

Martin Luther Preparatory School: Genesis

by

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Martin Luther Preparatory School (MLPS) was dedicated to the glory of God on October 14, 1979. The chain of events which led up to this dedication, however, really began approximately twenty years before.

In 1959, the Educational Survey Committee recommended that it would be in the best interest of the Wisconsin Synod to open a teacher-training college in the Milwaukee area. Acting on this report, the Synod in convention in 1959 resolved to open a teacher-training college in or near Milwaukee with a two year course, following the curriculum which was then in place at Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota.

This new school was to be coeducational with the boys continuing their college training at New Ulm, and the girls, having completed two years of college training plus two summer sessions, being permitted to enter the teaching ministry until such a time when the needs no longer necessitated the use of undergraduate teachers. This provision was made due to the shortage of teacher candidates needed to fill the existing vacancies. Thus, under an arrangement with Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College opened its doors in the fall of 1960.

Over the next few years Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College grew and prospered, and changed its name to Wisconsin Lutheran College. However, the projections upon which the opening of this

school was based were not panning out as quickly as had been hoped. The synod decided in 1969 that because their projected need for 200 and more teacher graduates had not materialized, and because an analysis of the decline in the birth rate, the number of baptisms, and the drop-out rate of teachers, together with an analysis of the near-static elementary school enrollment, indicated that approximately 175 teachers per year would be needed for some years to come, some action was necessary.

It was then decided that Dr. Martin Luther College was capable of recruiting and accomodating the students necessary to graduate at least 175 teachers annually. It was felt that an increase in the quality of education would be possible by concentrating staff and facilities on one campus, and that such concentration of staff and facilities would eliminate the duplication of capital investment and operational expense.

Therefore in 1969 the synod in convention decided that Wisconsin Lutheran College should be merged with Dr. Martin Luther College on the campus at New Ulm by September of 1970.

This done, the enrollment on the New Ulm campus, as predicted, grew immediately. What was not predicted was the enrollment explosion which occured at DMLC over the next few years. By 1977 the college enrollment on the New Ulm campus had grown to over 800 students, and this did not include the enrollment of Martin Luther Academy which shared the New Ulm campus with the college. Besides the jump in enrollment, dormitory conditions at New Ulm were deteriorating badly and many of the college students were being forced to live off campus.

Dr. Martin Luther College had grown so large that it was literally pushing Martin Luther Academy right off the campus, there simply was not room for both schools.

At the convention in 1977, the synod realized some permanent solution to the overcrowding problem on the New Ulm campus was needed. It was at this time that the Commission on Higher Education was authorized to look into the matter. It was felt that there were really only two alternatives, either build facilities for Martin Luther Academy on a piece of property which the college owned a few blocks from the main campus, or move the school (MLA) to an entirely new location.

In September of 1977, shortly after the Synod convention closed, it was brought to the attention of the Commission on Higher Education that there was available the campus of the defunct Campion High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Campion had been a Jesuit high school which had closed its doors about two years earlier due in part to declining enrollment and also to financial problems. The first visit to this campus was made on October 28, 1977.

After visiting the campus in Prairie du Chien a number of times and collecting the needed data from the campus, the Commission on Higher Education recommended in the 1978 Report to the Ten Districts that the Synod purchase the Campion facilities. The committee made this recommendation based on three major factors: location, the facilities themselves, and cost.

The Commission on Higher Education felt that the location of this campus in Prairie du Chien was definitely advantageous. It is strategically located between the two colleges in Watertown

and New Ulm, 100 miles west of Madison, 178 miles west of Milwaukee, 59 miles south of LaCrosse, 200 miles southeast of the Twin Cities, 235 miles southwest of New Ulm, and 60 miles north of Dubuque.

Using the commission's standard of a 250 mile radius for the majority of the students, the location in that radius would include 81% of the combined enrollments of Northwestern Prep School (91%) and Martin Luther Academy (70%) at that time.

The area is also easily accessible by car, and is served by major airlines through LaCrosse, Madison, and Dubuque. These airlines offer connections making the area accessible to all parts of the country.

The commission was also highly impressed with the facilities which they found on the Campion campus. There was an administration and faculty building which was capable of being remodeled to provide classrooms for at least 558 students. Connected to this building was a student dining hall and kitchen, capable of easily accommodating 420 at a sit-down meal.

Three dormitories had been erected on campus, two of which were equipped with a modern communications system as well as elevators. It was felt that these three dormitories, without crowding, were capable of providing housing for 547 resident students.

There were also two gymnasiums on campus. The newest building contained a gymnasium, athletic offices, locker rooms, a wrestling room, and an aquatic room which housed an olympic size swimming pool. The other building contained a gymnasium which

had been equipped with a portable stage, screen, and 35mm projectors, as well as a club room.

The other major building on campus was a large student chapel. This building had been erected in 1924 and fitted with stained glass windows which had been imported from Austria. It seats approximately 450.

In addition to these major buildings, there was also a central heating plant which was connected to the other buildings by heating tunnels. There were also various service buildings, a nine-hole golf course, six concrete tennis courts, four outdoor handball courts, softball fields, a baseball field, and a football field with an underground sprinkler system. All of the major buildings on campus had been erected to provide minimal maintenance problems. They were of block and brick construction with much use of ceramic tile, marble window sills, metal window framing, and tile flooring. Due to these facilities, the commission estimated that the campus could easily accommodate the enrollment of Martin Luther Academy then, and also the enrollment of Northwestern Prep School in the future.

The third major factor which the Commission on Higher Education cited was the cost of the campus. The facilities in Prairie du Chien were made available to our Synod at a total initial cost of \$2,800,000. In addition to this, it was estimated that an additional \$342,395 would be involved in takeover costs bringing the grand total to just under 3.2 million dollars. This was considerably less than any other option open to our Synod at that time, and also quite a bargain for a campus which is presently insured for better than 38 million dollars.

The Commission realized that there would be disagreement and criticisms of their recommendation. For this reason they felt it was necessary to publish various alternatives which had been suggested and considered, along with their reasons for setting these alternatives aside, in their report. These alternatives were as follows:

Alternative #1a:

- A. The college at Watertown
- B. The college at New Ulm
- C. Both prep schools sharing college campus and facilities

Comments:

1. Neither college campus can for long continue to share its facilities.
2. If facilities are not provided for the two prep schools, a choking of the schools results.
3. If facilities are provided, either in phases or completely, it becomes extremely costly.

Alternative #2:

- A. The college at Watertown
- B: The college at New Ulm
- C: The immediate establishment of the joint prep school at Prairie du Chien

Comments:

This alternative is undesirable because it calls for the immediate transfer and consolidation of two prep schools

and would unnecessarily disrupt the flow of pastor students at a time of critical need.

Alternative #1b:

- A. The college at Watertown
- B. The college at New Ulm
- C. Make provisions for both prep schools over the next four years for their own facilities in the same geographic area as the colleges.

Comments:

1. This continues the historic prep school pattern.
2. This guarantees the continued flow of graduates of the two prep schools into the colleges at the present rate.
3. This is the costliest of the alternatives in capital outlay calling for a minimum expenditure of approximately \$10,500,000 at present-day construction costs, exclusive of equipment and, in one case, property.
4. This commits the Synod to a prolonged amortization program and makes no allowance for projected needs at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and possibly Northwestern Lutheran Academy.

Alternative #3:

- A. The joint prep school at Watertown
- B. DMLC at New Ulm
- C. NWC at Prairie du Chien

Comments:

1. This is unacceptable because it in effect kills MLA

2. It does not solve the basic necessity for continuing a viable prep system.
3. It destroys a tradition which the Synod at large is not likely to accept.

Alternative #4a:

- A. The joint prep school at Watertown
- B. The joint college at New Ulm, with dorms for the college on campus #2

Comments:

1. This is unacceptable because it in effect destroys MLA.
2. It does not solve the basic necessity for continuing a viable prep system.
3. It combines a terminal and a non-terminal college, which could have deleterious effects.
4. It destroys a tradition which the Synod at large is not likely to accept.

Alternative #4b:

- A. The joint prep school at Watertown
- B. The joint college in New Ulm
- C. The second prep school at Prairie du Chien

Comments:

1. This is far too costly.
2. It combines a terminal and a non-terminal college, which could have undesirable implications.
3. It again destroys a tradition which may prove unac-

ceptable to the Synod.

Alternative #5:

- A. The college at Watertown
- B. The college at New Ulm
- C. The prep school at a new location

Comments:

1. This could be a desirable alternative.
2. However, in view of the availability of the Campion campus, its desirability becomes questionable because of costs and because in the intervening process MLA's dual program would likely be cut back, and it would not solve soon enough the squeeze in which NPS is likely to find itself.

Alternative #6:

- A. The college at Watertown, together with the prep school for boys only
- B. The college at New Ulm, together with the prep school for boys only

Comments:

1. This is attractive only from a cost standpoint.
2. It effectively destroys our over-all prep program.
3. It seriously weakens the Synod's teacher-training program.

With all these things in mind, The Commission on Higher Education recommended that the Synod purchase the Campion

property. The recommendation was made with the stated purpose being the relocation of Martin Luther Academy beginning with the 1979-80 school year, and the phased relocation of the Northwestern Prep School teacher track with provisions made for the eventual relocation of the entire institution.

Once the Districts had had the chance to study, consider, and debate the report, a special Synodical convention was called for August of 1978. After much discussion and the defeating of an alternate proposal, the delegates adopted the resolution, effecting the move of Martin Luther Academy to Prairie du Chien and renaming the school Martin Luther Preparatory School.

The next year was a busy one in preparing the newly acquired campus for use. An interim committee was appointed to ready the campus and take care of any business related to it until a new Board of Control could be elected. This committee was headed by Rev. Kurt Eggert - chairman of the CHE, and Rev. Robert Voss - executive secretary of the CHE. The main task of the interim committee was to implement and prepare for the school's opening in the Fall of 1979.

The majority of preparation was involved in remodeling. The administration building was remodeled from living quarters into classrooms. Also in this building, a room in the basement which had served as the private dining hall for the Jesuit priests who had lived there became the new library.

Since Campion had been an all-male school, a number of changes were needed to prepare for the female population forthcoming. The largest of the three dormitories was remodeled

to accomodate women, and the locker area in the Gymnasium was also remodeled, being divided into two seperate locker rooms.

The only unexpected work occurred in the cafeteria. It seems that the original floor had been poured incorrectly and was as a result slanted. This problem was corrected and the entire cafeteria was then remodeled.

At the convention in 1979 the Synod adopted a resolution endorsing the actions of the interim committee, and the date for the dedication of Martin Luther Preparatory School was set for October 14, 1979. It was at this same convention that the Synod decided to close Northwestern Lutheran Academy, effective August 8, 1979. Although it was not intended to do so, this decision provided MLPS with an influx of students, as well as a number of well trained and experienced prep professors to complement those coming from New Ulm.

In the Fall of 1979 Martin Luther Prep School officially opened its doors to an enrollment of approximately 350 students. Not everything ran as smoothly as might have been hoped, however. There were tensions between students from MLA and NLA. There were tensions between the student body and the local public high school students. Perhaps the best thing that could have been done would have been to change everything, instead of just the name. New school colors, school mascot, alma mater, etc. might have eased some of the tensions between students, however this would also have cost quite a bit in new athletic uniforms and so on. In all, the faculty and the young board of control handled the problems quite well.

The original faculty of MLPS consisted of Oscar Siegler,

President; James Schneider, Dean of Students; Heine Schnitker, Registrar; Herbert Jaster, Librarian; Harold Kaiser, Athletic Director; Erv Walz, James Denninger, Daniel Malchow, Harold Schewe, Robert Krueger, Carl Lemke, Alan Jeffers, Armin Schwartz, Kermit Moldenhauer, Eldon Hirsch, Daniel Kirk, Jerome Braun, Frederick Manthey, Myron Duin, and a number of part time teachers and tutors.

The face of the faculty has changed quite a bit over the past fourteen years. In 1982, Dan Malchow took a call to Milwaukee. Also in 1982, President Siegler retired, and Rev. Theo. Olsen was called to take his place. 1983 was also a busy year in this regard. Heine Schnitker retired, and James Denninger resigned. Also in that year, James Schneider received and accepted the call to teach eleventh grade history and twelfth grade religion. This call also relieved Prof. Schneider of his duties as Dean, and in the Fall of that year Rev. Dennis Hayes accepted the call to be the new Dean of Students.

Things stayed pretty much the same on the faculty for about four years. Then, in 1987, Dean Hayes accepted a call to return to the parish in Watertown, South Dakota. During the Summer of 1988, Rev. Roger Kobleske accepted the call to become the new Dean and took over in that capacity in the Fall of that year. Also in that year, Erv Walz retired from the teaching ministry after serving his Lord for better than forty years.

The nineties have seen a flurry of activity on the faculty in just a few years. In 1990, Carl Lemke accepted the call to coach football and teach at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in

Milwaukee. Also, Kermit Molderhauer accepted the call to be the head of the new hymnal committee. Also in 1990, MLPS received permission from the Synod to call the first ever full-time recruitment director. The Assignment Committee assigned Rev. Ken Brokmeier to this task.

In 1991, Robert Heubner accepted the call to teach geometry and coach football, filling the opening which was left vacant by Coach Lemke. At the end of that school year, in 1992, Frederick Manthey retired. He also had served his Lord in the teaching ministry for better than forty years.

1993 was a busy year as well for MLPS. Rev. Ken Brokmeier received and accepted the call to become the permanent full-time recruitment director for MLPS. Also, Nathan Kieselhorst accepted the call to teach history, filling a spot which will be left open by the retirement from the ministry of Rev. Herbert Jaster.

The student body has also seen many changes over the years. After its unexpectedly large enrollment in the first year, the size of the student body declined. This was due to a number of factors. The most important of these was the opening of Area Lutheran High Schools in New Ulm, Phoenix, Southern California, and Washington State. These had all been prime recruitment areas for both MLA and NLA.

The student body reached a low enrollment of about 190 in the late 1980's, but, amidst rumors of closing, the enrollment has taken an upward swing due in large part to the efforts of Pastor Brokmeier, and currently stands at approximately 220.

Martin Luther Prep School has been striving to be just that, a prep school. Since its inception in 1979, MLPS has

consistently sent an average of 65% of its graduating class to either NWC or DMLC. MLPS is a vital cog in our worker training program, and it is this writer's hope that this is only the beginning.

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