
- 33 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 6, June 1979.
- 34 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 7, August 1979.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Flashback: 1979-80, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1980).
- 37 Faculty Installation and Opening Service, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, August 26, 1979).
- 38 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 8, September 1979.
- 39 Our Growing Blessing, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1980).
- 40 The Charger, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1979.
- 41 Hi-Lites, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 1980.
- 42 Minutes of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Board of Directors, June 28, 1979.
- 43 A Very Special Thankoffering, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, October 1979).
- 44 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 9, December 1979.

45 Our Growing Blessing: Phase I, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, October 1979).

46 Dedication Booklet (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, September 13, 1981).

47 Ibid.

48 Hi-Lites, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 1980.

49 Dedication Booklet.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Hi-Lites, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1981.

53 Hi-Lites, Vol. 3, No. 2, March 1981.

54 Dedication Booklet.

55 Growing in Grace.

56 Flashback: 1981-82, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1982).

57 A Statement on the Purpose and Philosophy of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, (New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association, 1979).

58 Growing in Grace.

59 Ibid.

60 Minutes of the Exploratory Committee, March 22, 1978.

61 Hi-Lites, Vol. 1, No. 4, May 1979.

62 Hi-Lites, Vol. 2, No. 3, March 1980.

63 Bylaws of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association, 1979.

64 Keith Wessel, "Why I Chose MVLHS," The Charger, Vol. 1, No. 1, (December 1979).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Area High School Exploratory Committee, Minutes. March 4, 1978-October 24, 1978.
- Area Lutheran High School Steering Committee, Minutes. October 24, 1978-March 18, 1979.
- Birkholz, Jerome. Interview at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minnesota, February 9, 1991.
- Bulletin Insert. New Ulm: Area High School Exploratory Committee, October 1978.
- Bylaws of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association. New Ulm: 1979.
- The Charger. Vol. 1, No. 1. December 1979.
- Dedication Booklet. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, September 13, 1981.
- Faculty Installation and Opening Service. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, August 26, 1979.
- Financial Capability Report, New Ulm: Area Lutheran High School Steering Committee.
- Flashback: 1979-80. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1980.
- Flashback: 1981-82. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1982.
- Our Growing Blessing. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1980.
- Our Growing Blessing: Phase I. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, October 1979.
- Growing in Grace: Ten Year Anniversary. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, 1989.
- Henning, Thomas. Interview at home in New Ulm, Minnesota February 9, 1991.
- Letter to Area Pastors. New Ulm, Area High School Exploratory Committee, Spring, 1978.
- Minnesota Valley Lutheran Hi-Lites. Vol. 1-3. January 1979-December 1981.
- Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association Assembly of Delegates, Minutes. March 27, 1979.

Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Board of Directors, Minutes.
June 28, 1979.

Proceedings of the Special Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod, November 7-9, 1962.

Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Biennial Convention of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, August 3-10, 1977.

Proceedings of the Special Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod, July 11-12, 1978.

A Statement on the Purpose and Philosophy of the Minnesota Valley
Lutheran High School. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley Lutheran
High School Association, 1979.

A Very Special Thankoffering. New Ulm: Minnesota Valley
Lutheran High School, October 1979.

Wessel, Keith. "Why I Chose MVLHS." The Charger. Vol. 1, No. 1,
December 1979.