

**The Closing of Martin Luther
Preparatory School**

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By a very close 195-176 vote the 1993 Synod Convention held at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, MI., decided to end the existence of Martin Luther Preparatory School.¹

After a two hour hearing on Monday evening, three hours of debate on the convention floor on Thursday, and over an hour on Friday, the convention resolved to merge Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, WI., and Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, WI., on the Watertown campus under a new name.²

It was a historic decision. One which made sweeping changes in the synodical school makeup and which made sweeping changes to the lives of many faculty, students and parents. The decision to close Martin Luther Prep. School (MLPS) was not an easy one for a synod who had been served so well by its existence. That painful decision was only reached after eight years of exhaustive study and intensive debate.

In this paper I will attempt to follow that study which preceded the 1993 Synod Convention vote. The author is aware of the strong feelings which have accompanied the decision to close and merge our schools. Feelings and emotions might give way to facts and observations. For that reason any information regarding the school closing has been obtained only from officially printed reports of the synod's proceedings and its published reports. This paper will deal with the facts. It is my hope that in this way I might report on the what and the why without opening new wounds.

¹ Robert A. Sievert, *Northwestern Lutheran: October 1993*, (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, 1993) p. 349.

² *Ibid.*, p. 348.

Beginning in 1985 the synod resolved that the Worker Training Division continue to be sensitive to the matter of kingdom balance and that it continue to monitor carefully the need for three preparatory schools.³

Acting on this resolution the Board for Worker Training authorized a study of our preparatory school system with these objectives:

- a) To review previous studies of the worker training system.
- b) To review the philosophy which has sustained the preparatory schools as part of the synod's worker training system.
- c) To evaluate the contribution of the preparatory school system to the synod's program of training workers for the church.
- d) To analyze the financial and physical resources which exist at the present for the operation of the prep school system.

This study commission, composed of 12 members was chaired by Rev. John Graf. Appointed in 1986 it began its work in early 1987.⁴ Its purpose was to evaluate the work of the preparatory school system over against the continuing purpose and objectives of the synod, of the worker training division and of the three preparatory schools.

During the 1987 Synod Convention at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI. the study commission gave its first report. Its chairman, Rev. John Graf, reported ini-

³ Proceedings of the Forty-eighth Biennial Convention of the WELS. Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Saginaw, Michigan. August 5-9, 1985.

⁴ Report to the Twelve Districts. June, 1988. p. 7.

tial progress of the committees in studying the objectives set by the Board for Worker Training.

Committee I, the committee on Philosophy and Purpose, reported that it had chosen to study documents and reports that addressed the past history of our preparatory school system. This past history would be studied completely before any new philosophy pertaining to the prep school system would be entertained.

Committee II, the committee on the performance of the prep schools also gave a brief report. It reported that it had begun its task of evaluating the prep schools contribution to the synod's program of training workers for the church. The committee further stated that it was in the process of finding and assembling various statistical information which would be valuable and necessary for completing the assignment.

Committee III, the committee on finances and physical resources reported that it had begun its work. This committee was identifying those facts and figures which would provide answers to questions on the ability of the synod to provide suitable campuses and education programs for the prep school system.⁵ This progress report of the study commission was given and the commission was told to have its study completed prior to the 1989 synod convention.⁶

⁵Reports and Memorials for the Forty-Ninth Biennial Convention of the WELS. Northwestern College: Watertown, Wisconsin. Aug. 3-7, 1987. p.12-13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

During a two year period from February of 1987 to January of 1989 the Preparatory School Study Commission met together in plenary session nine times.⁷ It brought its completed report to the

1989 Synod Convention held at Martin Luther Prep. School in Prairie du Chien, WI.

The Preparatory School Study Commission (PSSC) opened its report by stating that what it had done was what the synod had been doing since 1927. Namely that as a synod we constantly evaluate efforts at, among other things, providing the workers needed to lead our congregations in the ministry of Christ.⁸

The PSSC began its report by examining the historical reasons for operating synod preparatory schools. It found that many of the reasons for which our preparatory school system was established are still valid reasons today. According to the PSSC's report the prep school system was originally established by the Wisconsin Synod for the following reasons.

- 1.) The shortage of trained workers.
- 2.) Confessional integrity.
- 3.) The lack of other educational opportunities.
- 4.) The need for specialized training.

The PSSC reported that point 1,2 and 3 are still valid reasons for the prep school system. Because high schools are located throughout our country point 3 is really not a problem as it was say one hundred 100 years ago. However these public

⁷ Reports and Memorials for the Fiftieth Biennial Convention of the WELS. Martin Luther Preparatory School: Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. August 7-11.1989. p.4, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

high schools still cannot provide the religious instruction which is the heart of our educational system for training future pastors and teachers.⁹

Another factor in the PSSC's report was the growing number of area Lutheran high schools throughout our synod. These schools have supplemented the preparatory schools well in providing college freshmen at Dr. Martin Luther College and Northwestern College. While students do receive religious instruction at these schools they are aimed at general Christian education and less toward the vocational ministry. The lack of adequate language programs for entrance into Northwestern College was a concern.

The PSSC was also asked to evaluate the performance of the preparatory schools in providing ministerial students. The synod wanted to know if the prep schools were doing the job for which they were created. The commission found that the preparatory schools were currently providing important numbers of freshmen for NWC (52.5% in Semester I, 1988-89) and for DMLC (42.7% in Semester I, 1988-89). The commission stated, "This tells us that we are, to a point, on the course with the preparatory schools. Indeed that is one of the main advantages that the commission saw for maintaining the prep school system."¹⁰

The PSSC was also asked to study the physical plants of the preparatory schools. The commission was directed to find how the present campuses were serving the needs of the synod both currently and for the future. The commission reported

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

that overall the four campuses and their respective buildings were well maintained and in good repair. They also pointed out that each campus was capable of providing for both present and short term needs of the schools.

Each campus was studied as to how much of its total capacity was being used and what additions would have to be made to accommodate an increase in the size of the student body.

Martin Luther Prep in Prairie du Chien was found to be situated on a campus which was presently underutilized. Only about 40% of its total capacity was being used. One hundred additional students could be accommodated with no additional work or expenditures being required.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary at Saginaw was found to be operating at near capacity with 83.5% of its capacity being utilized. Because of its smaller, landlocked campus expansion of this campus for more students would be difficult but not impossible.

Northwestern Prep School in Watertown, WI. had the unique situation of sharing its campus with Northwestern College. For this reason the commission reported it was effectively at full capacity.

Another area the Preparatory School Study Commission investigated was the enrollment trends for the preparatory school system. The overall declining enrollment of the preparatory schools could be attributed to several things. Parents were more hesitant in sending their children long distances away from home to attend a prep. school. Another factor was the high cost of sending a student to one of our prep

schools. Even though the synod subsidizes the cost of education parents still had to pay an average of \$2,984 in the 1987-88 school year.¹¹

Another important factor in decreased enrollment was the problem of recruiting students to become pastors and teachers. Many times these occupations were cast in a negative light by parents and other congregational members. Sometimes the recruitment problem was simply the result of a lack of effort by pastors or members of the congregation.

Area Lutheran High Schools also affected the preparatory school enrollment. Lutheran high schools were sending more freshmen to our two colleges than in years past. At Doctor Martin Luther College in 1970-71, 85 Area Lutheran High School freshmen enrolled making up 33.3% of the freshmen class. In 1980-81, 98 of the freshmen were Lutheran High School graduates making up 41.9% of the freshmen class. By the 1986-87 school year 78 area high school graduates made up 54.2% of DMLC's freshmen class.¹²

The same trend was also noticed in the numbers of graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Using five year groupings the commission found that in the years of 1965-69, 18 of the total number of graduates were from area Lutheran high schools making up 11% of the graduating class for those years. During 1975-79, 55 (19%) of those graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were area Lutheran high school

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.23.

students. That number increased even more when during 1985-89, 72 (27%) of the graduates were from area Lutheran high schools. ¹³

Another issue concerning the preparatory schools was the matter of kingdom balance. Kingdom balance is the allocation of synodical resources among the administrative divisions of the synod in such amounts so that each division receives the proper emphasis at a given time in the synod's history. This balance may vary over the years and is very subjective.

The worker training division of our synod uses a big portion of the synod's budget. Out of the total synod budget in 1988 worker training received 36.5% of the funds. In 1986-87 the Preparatory schools share of the budget was 14.4%.¹⁴

The commission brought up the subject of kingdom balance but did not offer any advice whether we as a synod were spending too much or too little of the synodical dollar on the preparatory schools. It brought up the subject only to make it known and make it something which may have to be watched more closely. The committee did point to the steady erosion of contributions to the synod which have made the amount of dollars the synod has to work with less and less. However it was stressed that this dollar issue should not be the driving force by ^{which} what the synod finally decides to do.

In its report the PSSC made it clear that the issue of kingdom balance and not budgetary pressure, was the driving force in establishing a commission to review the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

preparatory school system. Neither was the commission advocating fixing something that isn't broken. But the commission asked whether an agency of the past necessarily was the best agency for the future.

The PSSC reported that its task at hand was to present recommendations for the immediate future which would also accommodate options for the more distant future. It made the point of saying that it would be truly unfortunate if any actions taken by the synod were simply to be reactions to past events and financial pressures. The report stated, "In striving for kingdom balance the focus should be on proper stewardship of our resources-time, talents, and treasures in determining the best overall strategy for carrying out Christ's missionary command." ¹⁵

The preparatory school study commission carefully considered the following options in its report to the synod:

1. Keep the preparatory school system as it is presently.
2. Close all the preparatory schools.
3. Amalgamate MLPS and NPS on the Watertown campus; amalgamate NWC and DMLC on the New Ulm campus; keep MLS as is.
4. As #3 except MLS is sold to Michigan District.
5. As #3 except that MLS is operated by either the Michigan District or the synod as an area Lutheran high school.
6. Move NWC to Prairie du Chien; amalgamate MLPS and NPS as one preparatory school on the Watertown campus; keep MLS as is (or as in #4 or as in #5)
7. Amalgamate NPS and MLPS at Prairie du Chien; MLS remains as is.

The Preparatory School Study Commission brought these three recommendations to the synod. Recommendation 1: Preserve the preparatory school system in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25.

some form. It was of the opinion of the PSSC that the Preparatory school system worked. It provides quality education and a quality number of students for its worker training colleges. It provides the single focus schooling that is so important not only for academic preparation of but also encouraging students toward their goal of ministry.

Because of this singular purpose of the Preparatory schools the colleges were more easily able to retain the curricula it needed to train pastor and teachers. The colleges could also depend on the quality and know what they could expect from the students who came from the system.

Other support for this recommendation was the ability of the synod to stay in control of its worker training schools. In the singular purpose of preparing pastors and teachers it could administer and direct them as it saw fit. This control allowed the synod to train the kind of workers it determined as necessary for the greater good of the synod.

While this recommendation gave attention to the valuable source of students in the area Lutheran high school system it also recognized that their purpose was for general education. They also were not currently producing the numbers needed by the worker training schools and could not be expected to.

A few drawbacks to the preparatory school system were also given in the recommendation. Living in dormitories can expose a student to more temptations than if he or she lived at home. Also the environment at the preparatory schools tended to shelter the students from the outside world.

Recommendation 2: Modify the Preparatory school system by amalgamating MLPS and NPS on the Watertown campus which necessitates amalgamation of NWC and DMLC on the New Ulm campus.

The commission recommended that the two prep schools be amalgamated while realizing that doing so would not be easy. Martin Luther Prep was started at a time when the enrollment outlook was much different than the realities of today. Total preparatory enrollments have declined 27.5% since MLPS was opened. 52.7% of this enrollment decline in the last ten years occurred at MLPS.¹⁶

Because MLPS was only 10 years old at the time of this report the commission also felt that to close MLPS would be easier than to close one of the other prep schools. The roots of tradition not having grown as deeply as with the other longer established preparatory schools.

It was also felt by the commission that to close MLS and to keep MLPS open was not a good idea. MLS draws student from the east side of Lake Michigan. If it were closed it was thought that those students would be lost.

The commission predicted that closing MLPS and merging the two prep schools on the Watertown campus would bring a savings to the system operating budget. According to the fiscal office estimate the synod could expect an annual savings of approximately \$300,000 to \$325,000.¹⁷ The Prairie du Chien campus could be put up for sale. The synod might or might not be able to recoup the \$4.6 million invested

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹⁷ *Ibid* p.29.

in land and buildings on the campus and another \$775,000 invested in off-campus residences. The commission felt that any loss in the sale of the campus should be absorbed. In their own word, "Its served its purpose. But now it's time to cut our loses and move on." ¹⁸

Recommendation 3: Implement ways for the synod's constituency, in particular the area Lutheran high schools, to strengthen their resolve and capability to increase the number of worker training students drawn from area Lutheran and public high schools.

By this recommendation the commission urged that greater use be made of the ever increasing number of area Lutheran high schools. These schools were already sending larger numbers of students to the worker training colleges. Increased recruitment could make these numbers grow. The commission also felt that closer cooperation between the prep schools and the area Lutheran high schools would improves the quality of specific ministry preparation. Money saved in the school amalgamation could be used to support these area Lutheran high schools in some way as the synod worked to make better use of their student pool.

The Preparatory School Study Commission's report given at the 1989 convention was closed by the commission's remarks that it had worked at its assignment with honesty and integrity. It called its work finished and respectfully asked to be discharged. That synod convention endorsed the Board for Worker Training to provide

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encouraged?*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

further study together with the observations and recommendations to the twelve districts for their discussion and reaction.

With the work of the PSSC completed the study of the preparatory school structure was assumed by the Board for Worker Training. Using the recommendations made by the PSSC the Board for Worker Training provided a report of the synodical school system to the twelve districts in 1990. The report was offered so that the twelve districts could discuss the matter in district convention and bring their input back to the board .

In its report to the twelve districts the Board for Worker Training (BWT) offered eight options in the preparatory school structure. These options were the result of the PSSC's study as well as accommodating the implications of the mission/vision statement for ministerial education on the secondary level.¹⁹ The synod adopted, mission/vision statement carried immense implications for the synodical schools. That vision demonstrated that recruitment and not the structure of the schools should become the most compelling issue in ministerial education. A need for 70 pastoral and 140 teacher candidates was far more than what was to be available in the foreseeable future.²⁰

The first option which the BWT offered to the districts for discussion was the status quo. Developments which helped the cause of the status quo were the adoption of the mission/vision statement which raised the sights of the WELS constituency.

¹⁹ Report to the Twelve Districts. June, 1990. p.16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

The Lift High the Cross offering held promise that financial support of the programs would grow. Programs of recruitment, already being expanded, would help provide needed workers as well as making the three preparatory schools more cost effective.

However option #1 was not all roses. To remain with the status quo would also require some hard financial realities. Budget shortfalls throughout the 1980's caused maintenance at the synodical schools to suffer. Mandated salaries and staffing benefits were not able to be funded and this would lead to the elimination of some of the programs of the synod.

Option #2 was the amalgamation suggested by the PSSC. However if Northwestern College were to remain on the Watertown campus MLPS would not be able to combine with NPS due to limitations in accommodations.

Option #3 included the arrangement foreseen at the time of the purchase of the Prairie du Chien campus. The plan was that as the student population at Northwestern College grew the campus would be increasingly used by the college. The Preparatory school on that campus would then eventually be transferred to the Prairie du Chien campus.

This option was not deemed as very possible for in 1990 the enrollment at Northwestern College had not grown nor did it seem likely that it would in the future. To move NPS to Prairie du Chien would mean underutilization of the Watertown campus.

Option #4 was the amalgamation of the three prep schools into two. Students from Martin Luther Prep. School would be transferred to both the NPS campus and the

MLS campus. Adjustments would have to be made on the other two campuses for the inclusion of bigger student bodies. This option would still be more economical since only four campuses would be needed as opposed to five.

Another option made by the BWT was the transfer of MLPS back to the New Ulm campus. However the enrollment pressures at the DMLC campus would be as great as they were in the 1970's when the decision to close Martin Luther Academy was made. Further complications arise with the operation of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School in the immediate vicinity.

Option #6 would be the development of the common purpose secondary school. Such an option considers a change in philosophy in the operation of secondary Lutheran education and the secondary level training of future church workers. In this option the area Lutheran high schools and the prep school system would work to include in their goals the emphasis and goals of the other. Area Lutheran high schools would more adequately train students for full-time public ministry. In turn the prep schools would be asked to focus more on the ministry shared by all Christians regardless of occupation.

Included in this option was ^{the} role of Northwestern Prep. NPS would continue in the traditional role of a synod prep. school and continue to operate with the singular role of preparing future church workers.

Another option, option #7, would be related to option #6. The operations of Martin Luther Prep. School would be moved from the Prairie du Chien campus to another location. Current MLPS students from Wisconsin and Minnesota would likely

transfer to another WELS secondary school in the heartland. Students currently attending MLPS from outside the midwest area could be accommodated in some other part of the country as they are at Prairie du Chien. The transferred students would establish a base of worker training students in an area Lutheran high school. The combined student body would have strong elements of both general education students as well as worker training students.

The final option which the BWT submitted for discussion was option #8. This would call for the development of a school with a broader purpose in Saginaw. This school would emphasize both full-time work in the church and general Christian education. It would serve the Michigan area with a school for Lutheran college-prep education. With the strong ties MLS has in the Michigan District it might become possible for area churches to assist in the support of this school.

These options were delivered to the twelve districts for prayerful consideration. The BWT expressed its desire to receive input so it could develop its recommendations for the 1991 synod convention. ²¹

In 1991 the synod convention was held at Doctor Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. At this convention the Board for Worker Training gave its report regarding the synodical school structure. This report was the result of gathered information and input received from the districts in their conventions the previous year. Also included in the BWT study was the growing problem of funding. Money was turning out to be a bigger problem than was earlier anticipated.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

The BWT reported on the input it had received back from the districts who had met in convention. A majority of the districts asked that the current structure be retained for another six years. Several of the districts noted that this might not be possible for financial reasons.²²

In its report to the synod convention the BWT reported that the synod was at a crossroads. Decisions had to be made immediately in deciding what to do with the synodical school structure. They listed changing circumstances in two critical areas which brought the synod to that point. These problems included a significantly reduced pool of young people to recruit from and a financial crisis in the continuing operation of the six-school worker training system.²³

Because of a smaller pool of students from which to draw, the BWT felt that the five campus system was too much. The cause of this smaller pool was a dramatically declining birth rate in the WELS body. In addition area Lutheran high schools were being used more and more by parents. This also left fewer students available for the prep school system.

The problem of funding also was also becoming a bigger problem in the decision process. This dollar problem did not make the proposed operation of the current system for the next six years feasible without some major funding increases.²⁴ This

²² Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-first Biennial Convention of the WELS. Dr. Martin Luther College. New Ulm, Minnesota. August 5-9,1991. p.22.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

dollar problem had been growing for a time. The key factor in the problem of funding was the flatness in the Synod Mission Offerings, particularly over the past five years.²⁵ This had resulted in decreased support available for all synodical programs, including ministerial education. For this reason the schools could not wait another six years before something was done.

Because of these rising problems in the synod worker training scene the BWT offered to the synod convention two options for the future of the synod school system. Option A was the increase of synod mission offering. This would allow for the prep school system to remain as is. However this increase in synod giving would have to be quite substantial in order to meet the needs of the training schools. It would also have to be sustained throughout the rest of the decade. The BWT thought such an increase would not come easily if at all.²⁶

If dramatically increased Synod Mission Offerings were not feasible the BWT offered another option (option B). This option recommended the consolidation of schools on the secondary level. This option assumed that the colleges would remain on their existing campuses. By consolidation of the prep schools the BWT recommended the following to take place.

1) Michigan Lutheran Seminary would be retained as a school with a strong focus on worker training but also its use as a general education school be recognized and be supported by churches in the area.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12.

2) Martin Luther Prep school be closed and its students transferred to the other two prep schools as feasible. This proposal recognized the high cost of operating the campus as well as the small enrollment.

3) Northwestern Prep. School would continue to operate in the traditional manner of the WELS preparatory schools. This proposal recognized the school as a strong feeder school for the preparation of future pastors.

4) The area Lutheran high schools would be encouraged and assisted in developing more productive programs for worker training. This would be done by increased recruiting, developing coordination of programs with the prep. schools and the potential for telecommunications to provide a significant breakthrough for worker training programs at area Lutheran high schools.

5) Governance and coordination of the secondary level program be altered to accommodate changes taking place. The new program of secondary education would include increased involvement of the area Lutheran high schools and would place all activity under the supervision of the synod.

These options are what the Board for Worker Training brought to the 1991 Synod Convention in New Ulm, Minnesota for action. At the convention a great deal of floor time was given to the issues of prep school consolidation. Before it would be settled the convention would use two hours and forty minutes to debate the issues among the delegates. ²⁷

²⁷ Delegates set the synod's course for next two years. *The Northwestern Lutheran*, September 15, 1991. (Northwestern Publishing: Milwaukee, 1991) p.316.

The convention endorsed the need for a strong, growing and viable preparatory school system in our synod. It also adopted eight resolutions to shape the system in the coming years.²⁸ These resolutions recommended that the status quo be maintained for the time being while an independent committee reviewed the 1989 prep school study committee's recommendation in order to determine its feasibility, including when and how this new structure may begin to function.

This independent committee was to be appointed by the Conference of Presidents and was then to report its findings to the 1992 district conventions. A final report of the committee was to be presented to the 1993 synod convention.²⁹

In September of 1991 the Conference of Presidents appointed a seven member committee called the Feasibility Study Committee.³⁰ This committee was given the following directives:

- 1) to maintain the current worker training system: prep., college and seminary.
- 2) to develop a plan for a strong, growing and viable prep, college and seminary system.
- 3) to determine the feasibility of moving MLPS to the Watertown campus and combining it with NPS in a single school; and of moving NWC to the New Ulm campus to operate in conjunction with DMLC.
- 4) to determine when and how the new structure may begin to function (logistics and strategies).
- 5) to determine and study the effects of the proposed changes.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.316.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.316.

³⁰ Report to the Twelve Districts. June, 1992. p.29.

- 6) to give a full report to and seek a response from the 1992 district conventions.
- 7) to give a final report to the 1993 synod convention for action.³¹

The Feasibility Study Commission began its work of determining the feasibility of the proposal which it had been given. Much went into the commission's work. It began with a tour of each of the worker training campuses in the synod. The committee met with representatives from each of the schools and held thorough and open discussions. It sought the input of advisers and considered the input received from others. The committee also developed a complete listing of all worker training facilities, along with their capacities, condition, maintenance needs, ect. The committee met together via teleconferences and met in person to digest the information gathered. It met with ALHS representatives and attended the ALHS annual meeting in February, 1992. The committee surveyed recruitment directors and ALHS leadership. It reported to the conference of presidents and then submitted its report of findings to all the districts for study and response.

The report to the twelve districts of the Wisconsin Synod discussed the feasibility of the 1991 Synod resolution to combine the prep schools at Watertown along with the amalgamation of the colleges in New Ulm. The Feasibility Study Committee found that in financial terms such a merger would save the synod money. A combined college and combined prep school would offer a significant reduction in synod subsi-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

dy.³² The Feasibility Study Committee also stated that because there would not be enough room on the Watertown campus to accommodate both the combined prep school and Northwestern College, MLPS should be combined with the NPS only if NWC were moved to New Ulm.³³

The ability of each campus to handle the increased number of students was also studied. The Feasibility Study Committee (FSC) found that the Watertown campus would have dormitory space for 472 students and classroom space for 525. This would be adequate for a combined prep. school.

Much of the FSC's study to the twelve districts dealt with the combining of the two colleges in New Ulm, MN. Because this idea was a more recent concept it had not been studied as much as the prep school issue. The decision to amalgamate the colleges would have a direct impact on the future of MLPS because only if NWC were moved off the Watertown campus and combined with Doctor Martin Luther College would MLPS be moved to Watertown. The FSC made its evaluation of the synod proposal with the amalgamation of both the colleges and the prep schools in mind.

In its evaluation of the synod proposal the FSC studied the location of the prep school in Watertown and found it had some important advantages. Watertown was located in a region where the potential student population was the highest.³⁴

³² *Ibid.*, p.34.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48.

The FSC also stressed the increased role which the area Lutheran high schools would have to play if the prep schools were to be combined. Historically the area Lutheran high schools had supplied about 30% of the pastoral candidates and 50% of the teacher candidates.³⁵ These numbers would have to increase if the colleges were to be supplied with the students they needed. A survey conducted by the FSC of area Lutheran high schools found that they were in full support of training for public ministry. They also recognized the need to do more recruiting for the public ministry, particularly the pastor-track.

The FSC observed that to help this increased participation several options were in the works to give the area Lutheran high schools more help in sending graduates to the pastor training college. These included targeting potential students, one-on-one encouragement, use of the Taste of Ministry program, development of worker training support groups, and distance learning to share information and staff. The idea of distance learning would be to link several educational sites through means such as satellite transmission and fiber optics. It would allow for educational interaction between a presenter and an audience without being in the same room or building.

The FSC was also asked to come up with an amalgamation timetable it could present to the 1993 convention. A preliminary timetable was also sent to the twelve districts for their review. If the proposal to amalgamate were accepted by the synod in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.48.

1993 the timetable held that the two new schools, both college and preparatory would open in September of 1995.³⁶

In the committee's concluding remarks to the twelve districts it stated, "the unanimous consensus of the committee is that the proposal of the 1991 synod convention is feasible. We feel that the plan meets the definition of being carried out and being likely to produce positive results in the short and long term."³⁷

The committee also stated that it hoped for the broad acceptance of any plan. It foresaw that it would be imperative for all segments of the synod to unite in support of the new school structure, whatever form it finally assumed.

The delegates who came to the 1993 synod convention came with the very weighted responsibility of deciding the future of the synodical school structure. They would listen to the report of the Feasibility Study Committee and vote whether or not to accept the 1991 synod convention proposal to amalgamate the schools.

The Feasibility Study Committee came to the 1993 synod convention with a full report of its almost two year study. It had researched and checked both facts and figures. It had interviewed many people and sent questionnaires to many more. It had presented its findings to the district conventions and received input for further study. It had conducted exit polls on delegates to the convention and had conducted polls among the students of the worker training schools. Much work had gone into the FSC's report.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.50-51.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.52.

The FSC brought to the synod convention the responses of the district conventions. The great variety in responses and the close votes on the resolutions in several of the districts revealed a lack of consensus among the WELS membership on the issue of amalgamation. Three districts of the synod (North Atlantic, Dakota-Montana, Pacific Northwest) were found to be in support of the FSC recommendations regarding feasibility. Three districts (Southeastern Wisconsin, Northern Wisconsin, Minnesota) were near an even split on the FSC recommendations. Three districts (South Atlantic, South Central, Arizona-California) preferred another alternative. And three districts (Nebraska, Western Wisconsin, Michigan) opposed the FSC report, generally preferring status quo.³⁸

Before exploring the report of the FSC something should be mentioned of a study which was done by the Board for Worker Training. After the 1991 synod convention the BWT carried out a review of planning goals for the annual number of candidates needed to supply WELS needs. The study revealed that planning goals should aim at 52 pastoral candidates and 103 teacher candidates annually.³⁹ This number of needed church workers was a considerable decrease from that which the synod had forecast earlier in its adoption of the Mission/Vision statement. In that statement it

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.72.

³⁹ Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-second Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Saginaw, Michigan. August 2-6, 1993. p.1.

was projected that 70 pastoral and 140 teacher candidates would be needed annually.⁴⁰

The FSC used the number of needed workers supplied by the BWT's study. Using the numbers of a needed 52 pastoral candidates and 103 teacher candidates the FSC projected the number of students which would be needed to enroll in training programs of the synodical schools. To graduate enough pastors and teachers the prep system needed to handle 800-850 students. The teacher training program needed to handle 575-600 students. And the pastor training program would have to have a capacity for 275-300 students at the college level. The FSC reported that a synodical worker training system of this size would be in keeping with both resources and mission.⁴¹

The FSC also presented the number of available students from which the synod could hope to draw from in the coming years. Like the PSSC they found that the number of potential students for the prep schools was declining. Efforts to reach the expected pool of students in the prep schools would need to be done through more intensive recruitment.

The dollar issue and its impact on the synodical school structure again came up with the FSC's report. The committee stressed the fact that even if the prep school structure was retained in its present three campus system considerable money would have to be spent. The Watertown campus would need a new college level library, girls athletic facilities, additional gymnasium space, and a student union. Prairie du

⁴⁰ Report to the Twelve Districts. June, 1990. p.16.

⁴¹ Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-second Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Saginaw, Michigan. August 2-6, 1993. p. 45.

Chien while not needing any additional buildings was in need of having an unsafe structure torn down. ⁴²

Again the problem of funding was due to the decrease of Synod Mission Offerings. The amount of money which congregations had been passing along to the synod had decreased from 18.5% in 1970 to 11% in 1993. This meant less money for the operations of the synod and less money for the synod schools. Tuition could not be a part of raising more revenue. Raising the tuition any more would discourage students from coming to the prep schools. The cost of attending the prep school system was a concern of the FSC. ⁴³

The bottom line of the cost of operating the schools was found to be this. It would cost less to operate four campuses than it did to operate five. Even with the extra costs of moving the schools. Even with the extra costs of new buildings the synod would save money. It was projected that over a period of 20 years the synod would save approximately 69 million dollars. ⁴⁴

The location of a new combined prep school was also seen as a good thing. If MLPS were to be combined with NPS on the Watertown campus it would be in a location which was near the population center of the WELS. The change in location from Prairie du Chien to Watertown would be only two hours further to the west. It would be closer to major airports. The feeling was that since most of the students at

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.61.

MLPS were from great distances and many of them traveled by air anyway the two hours would not be that great a factor. On the other hand if NPS were moved to Prairie du Chien many students might be unwilling to make the move since most of the students came from the area.⁴⁵

The FSC addressed many of the same thoughts and concerns which had been addressed in detail by the PSSC and BWT. Those issues included the idea of moving MLPS back to New Ulm. This was again found to be unworkable since the size of the campus was not able to accommodate both a college and a prep school. The location of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School near New Ulm also added to the problem of such a move.⁴⁶

In its closing remarks to the synod the FSC implored the delegates to think hard about the 1991 resolution on which they would be voting. They understood that this was a resolution that if passed would satisfy some, while causing questions and concerns for others. They realized that this was a resolution which had an emotional side. They asked the delegates to weigh the advantages and the disadvantages of the proposal. The committee understood the tough decisions which would have to be made as it stated, "We have done our best to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. In the end the Lord has continually led us to believe that the 1991

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.99.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.98.

resolution is truly feasible, providing a vision for the future of our worker training system." ⁴⁷

At the start of this paper I wrote that the resolution to amalgamate the schools had been passed and Martin Luther Prep School at Prairie du Chien would be closed. It wasn't easy for a synod to hear that. In the past history of our synod the decision to close a synod prep school has never been an easy one to make. It also wasn't an easy decision to make this time. Let's hope it never will be.

In writing this paper I came to appreciate the time and the effort which was spent by our synod in deciding this difficult issue. Serious men put in serious effort to come up with serious answers. Let's pray that God blesses those efforts.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104.

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