

"The Growing Pains of An Area Lutheran
High School in Arizona"

by

David M. Warskow

for

Professor John Brenner
Church History, 332b
May 2, 1997

OUTLINE

Introduction

I. Getting Started

II. A Grand Opening

III. School on the Move

A. Teacher Trouble

B. The Move to Madrid

C. The Move to a New School

IV. Other Problems

Conclusion

"Growing Pains of an Area Lutheran High School in Arizona"

As a person goes through life, they rarely think about their life as taking a part in history. They first go about their everyday business and just try to live their lives. When a person is asked what major things ~~that~~ have happened during their lifetime, they think about things that happened in the world. Rarely do they think about things that they did to contribute to history. The exception is if they were a part of a major event.

In my life, I can remember where I was exactly on January 28, 1986 at 10:00 A.M. That is the day that the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded during its take-off. I was a freshman in high school and I was fifteen years old on that very day. There are other days just like that in my life for other events. That is the way it is for everyone.

The reason I bring this up is because I have chosen to do this paper on something that is a part of my history. I am also a part of its history. This paper is on Arizona Lutheran Academy (A.L.A.) I will cover the major hardships that the school had to deal with from the time it was just an idea up to the present time.

THE BEGINNING

On October 14, 1971, the initial groundwork for an area Lutheran high school was begun. On that day, the articles of incorporation were signed for the Higher Education for Lutherans Program (H.E.L.P.). This foundation was designed to deal with

the cost of getting the high school started. The way that the H.E.L.P. foundation would do this is by operating a thrift store. Through the store, the H.E.L.P. foundation would develop a cash reserve of over \$250,000 to assist the new high school by the time that it opened. It also would continue to assist the high school once it was started. The H.E.L.P. foundation truly helped to overcome one of the major hurdles in getting Arizona Lutheran Academy started (Warskow).

Even though this foundation existed, the idea of an area Lutheran high school was just talk. No studies had been conducted as of October of 1971 for that purpose. It wasn't until the February meeting of the Black Canyon Delegate Conference (B.C.D.C.) of the AZ-CA district that this happened. During the conference, either Pastor William Meier of Phoenix or William Warskow, a delegate, made the motion that a committee be formed for the very purpose of studying feasibility of founding a WELS high school in Arizona. Pastor Meier was elected as the chairman of the committee (Warskow).

The committee took over two years to complete its study. During those two years they enlarged their scope from just being a high school for the Black Canyon Conference to being a state-wide high school. They also moved from the idea of the school being an association of parents to a federation of churches. This allowed for more stability and greater resources to draw from. They also conducted a survey of the parents and others to find out what kind of support base they had. After analyzing the results this is what they had recommended:

WHEREAS the Black Canyon Conference in February, 1975, authorized the formation of a committee to explore the area Lutheran high school question in the Conference; and

WHEREAS about 45% of the Conference households responded to a lengthy questionnaire drafted by the committee and mailed to every household in the Conference; and

WHEREAS there is an immediate enrollment potential of approximately 90 students per year among those responding to the questionnaire; and

WHEREAS the survey results show (see Appendix 1) that approximately the same level of interest will continue at least through 1990; and

WHEREAS approximately 200 responses to the questionnaire were received from members (who either had no children or whose children were beyond high school age) promising support in the amount of \$1,330.00 per month; and

WHEREAS the total financial support through tuition from families with children averages \$30,000.00 per year through 1990; and

WHEREAS a total annual support figure of \$48,000.00 certainly demonstrates a wide spread dedication and commitment to Christian secondary education; therefore be it

RESOLVED a. That the Black Canyon Conference move to establish an area Lutheran high school; and be it further resolved

RESOLVED b. That the Black Canyon Delegate Conference recommend that a committee (comprised of one delegate selected from each of the Conference congregation at its next Quarterly Meeting) be created to proceed with the planning and establishment of an area Lutheran high school in the Conference, working through the member congregations of the Conference.

Respectfully submitted,
L.H.S. Study Committee

MAKING IT OFFICIAL

Even though the committee recommended that the B.C.D.C. go ahead and start the school, there was some opposition to it. Those who were opposed to it used the argument that they were "testing God." They said that they would be testing God if they were to go ahead with the school. Those in favor of

the school kept saying that through their faith that God would help them, they could get the school going. They also saw A.L.A. as a ministry and not as a business, they moved ahead in faith and were not disappointed (Warskow).

Shortly after the committee presented their study, they continued with setting up the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws. Attorney Joe Worisheck wrote the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws were written by William Warskow who used examples from the existing 12 WELS area Lutheran high schools as models. On January 10, 1977, they were signed by Mr. Warskow, and Harold R Schroeder, a member of St. Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church in Phoenix. The other founding directors were Louis R. Delicath, William F. McGee, and Richard B. Miller. One year later a Board of Directors was established with Pastor William Meier as its chairman (Meier, Warskow).

THE NEW SCHOOL

With this done, a second major hardship that had to be taken care of, was complete. The new school now existed legally on paper. It had some money to get started as well as support from 23 congregations. These congregations made up the federation that would support A.L.A. both financially as well as send their ^{children} kids to attend the school. Even with this support, the school, being a reality on paper, it still needed a facility and a staff. Both of these became a reality in the fall of 1977. *Explain*

In August of 1978, the school opened its doors, in the education wing at St. Thomas Lutheran Church, to 43 students in two classes. There were 11 sophomores and 32 freshman. They

had four full-time teachers: Principal Robert Adickes, Mr. Vic Fenske, Pastor William Meier, and Mr. Al Just. Mr. Just did not arrive until Christmas time and so Pastor David Gray filled in until he arrived. There were also several part-time teachers to assist with the curriculum (Adickes).

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW LOCATION

Things went well the first couple of years. In fact, they were going so well that within two years of opening its doors, the school was too big for its facilities at St. Thomas. Fortunately, they had planned for the growth and already had plans to find a suitable location that would best serve the growing school in a neutral location in the Valley of the Sun (Adickes, Fenske).

In April of 1980, A.L.A. found an elementary school in central Phoenix that was what they needed. In the bidding for a lease, A.L.A. lost out to the Arizona Department of Public Safety. However, the Department couldn't finalize the lease with the school district. This gave A.L.A. a second chance at the school. They obtained a lease for the year at \$36,000.00, with the option to renew for the next five years. A.L.A. was given the move in date of July 1, 1980. Unfortunately, before the move was complete, the darkest event in A.L.A.'s history took place (Warskow).

MAJOR TROUBLE

On July 22, 1980, my father, Mr. William Warskow, got a phone call concerning something that had happened with one of the teachers at A.L.A. He was called because he was on the Board

of Directors. The person who called told him that Sharon Just, the wife of Mr. Al Just, was murdered the evening before in their home. The police were called in to conduct an investigation. After examining all the evidence, Mr. Just was charged with the murder of his wife. With his trial, he was found guilty of killing Sharon Just and was sent to prison as punishment.

During this time, those involved could look back and see the hand of God at work. Two Christian detectives were assigned to the case. Because they understood the delicate nature of having such a crime involving teachers at a Christian school, they did their part in not dragging A.L.A.'s name through the media circus. There was also a Mr. Rod Peterson who worked at an AM radio station. He also helped keep A.L.A.'s name out of the news. This publicity could have really hurt the new school (Adickes).

It was also during this time that the leadership of the religious leaders came through. Pastor Meier and a couple of other federation pastors helped the Board of Directors see what God's Word had to say about the situation. They had to deal with Al Just the teacher and Al Just the person. As a result of the careful study of God's Word and out of love for Mr. Just, the students and the federation, Mr. Just was given a leave of absence with pay until the trial was over. At that time they rescinded his call because he had claimed to be innocent the entire time. Another reason the Board did this is because he was having an extramarital affair with one of the students at

the time (Adickes, Warskow).

The faculty then had the job of helping the students deal with the situation. They were open with the students. They gave the students the facts without trying to be biased. The faculty used Scriptures to show the kids the reason why things were being done the way they were. They let the students know that the Scriptures were the final authority on how the situation was to be resolved. To this day, the Scriptures remain the final authority in all things at A.L.A. (Adickes).

MADRID

A.L.A.'s ^{experience?} existence on the Madrid campus was a good one. The campus more than fulfilled all of the needs of the young and growing school. Unfortunately, their time there was short. On November 14, 1985, the school district that leased the campus to A.L.A., told Mr. Adickes that their lease would not be renewed for the next year. A.L.A. would have to move by July 1 of 1986.

Three days after receiving the news, Principal Adickes addressed the General Board delegates at their meeting. He said, "Historically speaking, eight years ago when I accepted the call to begin the Academy, we had a facility. There were no students, no teachers, no equipment, not even a piece of paper. We had the St. Thomas congregational wing as a facility." Now the tables are turned according to Adickes. "We now have nearly 200 students, 12 teachers, and a lot of equipment but no facility as of this week."

A SECOND MOVE

When A.L.A. had searched for the Madrid campus, they knew

that it was a temporary fix to the long range problem. So, at the same time they did a study to find a location for a permanent facility. They had narrowed it down to a general location that was easily accessible to the East Valley as well as the North and the West Valley. They found such a place at 27th Ave. and Southern Ave. in South Phoenix. It was an 18 acre plot that was farmland. It also had a house on it. The purchase price was \$400,000 (Fenske).

A.L.A. was also faced with getting the funding to do the building. The Board of Trustees came up with the **ITS YOUR MOVE** Fund Drive. Through this, they hoped to raise \$350,000 to get the project started. They also decided to approach the members of the federation congregations and offer them bonds to pay for the remaining \$1.2 million of the project. They wanted to do this instead of going to a major lending institution. To this day, a fair share of this money is still part of A.L.A.'s capital debt (Fenske, Adickes).

On April 27, 1986, they had a ground breaking ceremony in connection with their annual Concert in the Park. Pastor Don Fastenau, the religion teacher, helped direct traffic in the dusty field that day. Even though the ground was broken in April, construction didn't start until the first week in July. This was because of a delay in getting the building permits from Maricopa County. However, occupancy for the classrooms and offices was granted in September and school started the last week of that same month. It took less than three months for the main part of the project to be completed. The gymnasium

was finished last and the entire facility was dedicated to the Lord's service on January 11, 1987. This was only fourteen months after being told to vacate the Madrid campus (Fenske). To this day, this campus serves A.L.A. as its facility and long term home.

While the new campus was being built, all of the equipment from the old campus was in storage. It was stored in four tractor trailer trucks that were moved to the property and sat there. The house that was bought with the land was used as the school office and photo lab until the new offices and classrooms could be occupied (Fenske).

OTHER TRIALS

For the most part, these are the major trials and hardships that A.L.A. has been faced with. They have also been faced with others that need to be mentioned as well. In interviewing the pastors who served A.L.A. as teachers, they all answered the question: "What was the most challenging thing you had to deal with as religious leader at A.L.A.?" Their answers were very much the same. They were faced with the challenge of dealing with the discipline and counseling of the students in the proper way according to the Word of God. That is usually true for any Christian teacher in that position.

Another challenge that A.L.A. has been and is still faced with is having enough money to operate the school as well as reduce and eliminate its capital debt. They are presently in a drive called "Challenge 2000." This is a special fund drive aimed at reducing their capital debt as much as possible by

the year 2000. Their ultimate goal is to totally eliminate that \$1.5 million debt. They also hope to meet their financial needs through increased enrollment, increased congregation support and special gifts (Adickes).

Through the years, a number of teachers have come and gone. A.L.A. has always had to deal with finding qualified teachers to replace the ones that had left. Some took calls to other places. Some resigned for health reasons. One resigned for the good of the teaching ministry. Through each one of the teachers that has come to A.L.A., the Lord blessed the school and its students. The Lord has also blessed the school with a couple of teachers who have been at A.L.A. since the beginning. A.L.A.'s first principal, Robert Adickes, is still ^{serv}ing there as a teacher. He has stepped down as principal. He has "seen a school that started with nothing and has blossomed into a spiritual blessing for the congregations in Arizona."

The one thing that has helped prosper the school is the fact that it has remained true to God and His Word. This is the one constant in the school's history that has helped them deal with and make it through all of their major and minor hurdles and hardships. The Lord has truly blessed this school and has used it to send at least five young men on to our synod's program for training pastors. This school has also sent many more young men and young women to become teachers in our synod's schools. This school has a place in the history of the WELS. To God be the Glory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(All of the information in this paper was gathered from written interviews with the people in the following list.)

Interviews:

Adickes, Robert, Principial from 1978 - 1994, Teacher from 1994 to the present.

Fastenau, Rev. Don, Teacher from 1980 - 1988.

Fenske, Vic, Teacher from 1978 to the present; Publicity Director 1978 - 1996.

Gruetzmacher, Robert, Teacher from 1979 to the present, Athletic Director 1980 - 1996.

Meier, Rev. William A., Chairman of feasibility study committee 1975 - 1977, Chairman Board of Directors 1977 - 1984, Part time Teacher 1977 - 1980.

Lange, Rev. Doug, Teacher 1987 - 1995.

Plitzuweit, Rev. James, Principal 1994 to the present.

Warskow, William, Feasibility study committee 1975 - 1977; Board of Directors: Treasurer 1977 - 1980, 1984 - 1987; Secretary 1980 - 1982; Financial Secretary 1982 - 1984; Delegate for Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church to the A.L.A. Federation Delegate Assembly; President of the H.E.L.P. Foundation; member of the A.L.A. Challenge 2000 committee.

THE SEMINARY LIBRARY
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Milwaukee, Wisconsin