

A Short History Concerning Christian Day Schools  
And Christian Education  
In The Dakota-Montana District Of The  
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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The impetus for writing this short history comes from a number of factors in my life that have affected my love for the Dakota-Montana District and my desire to know more about it. First of all, I am a true son of the District, born in Rapid City, South Dakota in 1960, raised in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and graduated in 1978 from Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, South Dakota. I have a great love for windy days on the prairie, for quiet sunsets overlooking the Cahe Reservoir, for friendships with many wonderful, enjoyable people of the Dakotas and Montana. Secondly, I enjoy history. It is enjoyable to imagine or find out what it was like for our forebears to live in the very same places where we reside only many years removed. Thirdly, and least important (or is it really most important?), I am setting forth this history as a partial fulfillment of graduation requirements in Church History at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. A final, fourth reason for this paper is that I hope it may serve in a small way as a resource for the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association. This group of devoted Christians is dedicated to improving Christian education in the District. In as much as we can learn from history may this paper help their cause.

This short history will trace the establishment of Christian Day Schools in the Dakota-Montana District from its organization in 1920 until 1985. Sixty-five years may seem to be a large chunk of time to cover in a short history, but in reality there were not all that many schools in the

District. To fill out the body of this paper and to increase its scope somewhat, I will also include pertinent information about the growth of the District, the role of its former high school, Northwestern Lutheran Academy, and also a segment about the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School Association, and even a look at the present day economic situation in South Dakota as far as it may affect Christian education.

### Beginnings

Let's plunge into this history with a review of the beginnings of the Dakota-Montana District noting especially the geography of the area and its inhabitants. This review will be somewhat flawed/since most of my comments will be aimed at South Dakota and will not always apply in general or specific to the rest of the District. I am very ignorant in matters pertaining to Montana and Alberta, Canada, and am only vaguely familiar with North Dakota. Please be generous in your imagination. For instance, I realize that Montana is quite mountainous, but I do not mention it later.

The geography of the Dakotas is unique to most areas where the Wisconsin Synod is located. The contrast between the Wisconsin-Michigan-Minnesota area and the North Dakota-South Dakota-Montana-Alberta area is very distinct. The former is filled with trees, hills, dairy farms, large industrialized cities, and numerous rivers and lakes. These states also have a much higher population density. On the other hand the Dakota-Montana District is sparsely populated with people or

trees. Water is a precious resource available in just enough quantities to make life bearable. The Dakota-Montana District is a vast wide-open land of rolling grass-covered hills bisected by the mighty Missouri River. The whole area is distinctly Western in character. Eastern South Dakota has numerous farms and grain fields. Western South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana have a great deal of ranching operations with cattle or sheep. North Dakota and Alberta are known as the great wheat producers of the nation after Kansas. Much of your pasta comes from their fields. This District is decidedly rural and very dependent on favorable weather conditions for a healthy economy.

In the winter, the District experiences very bitter cold winds sweeping down from the Rocky Mountains. In summer, the wind can be hellishly hot and the land can be very dry and drought-stricken. But the sun shines and the breeze is pleasant enough during the year to make it a healthful country. The wind seems to blow constantly since there really is nothing to obstruct its path. People used to say that there was "nothing to make a shadow" at any time of day.

Trees are mostly found only along creek bottoms, the rivers and lakes, and in shelter belts planted by farmers and ranchers to protect their buildings and best topsoil. Otherwise there are few trees for they do not grow haphazardly in this rather dry environment.

Professor Karl G. Sievert, who spent almost his entire ministry in the District, often wrote about the region.

He once penned, "The

This is the great western prairie, rolling and almost treeless. Here the larger cities of the East disappear; instead, many small towns strike the eye of the traveler, towns which are grouped around their chief building, the grain elevator. Nearby is the stockyard, for agriculture is the industry of this vast area. And its products are of major importance to the economy of the nation.

Who were the people who inhabited the smaller towns and worked the farms and ranches? Prior to the Civil War, the inhabitants were mainly the nomadic Sioux Indians, other smaller tribes, and countless buffalo. In 1863, the federal government promised free land under the Homestead Act to the population at large. Many people from Wisconsin, Minnesota and other eastern states moved west to escape the economic depressions after the Civil War and claimed free land. The government also awarded free land to its faithful veterans of the war who were looking for a new life.

In the 1880's immigrants from Europe began coming west searching for cheap land and a stable government. Many Germans came directly from their mother country. Other nations were also represented in smaller quantities. One large group of Germans came from South Russia. Catherine the Great had lured many people to populate her land, but later tsars made life less enjoyable there so they sailed off to America and settled in the vast prairies of the Dakotas.

This territory was a new frontier for white settlers which meant there were no organized churches and schools to serve the spiritual needs of the people. K.G. Sievert

described what happened: "These pioneer settlers either forgot their church, or they were cut off from their church by great distances, or they were falling prey to false preachers." 2

The former Minnesota Synod saw these sad conditions and realized what a vast mission potential the area represented. The first missionaries from Minnesota were circuit riders ("Reiseprediger"). Under the auspices of the Department of Home Missions of the Synod, these traveling pastors began their work in eastern South Dakota and quickly expanded westward. These men were selflessly devoted to preaching wherever a congregation of worshipers could be found. Circuit trips lasted anywhere from three to six weeks. Travel was by horse and buggy; later by Model T Ford. Distances covered were anywhere from 150 to 600 miles. These men traveled from sod huts to farms to ranches until congregations could be established, churches built, and ~~past~~ pastors called to serve. Many congregations and preaching stations were organized. In fact, there were so many that even after the year 1900, pastors were absent from their homes and on the trail more than fifty percent of the time. (I feel sorry for their wives.)

Sievert wrote of this:

The development of the Dakota-Montana mission fields had extended into such great areas that the missionaries as well as other members of the Minnesota Synod respectively requested and advised the formation of a new district. )

The Organization Of The Dakota-Montana District  
And The Perceived Need For Christian Education

After years of planning and praying, the Dakota-Montana

District was organized on June 25, 1920 at the regular Minnesota District convention. A few weeks later, the General Synod ratified the organization of the new district in its session at Watertown, Wisconsin. It was now an official eighth district of the Wisconsin Synod. Here are a list of reasons offered to the Synod for this new district, taken from Professor E.C. Fredrich's History of the Minnesota District (1968):

1. Much travel time and money would be saved when it came to attending conferences and larger meetings;
2. The area would have officials of its own, living in the field of labor;
3. A more stable ministry would ensue, on the grounds that pastors tend to stay in their own district.

The District might best be described as a slow, but steady grower. Major controversies have not rocked its faithful membership as much as other areas in the Synod. The President's Report at the first regular convention mentions 7,000 souls, about 3,500 communicant members, 55 congregations (27 members of the District, and 28 not), 25 preaching stations, and 32 pastors plus 2 vicars. In 1985, there were 12,188 souls, 9,113 communicant members, 74 congregations, and 49 pastors.

What was the District's stance toward Christian education? If you would look at today's statistics compared to yester-years, one might be led to believe that the District cared not a whit for the education of its people, especially the young.

But in reality, this is not so. There is no hard evidence to support such a view. In reality, the Dakota-Montana District has always been acutely aware of the need for more Christian education than it was able to supply. Major essays were presented on Christian education in the early years. Each year the District appealed to the Synod for help in this area along with men to fill its parishes. In his essay, "Preaching The Gospel On The Dakota-Montana Prairies"; Prof. Sievert referred to such interests:

A live interest in Christian education has always existed in the District. For instance, in the first third of the life of the District, several essays on this topic were heard at the conventions of the District. 5

When the District came into existence-so reports tell us-eleven pastors were conducting twelve schools, and one lady teacher was active at Elgin, North Dakota for two years. One wonders about these schools. I know that some were little more than confirmation schools or even German schools. Only St. Martin's of Watertown had started a parochial school in the decade from 1910 to 1920. But the school was dropped again, since the congregation became discouraged at the fact that their teacher was being called away all too often. 6

More than one congregation conducted summer schools lasting one to two months. Such summer schools accomplished by far more than do the one-week vacation Bible schools of our day. 7

Rev. E.R. Gamm in his essay, "Our Daughter District's Golden Jubilee-1970 Dakota-Montana District"; also commented about early efforts towards Christian education:

Christian education was very limited. Pastor Boettcher conducted school in his parsonage four days a week in spite of his busy schedule. Naturally the standards required now were not demanded then. The pastors had summer school, or what is



known today as Vacation Bible School. To arrange instruction periods for confirmands for a parish of four to six churches was most difficult. There was very little time for vacations as the summer had to be utilized for that purpose, children were kept at the parsonage for daily instruction. 8

Nevertheless the District was ridiculed, chided and rebuked because it had no parochial schools. In 1921, one family of the Elgin congregation supported the first and only school in the District for two years. However, it had to be discontinued because and I quote, "The general mission board could not be interested to also support a teacher." 9

Christian education was discussed at every conference. 10

It is my intention to quote these two men at length to show that the District was sincere and still is about the education of its youth. I say this because the next couple quotes show the stark reality of the situation. Pastor William F. Sauer, President of the District, reported to the 1926 District Convention:

Freilich ist das auch zu bemerken, dass sich in unserem ganzen Distrikte keine Gemeindeschule befindet. (It certainly must also be noted, that there is not a single Christian day school in our entire district.) 11

This is the convention's response to the President's report:

Wir freuen uns und danken Gott fuer das gesunde Wachstum des Distrikts, aber bedauern es sehr ernstlich das wir in unserem ganzen Distrikte immer noch keine Gemeindeschulen haben. (We rejoice and thank God for the healthy growth of the district but lament very earnestly that we still do not have any Christian schools in our entire district. 12

I might add that this same condition continued well into the 1940's with the exception of the congregation at Bowdle,

South Dakota. It had a school from 1934 to about 1937.

Having noted this dismaying situation, what are the reasons for this? One reason that we can safely say does not apply is reluctance or apathy on the part of the District members as a body. Let us say that apathy existed only in individual cases, of which I have no outright proof.

There are more tangible reasons why Christian education has struggled so long to grow in the Dakota-Montana District. Perhaps the same conditions, mentioned later, have existed throughout its 66 year history, not just in the beginning. We can group the reasons into three broad categories: Political, Geographical, and Synodical. Of course there may be some overlap between these areas or groupings.

#### Synodical

In the early years especially, there was the particular problem of revolving manpower. Continuing In His Word, a synodical history, states that many missionaries were unwilling to remain in this field for any length of time. "Again and again the record reads, 'After only a few months Pastor .....left this field, having accepted a call to ..... (some eastern congregation.'" <sup>13</sup> Also, Pastor Gamm wrote, "Of the early missionaries it is recorded 'sie konnten die Strapazen nicht ertragen,' (They could not bear the hardships). This statement appears repeatedly." <sup>14</sup> Certainly such a condition would not be favorable to the establishment of schools. A church without consistent leadership does not know where to direct its efforts. In defense of the men who

left the area so soon, I will say that these men were advised to go into this untamed territory without the benefit of wives. The hardships and loneliness were thought to be too great. So it is no wonder that many young men left to live life in more comfortable, happy circumstances.

Another "Synodical" problem was that the Synod provided no subsidy for school teachers, and the congregations were too small and too poor to do it alone. Even if there were school buildings, teachers could not be called and paid.

#### Political

The political difficulties that led to so few schools have much more weight than the "Synodical" problems. One thing to be contended with were the stringent state laws concerning education. Any pastor or teacher trained in another state (which they all were) had to obtain certification from the State Department of South Dakota. This meant red tape, extra training and extra expense. This condition exists yet today. It has happened many times that a teacher accepts a call into the District, obtains state certification, and then accepts a call out of the Dakota-Montana District. It hurts when a congregation's money does not see full fruits produced.

The District Proceedings of 1938 included this report from the Education Committee.

The stringent school laws and the tendency in the state normal schools of South Dakota to stop granting teacher's certificates to those who take a six weeks' summer course forced Pastor Albrecht last fall to place his school into the hands of a girl from his congregation who had a South Dakota

teacher's certificate. Your Board considered this an emergency and granted the promised support of \$38.00 per month for nine months.

Bowdle School - Teacher Erma Lemke  
Pastor P.G. Albrecht

Pupils attending: 17

Grades taught: 1-8

Subsidy for nine months: \$342.00 or \$38.00 per month. 16

Note: This was the only school in the District at that time for a twenty-five year span.

The second "Political" problem came not so much from the state but from the population at large. Because most of the towns in the prairies are small, and because entertainment opportunities are few and distances to larger cities prohibitive especially in the winter, the local public school became the social center for these rural communities. Add to this that these communities worked very hard to establish a school system where great numbers of children do not live. All this leads to a somewhat unique situation with the result that the people in the Dakota-Montana District are intensely loyal to their local public school system. These are people who are very dedicated to providing an excellent education system. They have worked very diligently to gain every advantage for their children. Also, the state of South Dakota provides money and funds to the community schools based upon the number of children attending. (I believe this is a common practice in many states.) Is it no wonder then that any attempt to establish and maintain a Christian day school is perceived as a very real threat to the continued existence

of the public school? Many schools in the Dakotas are only a few students above the cut-off limit where they will be forced to bus their children to neighboring towns in order to consolidate. Christian parents in the Wisconsin Synod belong to the local school district and serve on its boards. Their children attend the local schools. Therefore they receive very real pressure to support the community's school. For every child enrolled in a Christian day school or high school and removed from the local school <sup>he or she</sup> moves that local school one step closer to extinction and consolidation. Nobody wants their hard work to end up as nothing. The difficulty for the Christian day school is that the local school was there first and won't be easily budged. Many parents gave their all first to the local school and therefore are very loyal to it.

Perhaps these ideas seem a little far-fetched. Here is a real-life example.

In 1959, a little town called Glenham, near Mobridge, South Dakota, had reached a crisis situation. It did not have enough students to keep its public high school open. The closing of this school would be a real blow to this community which very much desired to have its own high school. However, there was one citizen in Glenham, owner of a well-known hardware store and member of St. Jacobi congregation (WELS), who had a daughter and a son of high school age. He was a man who was concerned about his children and their Christian education, so he wanted to send them to Northwestern

Lutheran Academy in Mobridge only seven miles away. But in 1959, he had a real dilemma. If he sent his children to MLA, they would receive the finest Christian education available in the District. However, their departure from the Glenham public school meant the closing of the local high school. Would you like to have that kind of decision? He made a hard choice. His daughter, son, and wife enrolled at the public high school along with three other women from the community. The public high school remained open for more than twenty additional years. Approximately two years ago, Glenham high school finally closed its doors due to lack of students. 16

Now you may ask, how could this Christian man deny his family a Christian high school education in favor of the local school? Aren't the local schools Petri dishes for all kinds of evolutionistic, humanistic vices? This may be true in many states, but for decades this generally was not the case in South Dakota. Many local teachers were good, solid Christian folk and their classrooms did have a healthy atmosphere for Christian youth. In other words, one would have a hard time convincing folks that too much was wrong with the public school system. Such was the case, I hope, in Glenham South Dakota in 1959.

The closing of local schools not only darkens the educational dreams of the parents, but the effects on communities which were forced to shut down their schools are readily apparent. First the school closes. Then local businesses fail or move to the larger towns. Finally all that is left

is a grain elevator, a tavern, and maybe a gas station. There are many such towns in the Dakota-Montana District. Public schools are a vital link in the survival of the many small communities of the Dakota-Montana District.

#### Geographical

The last grouping of circumstances which work against the opening of Christian day schools is the largest and also overlaps very heavily into the first two groupings. These next circumstances are linked to the geography of the prairie states. By the term geography, I mean to include climate, economy, population density, and transportation.

First and perhaps foremost of the factors in this section is population density. Neither of the three states of the Union or the province of Canada that belong to the Dakota-Montana District have very large populations. In the 1970 census, Montana had 701,000 citizens; North Dakota-639,000; South Dakota-674,000; and Alberta-1,456,000. The population of Wisconsin in comparison was 4,188,000. The area in square miles for the Dakota-Montana District is 520,135 while the area of Wisconsin is 56,154 square miles. Population levels since then have remained the same or declined. This entire district is ten times the size of the three districts of Wisconsin with only three-fourths as many people.

In this vast area, our Wisconsin Synod churches have a combined total of 12,188 souls and 9,113 communicants in 1985. In the Central Conference of the Western Wisconsin District alone, there are 34,955 souls and 27,321 communicants all

encompassed within a twenty-five mile radius basically. This District has 18 schools. What do all these statistics mean in relation to Christian day schools? It means that the opening of Christian schools in the Dakota-Montana District is hampered 1.) by small congregations and 2.) by great distances. In 1970, there were only three congregations of seventy-two with more than 300 communicant members in this whole vast District. In 1985, that number has crept up to five. Secondly along with few people there are great distances between towns and between churches and the homes of the members. Sievert wrote in his History, "And the geographical areas, covered by most congregations-often as great as 500 square miles or more-made the operation of parish schools impossible." <sup>17</sup> Farms are often more than 900 acres. Ranches often top 1,500 acres. How do you enable children to attend a Christian day school regularly during the winter months and severe weather? Is it affordable to bus children such long distances? Can parents afford the time driving back and forth? What about the danger to lives with the sudden blizzards? What about the many unpaved roads and the wear-and-tear on vehicles?

The local public schools have solved many of these problems, but remember, they were established first and receive first attention by all citizens. Also they have a larger base of families to draw upon for students, and they draw from a smaller area in square miles.

The small congregations of the District would have a hard time paying the salaries of a pastor and teacher(s) in



addition to building classrooms. One needs a large base of support to do this. Pastor Daniel Malchow conducted a survey of 9 principals of area Luthrean high schools in 1973 to find out what kind of congregational membership was needed to attract students to and finance a high school. He writes,

The replies indicated that a school exercises little influence beyond 25 to 30 miles. They also showed that within this radius membership in congregations would have to total 7,500 communicants in order to provide the financial support necessary. 18

Such a scenario does not exist in the Dakota-Montana District for a high school or for Christian day schools. The communicant membership for the entire district is 9,113 today. Yet despite these facts, opinions, and figures, 6 Christian day schools can be found in the Dakota-Montana District, and it is are working hard to start a high school.

A second circumstance hindering the opening of parochial schools is the rural economy of the District. Agriculture is king and fickle nature is queen, or maybe it is the other way around? How the Lord supplies the right kinds of crop-growing conditions affects the contributions and financial stability of the rural congregations and the District. Let me give you an example. In the 1934 District Proceedings, the Board of Regents of NLA wrote in their report, "In spite of the drought, and the resultant crop failures, lack of feed and water, and the general poverty of our Christians, we were able to open our 1933-34 school year with 16 students." 19 This, of course, was the era of the Great Depression. However, in 1940 the District had a different story in its Proceedings

of the District convention: "With the gradual return of normal crop conditions, the finances of the district again showed an increase in our contributions towards the synodical budget. In general conditions in our local congregations and mission fields show a marked improvement." <sup>20</sup> I must add, though, in 1940 there were still no Christian day schools in the Dakota-Montana District. However, these two reports show how the weather and crops play an important part in the economy and stewardship of the District.

The Great Depression of the 1930's, along with severe drought, had a devastating effect on the prairie congregations as well as on the rest of the nation. Many lost their farms and homes and had to move elsewhere to start over. Many of the well-to-do went on welfare. Whole congregations went on public relief. One pastor signed his letters, "Yours in the Federal service,". <sup>21</sup> Many self-sustaining congregations were forced to seek aid from the Synod's mission account.

Closely tied with the problem of crop failures or low prices for farm products is the fact that these small congregations lacked the money to start schools even though the desire was present. Pastor Malchow commented about the low enrollment and lack of finances that burdened NLA for many years. He said,

... shortly after the school opened, the Depression Era began. The effects of this social disturbance left their marks for many years. Financial hardships were common to most families. Children could

not be sent to school because they were needed to work at home. In addition to the Depression Era, veteran pastors listed as the second biggest factor in the school's small enrollment the fact that repeated years of crop failure intensified the financial plight of many families. <sup>22</sup>

The financial stability and ability to support schools did not exist among most of the rural congregations so dependent on agri-business.

Pastor Gamm listed one reason for the difficulty of maintaining Christian day schools in that

missionaries were primarily interested in becoming self-sustaining. In 1917, the salary was \$660 which was gradually increased to \$1200 as top salary 25 years later. The records show that some were self-sustaining at \$400, \$750 and \$1000 annually. To interest the members in supporting a teacher was impossible. Missionaries were thankful when they were relieved of the support from Synod's treasury. <sup>23</sup>

The next factor, transportation, may seem to be trivial, but actually, transportation problems weighed more heavily than one might think. Road conditions in the Dakota-Montana District are not the same as Wisconsin where almost every lane and by-way is paved with blacktop. Back in the early days of the District of the Dakotas, highways were not paved, but merely graveled. The side roads were bladed trails. Today many highways cross these prairie states for the sake of tourists and just plain modern improvement, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the gravel and mud roads may still outnumber the paved roads.

What does this mean in respect to Christian day schools? It means that by no stretch of the imagination are travel conditions safe, reliable, or taken for granted. Especially

in winter, drifting snow caused by constant wind continually makes highways impassable. Rural children tend to miss a fair amount of school each year, or else they board in town for a school session-a less than desirable situation for parents. Even rain can make travel treacherous. The soil of the area is known as gumbo. When dry it packs as hard as rock, but as soon as any rain dampens the soil, the muddy unpaved roads soon become as slippery as grease in a skillet. Not only do farms and ranches become snow-bound, but they can also become mud-bound. Parents can't afford to spend all day getting to their children to and from school, so the children stay at home where they are safe from the elements.

All the difficulties and problems hindering the opening of Christian day schools may be surmounted individually by force of will, but when one adds it all together, it can be easily recognized why so many congregations have opted not to build schools. In my opinion, if I were to pick one or two factors that weighed the most heavily on the District, I would pick the relatively few numbers of students per congregation, and the intense loyalty given to the hard-won local public school systems. It seems to me that the only way to solve these problems is to locate Christian day schools in cities where the numbers of children are greater and won't be missed too much from the public schools.

#### Northwestern Lutheran Academy

Amidst all the problems and difficulties surrounding Christian education in the Dakota-Montana District, there

did exist one bright spot for 51 years of its 66 year history. This lamp on a hill did not appear at the elementary school level, but in the area of secondary education. Northwestern Lutheran Academy was the one beaming center of Christian education in the Dakota-Montana District.

From the time that the District was organized and even before, the pastors and laymen of the District saw the need for sound education of its youth. They also recognized that they needed help from whomever could give it, so they looked to the Synod. Each year from 1920 on, the District petitioned the Synod for assistance in starting some type of secondary school for the children. Their reasoning was this: We have a distinct lack of Christian education. If we had a high school, we could encourage congregations to start Christian day schools to feed into the high school and help it grow. At the same time, our graduates could feed into the worker-training programs at New Ulm and Watertown, or recirculate back into our own congregations as well-educated laypeople who know the benefits of Christian education. It was an all-win scenario.

Also in the 1920's, Synod leaders were espousing the virtues of Christian high schools, and they were encouraging all districts to do what they could to establish high schools. Professor August Pieper challenged the Dakota-Montana District in 1922. He said,

But our church as a whole must not stop with the Christian elementary school. The need for higher education is growing among us from year to

year. It is just our public high schools that are at variance with that which is intrinsically Christian and become dangerous to our youth. Therefore we must found Lutheran high schools for all Lutheran boys and girls; otherwise they will be lost to our Church and to Christ. <sup>24</sup>

In 1924, Professor Bliefernicht of New Ulm added more thoughts to the hopper in an essay delivered at Zeeland, North Dakota. In general he said, "We Christians must more and more take the thought to heart that we establish high schools for our Christian youth." <sup>25</sup> He also said to the District,

In time they, the high schools, will become "feeders" for our educational institutions. How often have we experienced it in New Ulm that such young people who came to us only to receive a general high school training later decided to be trained as a pastor or teacher. And even if they did not! If we educate our future church members in our own schools in our spirit, we are preparing pillars for the Church, and the state gains the very best in the process. <sup>26</sup>

Three years later the desires of the Dakota-Montana District and the Wisconsin Synod were able to fuse together in a plan to establish the Academy in the District. In the 1927 Synod Convention, a report was delivered called the "Moussa Report," named after one of the men serving on the Committee on Education.

If Christian intermediate schools, whether intended to prepare for the ministry or not, are so little available to the greater part of the Synod's congregations, then our well-meant efforts to establish primary schools and eventually colleges for our people will come to little good, because with school attendance compulsory to the end of the high school age, much of the work done in our common schools, where we are fortunate to have them, is later undone, and the interest and concern for these common schools is sure to decline. Furthermore, if

we were able to stock our congregations with members who have attended our own academies, we could be sure of more understanding and zeal in behalf of our schools. 27

Thus the Committee on Education made this recommendation that "the Synod should authorize and subsidize the establishment of preparatory schools or academies, in many different parts of its territory, preferably according to conferences." 29 The Committee also recommended that there should be a day school in every congregation.

Well it just so happened that there was a territory asking persistently for more education for its youth in 1927. The pastoral conference of the Dakota-Montana District assembled at Raymond, South Dakota issued this appeal to the Synod in 1927.

1. "To consider the need of a Synodical institution in our midst.
2. To help us obtain such school, to erect it if possible west of Aberdeen.
3. That certain offers would be made to reduce the cost to a minimum." 30

This appeal was supported by two earlier conferences of the Dakota-Montana District in 1925 which authorized the drafting of such a proposal to the Synod.

The Western Conference assembled at Roscoe discussed a paper by Pastor J.B. Scherf in which he asked, "How can we in view of local conditions provide the best education for our children?" This next quote followed in the minutes:

Therefore a lively discussion of the high school matter, provoked by Pastor P. Albrecht, followed. It was decided that this conference memorialize the Synod as follows: That at this year's convention of our Synod it be noted how much we need an educa-

tional institution in our district, whether one calls it a high school or an academy. We plead that in the building plans of the Synod our district be taken into consideration and be helped in this urgent need. <sup>31</sup>

Later the Eastern Delegate Conference discussed this matter and this item appeared in its minutes:

Rev. Sievert also referred to the needs of a Christian High School in our own Dakota-Montana District. The object, system, and principal (sic) was discussed, and the need of it was greatly felt and therefore it was also resolved to have the secretary of the Conference write to the Western Conference to assure them that we could support their overtures to the general synod regarding a Christian high school in their midst. <sup>32</sup>

All these reports, memorials, and appeals led the Synod in its 1927 convention to this happy conclusion. "The Synod authorizes the establishment of an Academy in the Dakota-Montana District." <sup>33</sup> It also passed this resolution.

"The academy to be established in the Dakota-Montana District is to be a synodical institution supported and supervised by the Synod in every respect." <sup>34</sup>

Mobridge, South Dakota was the site chosen for Northwestern Lutheran Academy, and on Sept. 5, 1928, the doors were opened to 24 students and one professor, K.G. Sievert. The primary purpose of NLA was to provide a general Christian education on a high school level. This helped fill a wide gap of no Christian education in the District. Secondarily, it was to be a "feeder" to our synodical colleges.

The subsequent history of NLA can be found in several synod history books and in papers written by Prof. K.G. Sievert, Pastor E.R. Gamm, Mark Wilde ('83) and John Schroeder ('86).



It is well-known to some that on August 1, 1979, the Wisconsin Synod closed Northwestern Lutheran Academy in the face of debts, high interest rates, the opening of a new preparatory school in Prairie duChien, Wisconsin, and a re-evaluation of NLA's primary purpose. When it was decided in the 1970's that NLA was to be primarily a "feeder" school to the New Ulm and Watertown colleges, it was also decided that the high cost of operating the school compared to the number of graduates that matriculated at our colleges was not justifiable. Thus the District lost its bright shining star of Christian education.

#### Through The Years - The Actual Record

Up to this point, much of the material in this short history has been background information preparing the reader for this next section. We now know how the Dakota-Montana District was started, the problems it faced in the area of Christian education, and how it attempted to solve those problems with Northwestern Lutheran Academy. But now key questions must be asked. How many Christian day schools has the District had? When were they in existence? And where were these schools located? I will not include complete or even partial histories of the individual day schools of the Dakota-Montana District, but I can envision adding this information in a series of appendices at a later date if resources should become available.

The following section of this paper, Compilation A, will be somewhat statistical in nature, charting the course of

Christian day schools in the Dakota-Montana District year by year as far as records allow. The resources in the library at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are incomplete. The second half of this section, Compilation B, will supply the records from the District Conventions through the years in as much as they commented on Christian education. Again my resources were somewhat incomplete. I would recommend reading Compilation A and B at the same time if possible for an interesting view of what happened.

#### Compilation A

- pre-1920 - Only Watertown, South Dakota had a parochial school at this time. It was closed for reasons cited on page 7. This area was still part of the Minnesota Synod. 1920-Dakota-Montana District org.
- 1921 - Elgin, ND operates a school for 2 years with one woman.
- 1922 - Records show 12 pastors with 12 schools. These were not "Gemeindeschule," but were confirmation or German schools.
- 1924 - Records show a large increase in education. There were 24 pastors with 43 schools, but no day schools.
- 1927 - 7 years after the District was organized. 13 partial schools. 32 pastors with 39 congregations. 2,461 communicants and 6,480 souls.
- 1928 - 1933 Records not available. NLA opened in 1928.
- 1934 - Bowdle, SD has a school with 44 students under Pastor P.G. Albrecht. It is the only one.  
41 pastors  
72 congregations  
4970 communicants  
9653 souls
- 1936 - Bowdle, SD is still the only one with a school. 36 students are enrolled. State certification becomes a problem. Cf. pages 10-11. The school closes within a year.

- 1936 - continued:  
     39 pastors  
     76 congregations  
     4,877 communicants  
     8,971 souls
- 1938 - No schools.  
     39 pastors  
     73 congregations  
     5,021 communicants  
     8,959 souls
- 1940 - No schools.  
     40 pastors  
     72 congregations  
     5,789 communicants  
     10,276 souls
- 1942 - No schools.  
     43 pastors  
     73 congregations  
     5,586 communicants  
     9,524 souls
- 1944 - No schools.  
     46 pastors  
     73 congregations  
     6,336 communicants  
     10,052 souls
- 1946 - At last! Akaska, SD has a school with 15 students under Pastor Gehrke. He taught all grades.  
     35 pastors  
     76 congregations  
     6,632 communicants  
     10,527 souls
- 1948 - Akaska, SD and Jamestown, ND have schools. Each have one lady teacher. Jamestown started its school in the fall of 1947. Other records are not available.
- 1949 - A third school! Zion of Mobridge, SD had 34 pupils and one male teacher. A lady teacher was added the next year.
- 1950 - 4 congregations have schools! Akaska, Mobridge, Jamestown, and Morrystown, SD, with a grand total of 88 pupils. All schools are in the Western Conference.  
     40 pastors  
     73 congregations  
     7,041 communicants  
     10,887 souls

- 1952 - Same 4 schools with 118 students.  
 39 pastors  
 71 congregations  
 7,080 communicants  
 10,889 souls
- 1956 - Same 4 schools.  
 39 pastors  
 68 congregations  
 7,776 communicants  
 11,857 souls
- 1957 - Same 4 schools with 136 pupils.  
 36 pastors  
 69 congregations  
 6,574 communicants  
 12,105 souls
- 1959 - The Jamestown school was lost when the congregation left the District and the Synod to join the Church of the Lutheran Confession. However, both Mandan, ND, and St. Martin's of Watertown, SD opened new schools. Mandan may have been just a kindergarten because the North Dakota school system does not have this grade level. You may recall that St. Martin's had a school in the 1910's.  
 34 pastors  
 68 congregations  
 7,256 communicants  
 11,191 souls
- 1960 - 5 schools in the District at Akaska, Mandan, Mobridge, Morrystown, and Watertown.  
 35 pastors  
 69 congregations  
 7,246 communicants  
 11,248 souls
- 1961 - Same 5 schools.  
 34 pastors  
 69 congregations  
 7,333 communicants  
 11,609 souls
- 1962 - Same 5 schools.  
 35 pastors  
 69 congregations  
 7,402 communicants  
 11,466 souls

- 1964 - Akaska had to close its school for enrollment reasons.  
Then there were 4.  
36 pastors  
70 congregations  
7,627 communicants  
11,763 souls
- 1965 - Bismarck, ND opened a kindergarten. Back to 5 at  
Bismarck and Mandan, ND and Mobridge, Morrystown,  
and Watertown, SD.  
33 pastors  
74 congregations  
7,658 communicants  
11,664 souls
- 1966 - Morrystown closed its school for the same reasons  
as Akaska. Back down to 4 with only 2 complete  
schools.  
34 pastors  
74 congregations  
7,714 communicants  
11,609 souls
- 1967 - 4 schools in the District.  
33 pastors  
70 congregations  
7,548 communicants  
11,404 souls
- 1969 - By now, Bismarck and Mandan had discontinued their  
kindergartens, but Billings, Montana started a  
day school. Now there were three schools at  
Billings, Mobridge, and Watertown.  
39 pastors  
72 congregations  
7,843 communicants  
11,353 souls
- 1970 - The new decade saw the opening of a school in  
Rapid City, SD. Up to 4 full schools again.  
40 pastors  
72 congregations  
8,061 communicants  
11,375 souls
- 1971 - Same 4 schools.  
38 pastors  
72 congregations  
8,079 communicants  
11,161 souls

- 1972 - Same 4 schools at Billings, MT, and Mobridge, Rapid City, and Watertown, SD.  
 39 pastors  
 72 congregations  
 8,119 communicants  
 11,264 souls
- 1974 - Same 4 schools.  
 40 pastors  
 74 congregations  
 8,425 communicants  
 11,400 souls
- 1975 - Same 4 schools.  
 40 pastors  
 73 congregations  
 8,528 communicants  
 11,605 souls
- 1976 - Same 4 schools.  
 41 pastors  
 72 congregations  
 8,775 communicants  
 11,790 souls
- 1977 - Sioux Falls, SD opened a day school. Now there were 5 schools in the District.  
 42 pasors  
 72 congregaions  
 8,921 communicants  
 11,956 souls
- 1979 - Aberdeen, SD also opened a school. There were schools at Aberdeen, Billings, Mobridge, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, and Watertown. The District had reached an all-time high. NLA was closed on Aug. 1.  
 42 pastors  
 74 congregations  
 9,021 communicants  
 12,033 souls
- 1980 - Same 6 schools.  
 45 pastors  
 74 congregations  
 9,068 communicants  
 12,025 souls
- 1981 - Same 6 schools  
 45 pastors  
 74 congregations  
 9,014 communicants  
 12,082 souls

- 1982 - Same 6 schools.  
           47 pastors  
           75 congregations  
           9,080 communicants  
           12,135 souls
- 1983 - Same 6 schools.  
           48 pastors  
           74 congregations  
           9,103 communicants  
           12,229 souls
- 1984 - Same 6 schools.  
           49 pastors  
           74 congregations  
           9,093 communicants  
           12,214 souls
- 1985 - Same 6 schools at Aberdeen, Billings, Mobridge,  
           Rapid City, Sioux Falls, and Watertown with  
           a combined total of 325 students.  
           51 pastors  
           74 congregations  
           9,113 communicants  
           12,188 souls

Summary of Compilation A and B:

Some of the key things to notice are the gradual increase in the number of pastors and in membership even though the number of congregations has stayed about the same since 1934. It is also encouraging to see the relative stability of the schools in recent years. One reason for this is that they are located in some of the largest cities and towns of the District. Compilation B shows that the District is not giving up the battle for more Christian education, but continually works to forge ahead. One key happening was the formation of the Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. I will fill in some information on the organization in the next section.

Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc.

Shortly after Northwestern Lutheran Academy was closed, certain members of the District met in mid-September of 1979 to see what interest existed in establishing an area Lutheran high school. A steering committee was set up to direct the efforts of this group. On Dec. 1, 1979 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Aberdeen, SD, Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, Inc. was organized and bylaws were adopted. There were 39 individual members at that first meeting.

The efforts of DMLHS have been directed to the finding of more support among the District's congregations for a high school. Secondly, they are searching for possible cities and facilities in which to locate a school.

Through its Board of Directors, DMLHS has done much work. The Board has toured several sites in and near Watertown, SD and Gary, SD. None of these facilities were found suitable or later became unavailable. The Board also explored the possibility of schools in either Mobridge (the former NLA campus); Watertown or Aberdeen. In order to build up support, in November 1984, "the board extended a limited call for Promoter of Christian education to Mr. Neil Scriver of Rapid City, SD. Mr. Scriver accepted the call and in January 1985 began extensive traveling and talking to pastors, teachers, and laymen both in and around the Dakota-Montana District." 35  
In March 1985, "the DMLHS board recommended two options to the May annual meeting. 1) That our high school be opened for classes in the fall of 1986 utilizing leased school facilities



(such as modular classroom units) in Aberdeen at an undetermined site. 2) That we support our neighboring Lutheran high schools while DMLHS is materializing." 36

Thus the future of Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School is pending on developments occurring in this year. It is certainly an up-hill battle.

For example, since it had the largest congregation and day school in the District, the congregation of St. Martin's in Watertown, SD was looked to as a possible catalyst for DMLHS. When large amounts of support were not forthcoming from the congregation as a whole, some criticisms began to circulate. The congregation defended its position in a letter to Roger Frey, President of DMLHS, Inc. I have attached the letter in full at the end of this history. The congregation demonstrated its role as a true supporter of Christian education in the District, but it also showed that it could not conscientiously give too large a commitment to the high school. To do so would jeopardize the operation of its own church and school.

There seems to be two ideas circulating among the District's members. One is "Let's start now. No cost is too high." The other is "Let's wait and build more support before we start." There is one common agreement- the Dakota-Montana District needs more day schools, and it would be very beneficial to have a high school. May the Lord direct these people to wise decisions.

"Compilation B"

**Die Angebote.**

"Compilation B"

Die Synode begann sogleich nach Eröffnung, die verschiedenen Städte zu hören und zu prüfen.

**The Offer of Bowdle, S. D.**

1. To the Honorable Synodical District, of Wisconsin Synod.

Gentlemen:

We offer as an inducement to locate your college at the City of Bowdle, S. D., the following: to wit. A 30 acre site adjoining the city of Bowdle on the West side and worth conservatively .....\$5,000.00  
 A cash donation of ..... 3,000.00  
 Total .....\$8,000.00

Respectfully submitted by

A. C. Schoeneder, Secretary. H. C. Gross, President.

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2. To the Honorable District Board, of the Wisconsin Synod.

Gentlemen:

In behalf of the City of Bowdle, So. Dak., I am authorized to make the following offer as an inducement to locate your proposed school at Bowdle, as follows:

Free water for a period of 5 years, and free sewage connections to which no further charge will be connected at any time. This offer is a matter of record and duly voted upon at one of the meetings of the city council.

Respectfully submitted,

(?) Kundert, Mayor.

3. The Bowdle parish makes the following inducement to locate the proposed academy at Bowdle. \$5,000.00 in cash as soon as it is needed and a furnished schoolroom, 28x50.

P. G. Albrecht.

P. S. The Bowdle schoolboard offers the use of its high-school gymnasium for a period of two years.

P. G. Albrecht.

**The Offer from Elgin.**

I, A. P. Rausch, hereby certify that I am the duly elected secretary and treasurer of the Elgin Commercial Club and that the following is a true copy of an extract of the minutes of the annual meeting of the Elgin Commercial Club, held at Wick's Hotel on January 4th, 1928. The extract is as follows:

"A motion was made by Em. Dittus and seconded by Fred Reinke to donate 40 acres of land, free light and water for a period of five years, and \$10,000.00. The motion carried unanimously."

A. P. Rausch,  
 Secretary and Treasurer.

Elgin, N. Dak., January 9, 1928.

**The Mobridge Offer.**

1. To Dakota-Montana District of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States.

Gentlemen:

It has been called to our attention that Mobridge is being considered by your district as a possible location for the proposed academy.

The Board Members of the Mobridge Independent School District, Mobridge, So. Dak., assembled at a regular meeting made and adopted a resolution to present further inducements to those that have already been offered by the Mobridge Commercial Club and your Local Congregation.

This resolution is as follows: "Be it resolved that the Mobridge Independent School District, Mobridge, So. Dak., in view of the fact that a new school house is being erected which is known as the West Side School, and is to be completed on or before August 15, 1928, that the old school house, known as the West Side School, be turned over to the Dakota-Montana District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, to be used for school purposes, by them.

That the building is to remain on its present site and is to be used by you during the school term of 1928 at a rental of the fire and tornado insurance, which we guarantee will not exceed \$60.00." Upon roll call the above motion was unanimously adopted.

Mobridge Independent School District.

By G. H. Twining, President.

(Seal) Attest: H. J. Kindred, Clerk.

2. Dakota-Montana District of the  
Ev. Luth. Joint Synod  
of Wisconsin and Other States.

Gentlemen:

It has been called to our attention that Mobridge is to be considered as a possible location for the proposed Academy. The Mobridge Commercial Club at their annual meeting, adopted a resolution to present further inducements to those already offered by the Mobridge School Board and your local congregation. This resolution is as follows:

"Be it resolved that the Mobridge Commercial Club pledge a sum of money to the Dakota-Montana District of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, sufficient to purchase a site for the proposed Academy of no less than twenty acres within the city limits of Mobridge, or adjacent thereto, on condition that such Academy be permanently located at Mobridge."

The above resolution was unanimously adopted.

Julius Skaug, President.

Attest: Carl Hildebrandt, Secretary.

3. Dakota-Montana District  
Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin  
and Other States.

Gentlemen:

At the annual meeting of Zion Ev. Luth. Congregation the following resolution was passed: "We pledge and obligate ourselves to purchase what is known as the West Side Frame School Building and to remove it upon the site selected for our proposed Academy and to place it upon a permanent foundation and basement without extra expense to Synod.

Rev. E. R. Gamm, Pastor.

Trustees: Emil Buxe.  
Jacob Klein.  
Gust. Montlege.

**The Roscoe Offer.**

1. Rev. J. P. Scherf,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dear Sir:

I wish to inform you that Roscoe has more money in the Treasury than she owes. That the consolidated taxes are only 22 mills, being the only city on the Milwaukee through line west of Aberdeen out of debt. While we have no sewage system, as yet, we are ready to put one in when occasion demands it, and when the Lutheran College is located at Roscoe the work will begin as soon as it can be done legally.

Paul F. Elford,  
Mayor of Roscoe.

2. Rev. J. P. Scherf,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dear Sir:

Touching the location of Lutheran College at Roscoe will say that there is no doubt but what the college can have the free use of the old school house for college purposes, and in time we think the building will be donated outright, but this takes time to do this work legally. This country is unitedly for the College at Roscoe, and will do everything possible.

Eugene Licht,  
Chairman of the Roscoe Independent  
School District.

3. Subscription List for the Purpose of locating Lutheran College at Roscoe, So. Dak., under date of August 14, 1927.

We, the undersigned, hereby promise to pay the sums set opposite our names for the location of Lutheran College at Roscoe, So. Dak., paying first 20% inside of one year or sooner; 20% inside of two years; 20% inside of three years; 20% inside of four years; and the balance inside of five years.

Names: Here followed a list of 69 names, subscribing \$31,450.00 inclusive of a tract of land, valued at \$3,000.00.

Nachdem diese Offerten hin und her besprochen worden waren, schritt man zur Abstimmung. Die Wahl ergab folgendes Resultat: Aus 64 Stimmen erhielt Wobridge 51, Roscoe 7, Bomble 4 und Elgin 2 Stimmen. Wobridge ist also der permanente Ort für unsere Akademie.

8. SCHOOL MEMORIAL

To the District Synod of the Dakota-Montana District, in convention assembled at Elkton, So. Dak., June 20 to 25, 1934.

Brethren,

The undersigned herewith petition the District Synod to adopt the following resolution in the interest of the furtherance of the cause of Christian day schools in our midst.

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Whereas, Christian day-schools are of supreme value and importance in the proper training of our children, and are acknowledged to be one of the most fruitful means of furthering mission-work and congregational growth, and

Whereas, under the circumstances prevalent in our district for many years past, it is well-nigh impossible for many pastors and congregations to undertake the founding of such schools upon their own resources, even where outward conditions, apart from financial considerations, would warrant such an undertaking, and

Whereas the practice of supporting financially the opening and conducting of parochial schools with Synodical funds is common in other districts of Synod, and

Whereas, in a resolution adopted by Joint Synod in 1925, such practice is urged and encouraged,

Be it therefore resolved,

That the district herewith direct its Mission Board to include in its next budgetary estimate an allowance of one thousand dollars, as a fund from which monies are to be available upon application, after due investigation of the conditions and accompanied by the recommendation of the District School Board, to any pastor or congregation desiring to organize such a parochial school, and further,

That the District School Board be given an authoritative voice in the considerations and decisions of the District Mission Board respecting the grant of such funds, as well as in any other matters involving parochial schools in our district; and further,

That the district shall, now and in future, in choosing, proposing, or electing men to the office of the School Board, regard the duties of such Board to be as outlined in this resolution, and in the plan for school visitation adopted at the last meeting of Joint Synod, and shall seek to elect men for this purpose with a view toward their qualifications for the office so defined.

Respectfully submitted,

PAUL G. ALBRECHT.

E. SCHALLER.

E. R. GAMM.

\* \* \* \*

## 1940 District Proceedings:

### G. Schools:

#### 1. Northwestern Lutheran Academy.

Prof Fenske assumed his duties as professor and director of our Academy with the beginning of the new school year September, 1939.

H. Meyer and I. Frey served the institution as tutors during the school year 1939-1940.

The General Synodical Committee which met in Milwaukee, Wis., May 20-24, 1940, has authorized the Board of Directors of the Northwestern Lutheran Academy, according to the instructions of the Synod (Proceedings of 1939, page 44) to call a professor in place of one of the tutors.

With the beginning of the new school year in September, 1940, we hope that our faculty will consist of three professors and one tutor.

#### 2. Although we have summer schools, Saturday schools and regular confirmation instruction, we have no parochial school in the entire district. When our forefathers began the work of the Synod ninety years ago they realized that the best way to carry out the Godgiven commission to bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to feed His lambs would be in well established and maintained parochial schools. After ninety years that is still the best way to carry out this commission. May that fact and the many blessings that God has bestowed upon the Synod through the parochial school be an encouragement to all of us to work towards that goal with renewed interest and zeal. To keep that goal before us it may be well to give heed to the suggestion to meet in smaller circles from time to time and discuss the problems that confront us and at the same time awaken a desire for such instruction and a correct understanding of it.

## 1944 District Proceedings:

### H. Schools:

1. Although we must admit that we are still a District without parochial schools, the trend towards starting and opening schools seems to be growing. May the fond hope soon be realized.
2. We are indeed grateful to God for the many blessings showered on our Academy. Let us show our appreciation and support it always to the best of our ability.

## 1948 District Proceedings:

### 7. Christian Education

It is with genuine joy and deep gratitude to God that we report the opening of two Christian day schools in our District within the past two years.

Zion of Akaska opened its school in the fall of 1946. The first year Pastor Gehrke carried the full teaching load in addition to his pastoral duties. The past year Miss Ella Rabenberg, a graduate of our academy, was in charge.

Our Savior's of Jamestown, North Dakota, called its school into being in the fall of 1947. Miss Lorna Gerlach, a graduate of the normal department of Dr. Martin Luther College at New Ulm, Minnesota, is the teacher.

May God richly bless these two nurseries of Christian knowledge.

It is our fervent prayer that other congregations of our District may soon follow the example of Zion of Akaska and Our Savior's of Jamestown.

We need to make greater efforts for the thorough Christian training of our children. The importance of a Christian school can hardly be overemphasized.

May I be permitted at this point to make a suggestion for the improvement and intensification of religious instruction of the young, particularly in congregations which have no Christian day schools. I believe that we might well make it the duty of our School Committee or Board of Education to concern itself with all phases of the Christian training of our young people, from Sunday School through adult Bible class. Let us not forget that we as a District are responsible for sound doctrine and practice in all our congregations.

Our academy at Mobridge is enjoying an unprecedented increase in enrollment, the number of students during the past two years being the largest in the institution's history. We thank God for this increased interest in Christian education.

A fourth instructor was added to the faculty in the person of Prof. Armin Schuetze.

Funds, amounting to more than \$100,000.00, were made available by the Synod for the construction of a much-needed girls' dormitory. Building operations are to begin shortly.

Let us lose no opportunity to win students for our academy. Our young people need the kind of education which

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our academy offers. Our Synod needs more young people who are willing to enter the service of the church as pastors and teachers.

## 1950 District Proceedings:

### New Schools

We are deeply grateful to almighty God for the opening of a third Christian day school in our District. Zion of Mobridge opened its school in the fall of 1949 with thirty-four pupils. Mr. Robert Scharlemann taught the school the past year. Miss Renata Pape, a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, has accepted the call to serve in this school in the future. May our gracious Savior hold His protecting hand over this new school and preserve it against all the assaults of the evil one.

Christ of Morrystown, South Dakota, resolved to open a school this fall. We pray that the Lord may send a teacher in due time and bless this school for the spiritual enrichment of His lambs.

### BOARD OF EDUCATION

1. Three Christian Day Schools were conducted during the past year; in the congregations at Akaska, at Jamestown, and at Mobridge.
2. The Board sent letters of encouragement to these congregations through their pastors and to others to whom it deemed it advisable.
3. The usual visitation of these schools was made and the work was found satisfactory.
4. For the next year teachers have been provided for the three established schools.

We hope that Christ's Congregation at Morrystown will obtain a teacher, so that it can carry out its resolution to open a Christian Day School in fall.

At present we are hopeful that graduates from Dr. Martin Luther College will be granted a South Dakota State certificate on the basis of their diploma.



1952 District Proceedings - President P. Albrecht's Report:

In the field of Christian elementary education we have made a good beginning. We now have in our District four Christian day schools in which children, throughout the school year, sit daily at the feet of Christian teachers whose prime concern is to teach them eternal wisdom, to love and know the Savior who has redeemed them with His own blood. The Lord is pleased with what is being done but wants us to do more. Let us therefore go forward resolutely. We must establish more Christian schools; otherwise we will lose those which the Lord has given us. A few coals lying alone do not burn well.

We have made a beginning in giving our children a Christian high school education. We admit with deep humility that we have made only a beginning. The Lord has placed a fine Christian high school into our very midst.

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While its physical facilities have been very humble in the past, the One Thing Needful was always there. That made our academy more desirable than the most elaborately equipped high school in the state. For the coming year we look forward to a physical plant which will be more than adequate in every respect. As a school it is far superior to any other high school in our four states, because Christ, our blessed and exalted Savior, dwells within its hallowed walls and stands in the very center of everything that is taught. An ever increasing number of our people appreciate the blessings of a Christian high school education for their sons and daughters. The number of students at our academy has been growing from year to year. But there should be many more. There is no reason why our academy should not be filled to overflowing. It is the Lord's will that we abound more and more. We must interest more boys and girls in the kind of education which our academy offers. We render our boys and girls a real service when we urge them to attend our academy during their high school years.

### BOARD OF EDUCATION

Realizing the importance of the Christian education and training of the children and the need for encouraging one another in this necessary work, your District Board of Education presents the following report:

1. A Christian Day School was opened in Christ Congregation at Morristown in the fall of 1950.

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2. Another class and a second teacher were added in Zion's School at Mobridge in September, 1951.
3. Our Savior's Lutheran School at Jamestown replaced its lady teacher with a male teacher who has been called permanently. Every spring a Kindergarten class is conducted for six weeks. The past year there were nine in the class.
4. The total enrollment of the four schools of our District during the past school year was 117, an increase of 29 —  
Akaska 21, an increase of 4; Mobridge 48, an increase of 12; Jamestown 38, an increase of 10; Morristown 10, an increase of 3.
5. During the biennium the teachers of our District had their annual District Conference in spring. Since the Conference numbers only five teachers at present, it was attended also by the pastors of the congregations which have schools, the District President, and members of the Board. The teachers of our District also attended the Nebraska Teachers' Conference in fall.
6. The results of standardized Achievement Tests given in all the day schools of Synod showed a high degree of attainment on the part of our schools.
7. Two years ago we expressed the hope that the graduates of our Teachers' College at New Ulm, Minnesota, would receive South Dakota State Certificates without having to attend a South Dakota teachers' college. They are receiving such certificates, permitting them to teach in any grade school in the state.
8. A number of other congregations in the District are definitely working toward the establishment of Christian Day Schools. We wish them the Lord's guidance and blessing in this important endeavor; we also urge other congregations in the District to work toward that goal and encourage all pastors and congregations to use every available means in the congregation for the Christian training and indoctrination of the children.

## 1958 District Proceedings - Pres. P. Albrecht's Report:

The cause of Christian education on both the elementary and secondary level is making commendable progress. Another school, Bethlehem of Watertown, S. Dak., has been added to our roster. The number of people who truly appreciate the blessed work which our Christian day schools as well as our academy are doing is increasing from year to year. This is a sign of spiritual health. May God give us more Christians schools and more parents who recognize and appreciate the fact that our schools are training our young people well for this life and that which is to come.

## 1978 District Proceedings - Pres. A.P.C. Kell's Report:

### DISTRICT BOARD FOR PARISH EDUCATION

Ten years ago there were two; then there were four, now there are six Christian day schools in our district. The reason for this is two-fold. First, faithful pastors proclaimed the Word encouraging faithful Christians to feed God's lambs in the most efficient manner available. Second, God blessed His Word upon the hearts of His faithful Christians and moved them to provide a Christian day school for their children. The latest school to open, number six, is at Trinity, Aberdeen. It will be under the supervision of Mr. Rolland Menk. It will begin classes in 1978.

Our statistics are the following:  
St. Martin's Lutheran School, Watertown, SD, enrolled 135 - 75% of eligible children.  
Zion, Moberge, SD, enrolled 55 - 73% of eligible children.  
St. Paul's, Rapid City, SD, enrolled 24 - 27% of eligible children.  
Apostles, Billings, MT, enrolled 13 - 31% of eligible children.  
Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, SD, enrolled 30 - 43% of eligible children.

We hope and pray that all of our pastors are continuing to spread the Word in behalf of Christian education in our congregations so that the blessings of a Christian day school may come to more of our children. The Dakota-Montana District is still on the bottom of the list in regard to the number of schools.

Pastor Fischer is revamping the Sunday School curriculum and wants district in-put. He has scheduled two meetings for October 14 & 15. He has arranged to meet at Moberge on October 14 and at Grover on October 15.

The department of teacher certification of the state of South Dakota is creating problems for Dr. Martin Luther College graduates. Those assigned to South Dakota are attending Northern State College at Aberdeen, and they are taking six graduate hours this summer. For this they will receive only a one-year limited certificate.

In 1928 the Synod opened Northwestern Lutheran Academy at Moberge as an institution in which the youth of the District might receive a Christian education on the high school level, for it had long since become apparent that because of the small congregations and the great distances between them and because of other peculiarities of the Dakota-Montana District, Christian education on the elementary level in so-called Christian day schools would be the exception rather than the rule for many years to come. Other blessings were expected to flow from the faithful use of this school by the members of the District, but this was the reason that prevailed. The Academy was opened amid great rejoicing of the members of the District. Giving thanks always for all things.....

Then the great depression came. The Synod was forced to cut its budget radically. Some mission fields had to be abandoned. The salaries of all workers were cut repeatedly. The number of students in our educational institutions decreased. All this affected the newly-founded school here at Moberge, too. By the year 1939, when the General Synod met at Watertown, Wisconsin, there was an organized attempt to close NLA and save the rest of the synodical schools. When the debate was going more and more in that direction, the General President took the floor and single-handedly, but successfully, defended the existence of Northwestern Lutheran Academy and passionately pleaded for its continued support by the Synod, using as his theme the words of the Savior in Matthew 11:5, "the poor have the gospel preached to them." In the vote which followed the debate, the Synod upheld its President and granted the pleas of the Dakota-Montana delegates and of the representatives of the Academy to continue the operation of the school. Giving thanks always for all things...

Another setback came about twenty years later. While the school continued to grow gradually, there was little organized support for it from within the District. Apparently the members of the District had come to think of the Academy as a synodical school in the sense that the Synod would always support it and that the members of the District had done all they could be expected to do when they supported the annual drives for donations of food and by helping defray expenses for special needs not covered by the budget. Then came the 1959 withdrawal from the Synod of a number of pastors and congregations of the District. This withdrawal affected the NLA student body, too. The 1960 enrollment dwindled to 85. The question as to what the future might hold in store for our school was quite often discussed privately in those days. Would it remain a synodical institution? And if not, it seemed quite clear to many members of the District that we would never be able to operate the school alone. But again, the worst fears never materialized. With a new administration taking over in more opportune times, there were new and different emphases for the future. The student body has been growing again since the early sixties, gradually at first, at a faster pace the last years. At the synodical convention at New Ulm last year the enrollment was announced as standing at 138 with several

#### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

more expected to make an appearance. Due to unforeseen circumstances in the lives of future students, some of them were forced to withdraw their applications, and 131 appeared instead. But even this figure represents an all-time high!

In the meantime, a plan for the organized support of the general education feature of the school is being worked out by the Commission on Higher Education and the Synod on the one hand, and by the administration of the Academy and the District on the other. For the first time in its history the members of the District are given an opportunity to show more than a passive interest in the weal and woe of their school. Special collections sent in during the course of this last school year loudly testify to the active interest of the members of many congregations of this District in the Moberge academy. At last the real and deep interest of the people in their school has been awakened. Giving thanks always for all things.....

Nor have the experiences here described been the only ups and downs in the history of the Dakota-Montana District. Our pastors no longer accept only assignments to this District. The Holy Spirit has moved them to remain here and work ardently in one field or another, accepting calls to move within the District, and a number of them declining many calls to congregations outside the boundaries of Dakota-Montana. That, too, we confess is due to the undeserved and unmerited grace of our God, certainly not to us and our own wisdom. As a Synod we have experienced that grace of God for 125 years; as a District we have known it ever since our humble beginnings. And so let me plead with you, let us join in the great thankoffering, acknowledging ever anew God's undeserved grace, giving thanks always for all things....unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be WORKERS TOGETHER WITH HIM.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

1980 District  
Proceedings -  
Pres. Kell's  
Report:

The last biennium has brought some bitter 1979 disappointments to the members of the Dakota-Montana District in that the Synod found it necessary on August 1, to close our beloved school, Northwestern Lutheran Academy, because of a lack of a broad enough support to warrant its continuance in the face of the inflationary pressures under which we all suffer. Our district is sixty years old in 1980. The school had been in existence for fifty-one years.

The closing of the Academy was not all that abrupt. All you have to do is to look at the 1978 Proceedings and you will remember that its approaching end was feared even then, and efforts of every description were made at that time to prevent the implementation of the plans. A recruitment committee was put to work. A finance committee addressed itself to the members of the congregations of the district in an effort to raise substantial sums of money to help convince the Synod to keep the school in operation. But it was a case of too little and too late. Not that the school was not appreciated and used consistently by a certain section of the membership of the district. But the base did not prove to be broad enough to justify the continuance of its operation when comparing its performance with that of our other worker training institutions. To be sure there were reasons for this, such as the economic depression which plagued the Dakotas in their early history, the lack of feeder schools, the unusual degree of self-interest on the part of our people in their own local school systems in the many hamlets and small inland towns of the district. The quick change in pastorates in the district no doubt contributed to the condition, too. Many of the pastors in the course of the years were not at their posts long enough really to become acclimated themselves, much less to train their members in the Gospel appreciation and the educational system of the Synod. What could one expect of the people?

Now all this was and is in the process of changing. Scientific farming methods and procedures have raised the standard of living of our people. Some of the country congregations have relocated to the larger cities. New missions have been planted in other cities where there is a future for them. Many of the small-town schools have been consolidated. Christian day schools are being started in even greater numbers. The average pastorate in the congregations of the district is being extended. Not only do pastors stay longer in the field, they even accept calls back into the Dakota from other districts. All this is a development in the right direction so far as the future of our school was concerned, but apparently it was too late.

Also the attitude of many of our people who used to be non-committal toward a secondary Christian school in the district has visibly changed. But so far as Northwestern Lutheran Academy was concerned, it was too late. The Academy was closed as of August 1, 1979.

And since that time a certain spirit of gloom has become noticeable in the district. Some members are not participating the synodical committee meetings any longer. Here and there one gets the impression that the Gospel has been taken from us. But isn't that a rather human reaction? Is it all that bad? If you think it is, what do you think the apostle means when he says, "All things work together for good to them who love God?" Does he not mean to say that all things, even those which are highly disagreeable to us, under God will turn out to be the greatest blessing we may have experienced? And is that Scripture principle not applicable here too? We certainly must realize that the Lord of the Church has permitted our school to be closed. What is stopping us from praying and looking for those blessings He has promised? As a matter of fact, there is evidence for us to believe now that we are

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

on the way to receive those blessings that will be ours if we but believe the promises of God.

As a first step in that direction, an area high school committee has been organized and has been hard at work for about a year. Our failings in the past have been noted. They have been debated and vows have been taken not to repeat them in the future. The cause of Christian education as against the present humanistic training of our youth in our public school system is being highlighted on many an occasion. The fact is also being emphasized that this cause is worth sacrificing for. We don't know exactly when this regional Lutheran high school will be started or where in the district it will be located. But we do know that here lie the blessings which the Word of God promises. We know it is not too late for we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Trusting in God's promises, we are confident that what looked like a great calamity to us only two years ago may well under God turn out to be one of the greatest blessings the Dakota-Montana District has yet experienced. May God grant it.

The Future Of Christian Education In The  
Dakota-Montana District

My short history of Christian education in the Dakota-Montana District is basically complete, but I have one question I'd like to speculate on before I close this paper. What does the future hold for this District in the realm of education? Is it going to grow or will it slowly dwindle? If it is true that the District could be doing more for its youth, and if it is true that the cause of the lack of education for youth is the local loyalty to public schools and the scarcity of children in rural congregations, then the following solution has occurred to me if the District would like to have more day schools for its youth and also a high school.

First of all, work hard to start churches and schools in the larger towns and cities. Not only will there be a larger pool of children to draw from, but also there should not be as great a pressure from the public schools to have every available child in its own classrooms.

Secondly, wait for certain towns to grow larger and/or build a more stable economy not solely based upon agriculture. Recently there has been the smell of change in the air in the Dakotas and surrounding areas. Farming and ranching have become exceptionally tough businesses to survive in with the current state of affairs and economy. This means change will probably come. Governor William Janklow of South Dakota said at the end of 1985, "In some ways, the changes are inevitable as technological improvements mean fewer and fewer people are needed to farm South Dakota's land. Economic forces

such as high interest rates and low prices for grain and livestock, speed the exodus from rural South Dakota." <sup>37</sup>

Changes are also affecting the towns. Here's what Gov. Janklow said,

The state now has three kinds of communities. Larger cities, the dynamic trade centers of the Black Hills and eastern South Dakota, are attracting new industry and building an economic base less dependent on agriculture. Many small farming towns are shrinking, losing business, and their job-hungry young people. In between are cities and towns that are at least holding their own by relying on tourism or some other non-farm industry. <sup>38</sup>

The future for growth in Christian education seems to be located in the cities. Yet the District must continue to serve the people of the rural areas because it was to these people that the District reached out first and their souls are just as precious as those of the cities.

What about Christian education for those smaller towns and churches? Surely, we will give thanks to those who find the courage and means to start schools in the sparsely settled areas. The District and the Synod should also work hard to develop education programs for churches that do not have schools. A conscious effort should be made to make the church even more of a social and spiritual center. Work hard to make the churches of Christ appealing to the youth of our era. These youth are tomorrow's leaders. Let us not drive our leaders away.

One could speculate for hours on what the future holds for the Dakota-Montana District. It is my hope that the few minutes the reader takes to view a history of the District

may lead to an appreciation of the trials and blessings the Lord has bestowed upon this area of our Synod. May the Lord fulfill many prayers and bless the Dakota-Montana District in the future.



# St. Martin's Lutheran Church

WISCONSIN EV. LUTHERAN SYNOD  
119 2nd Avenue Southeast  
P.O. Box 165  
WATERTOWN, SOUTH DAKOTA 57201

July 17, 1985

DMLHS Roger Frey, President  
Box 814  
Mobridge, SD 57201

Dear Fellow Christians, Friends of Christian Education:

In recent months a member, and a representative of the High School Association have contacted our congregation, Board of Christian Education, Church Council, and congregation chairman to inquire about our position regarding the opening of a Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School and joining the association at this time. We have answered their inquiries, but we feel, as one of the association members also indicated, that perhaps it would be well that we put our answer and feelings into writing so they might be clear.

To begin we would have it understood that, inspite of any innuendoes to the contrary, our pastor is very much in favor of Christian education on all levels, from kindergarten through college, including a Lutheran University. His activities in the Holy Ministry bear out this fact. From 1949 to the present date he has been very active on the congregation, district, and Synod levels to promote Christian education. During these years he was instrumental in school building projects in four of the congregations he served. He taught and administered a Christian day school for 8½ years in a mission congregation without remuneration of any kind. He was active on our District Board for 13 years during which 4 new Christian day schools were opened. During these years he battled the State Board on behalf of our schools and teachers. Under his leadership our school at St. Martin's now offers 10 grades of Christian Education for the boys and girls in our congregation and our area. Our pastor publicly expressed his feelings about the last three years of high school training in the article which appeared in one of the issues of the Northwestern Lutheran (after October 1979) in which the opening of our 9th grade at St. Martin's was announced.

We want to assure you that the members of St. Martin's are supportive of their ~~own~~ pastor and his enthusiasm for Christian education. Nor has their enthusiasm abated. Conditions at present are such, however, that financially we find ourselves in a very critical position. We are actually struggling to meet our current expenses. Any added obligations might jeopardize our present operation.

Furthermore, we find that, whereas the average per communicant member of Synod contributed \$4.65 for missions last year, we fell far short of this mark. We feel obligated to these fellow Christians all over Synod to share their load. Our teachers are working for less remuneration than if they would be teaching in a mission congregation. We feel obligated to them before we take on more obligations.

We are aware of the fact that there is room in our Synod schools for more students. There are empty dormitories at DMLC and MLPS. These schools offer a quality education and Christian training. Added enrollments at these schools would further increase their efficiency. We do not see the need of more institutions to be added to those which already exist in our Synod and are not being put to use.

This does not mean that our interest in secondary Christian education has been abandoned just because we have not joined your association and are not interested in opening another institution at this time. We are doing something. We have created a scholarship fund whereby we annually make funds available to our boys and girls who wish to attend our Synod schools and obtain a secondary education there. All we ask is that they keep their course of study inline that, if they so desired, they might continue on to prepare themselves for the preaching or teaching ministry. There are no strings attached to these grants. We hope they will encourage and help our youth to seek a secondary Christian education. Our 9th grade offers one year of such

training free to our members and at  $\frac{1}{2}$  tuition to sister congregations.

At the present time, with existing financial conditions being what they are, the best way to promote the cause of secondary Christian education for our boys and girls seems to be -- not by going into debt to provide another institution; -- not by strapping our budgets to provide a continuous cash flow to staff a faculty at another school. This at the expense of our local programs and at the expense of Synod's mission contributions. We feel that the best way, at this time, is to make full use of our Synod schools. Fill those dormitories. Make grants available to our boys and girls and encourage them to attend these schools. The quality of education offered in our synod schools is hard to match.

Perhpas a word of caution is in order. In stressing the opening of an institution it is very easy to overlook the real issue, that is the Principle of CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. We can see congregations in our district which have enough financial power and children to start their own Christian day schools but haven't done so. We are aware that God has provided an abundance of day school teachers. They are waiting to serve. God is waiting to bless. What are these congregations waiting for? It is through the development of a genuine love for Christian education on the elementary level that a broad base can be developed on which to build and expand into secondary education. This fact was held before the then Northwestern Lutheran Academy Board as part of the solution to gain enrollment and save the Academy. The suggestion was ignored. Not only are our members far flung, we are lacking this base. This is the source of financial and enrollment support. Work to establish this foundation on which to build.

We at St. Martin's are using the means for secondary Christian education before us now and hope the Lord may further bless our efforts in the future.

Sincerely with Christ,

St. Martin's Lutheran Congregation

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Prof. K.G. Sievert, Continuing In His Word. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1926), p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Prof. K.G. Sievert, Essay-"Preaching the Gospel On The Dakota-Montana Prairies" contained in Fifty Years of God's Blessings In The Dakota-Montana District 1920-1970. (Milbank, SD: Midland Printing, Inc., 1970), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibidem, p. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Rev. E.R. Gamm, Essay-"Our Daughter District's Golden Jubilee - 1970 Dakota-Montana District", contained in Fifty Years of God's Blessings In The Dakota-Montana District 1920-1970. (Milbank, SD: Midland Printing, Inc., 1970), p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Ibidem, p. 62.

<sup>10</sup>Ibidem, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup>Rev. D.W. Malchow, "A Restudy of Northwestern Lutheran Academy's Role In The Educational Program Of The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (unpublished project paper, 1973, p. 9)

<sup>12</sup>Verhandlung der Dritten Versammlung des Dakota-Montana-Distrikts der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin u. a. St., gehalten in der Ev.-Luth. Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde zu Elkton, S. Dak., 16-21. Juni, 1926, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1926), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Continuing In His Word. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), p. 132.

<sup>14</sup>Rev. E.R. Gamm, op. cit., p. 64

<sup>15</sup>Proceedings of the Dakota-Montana District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States Held in Elkton, S.D., June 22 to 27, 1938. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House Print, 1938), p. 34-35.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mrs. J. Brug of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Prof. K.G. Sievert, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Rev. D.W. Malchow, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Proceedings of the Dakota-Montana District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States Held in Elkton, S.D., June 20th to 25th, 1934. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1934), p. 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Proceedings of the Tenth Convention of the Dakota-Montana District of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States Held in Roscoe, S.D., June 18th to June 21st, 1940. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1940), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Prof. K.G. Sievert, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Rev. D.W. Malchow, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Rev. E.R. Gamm, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> Continuing In His Word. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 198.

<sup>26</sup> Rev. D.W. Malchow, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Continuing In His Word. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), p. 198.

<sup>28</sup> skipped number

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 199.

<sup>30</sup> Rev. E.R. Gamm, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. D.W. Malchow, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Dakota-Montana Lutheran High School, "workbook for our 1985 Annual Meeting. (pub. n.a., 1985), p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Chet Brokaw, "Economy Growing Only In Some Larger Areas" (Aberdeen, S.D.: Aberdeen American News, Dec. 30, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.

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