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The Role of Dr. Martin Luther College in the Preparation  
of Teaching ministers for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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**in the**  
  
**PREPARATION OF TEACHING MINISTERS**  
  
**for the**  
  
**WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD**

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Dr. Martin Luther College exists to prepare qualified educators for the teaching ministry in the Christian day schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (1:11). These words express our congregations' expectations of this institution. It is a statement of mission that makes this college unique among the almost 3,000 colleges and universities in our land. Unique because it serves the Wisconsin Synod, unique because its assignment focuses solely on the education and training of elementary teachers, and unique because the means to carry out this assignment, its curriculum and campus life, are built around the proclamation of Christ in the Scriptures.

Dr. Martin Luther College is unique in yet another way. Unlike so many other midwestern, hilltop church colleges begun about a century ago, its purpose remains closely tied to its governing church body's Gospel testimony to the world.

In our consideration of the college's role in providing teaching ministers for the Synod, we will understand the present better if we mark the milestones which have led to the college's present assignment. Then, we will identify a few of the challenges which will require us to exercise quietness and trust as we step into the second century of this institution's life.

### MARKING THE MILESTONES

Events in the years 1884, 1892, 1919, 1928, and 1962 influenced in one way or another the purpose of this college. We might also consider these as years which mark the beginning of significant periods of its history.

#### 1884-1892: The Formative Period

According to original intentions, the little German-flavored college that opened its doors on November 10, 1884, was to serve a dual purpose. The Minnesota Synod, with encouragement and a vigorous push from its president, Pastor C.J. Albrecht, established this school to furnish young men with a preparatory education which would qualify them to enter a theological seminary. A general academic course was offered to those interested in a business career or any other profession. By 1887, a special normal department took shape to prepare teachers qualified for service in either parochial or public schools.

Two sermons delivered on this campus in 1884 placed a seal on the curriculum and life of the college which by God's grace remains unbroken to this day. On June 25, Professor A.L. Graebner of the Wisconsin Synod's theological seminary preached at the laying of the cornerstone for what is now Old Main. He asked, as Samuel did of Jesse in I Samuel 16:11: "Are here all thy children?" He then demonstrated what must happen if this school should continue as an abiding blessing. "Then, besides the arts and sciences, He must come and live here whom the world regards as insignificant, yet is the greatest of all, namely, Jesse's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He must be at this school; His Word must be taught from the very first day" (2:5-6).

At the dedicatory service on November 9, C.J. Albrecht preached. With Matthew 5:14-16 as his text, he also asked a question: "When will our Martin Luther College truly become a city on the hill?" His answer was twofold: 1) When the arts and sciences are properly taught in the same, and 2) when teachers and students let their light shine before all people (2:6).

#### 1892-1919: Shaping the Future

**A new affiliation.** During the formative period from 1884-1892 the college served students through its theological, classical, commercial, and normal departments. In 1892, however, the Minnesota Synod took a step that decisively shaped the future of Dr. Martin Luther

College. The Synod's friendly affiliation with the Wisconsin Synod was turned into a more definite and permanent organization, which also included the Michigan Synod (3:38).

**A definitive purpose.** As part of the structure of the new General Synod, "New Ulm" (as the college is frequently referred to by our brethren to the East) was designated as the teachers' seminary, and its preparatory school was to serve for the early education of pastors. The new board adopted a creditable statement of aims and objectives which distinctly reflects what the Synod's members expected of the college. It reads in part:

1. The aim of this institution is to educate competent teachers for the parochial schools of the General Synod . . . .
  
3. The object to be attained by this institution in the pupils entrusted to it is as follows:
  - a. Its graduates must . . . understand precisely the mission and objective of our parochial schools . . . .
  - b. They must have a thorough and clear knowledge of the doctrines of our church . . . .
  - d. Of all English branches, the study of which is obligatory in the state normal schools, they must become masters to such a degree that they are able to obtain a first class certificate for teaching elementary classes.
  - e. They must, furthermore, acquire all necessary knowledge and ability in pedagogy, general history of the world, music and drawing, so as to enable them to successfully undertake the entire control of our parochial schools . . . .
  
7. The seminary . . . is a normal school in the accepted sense of the term. Persons desiring to enter it, must speak, read and write the German and English languages, with essential correctness. They must be able to express themselves clearly and especially to narrate passably well.

"In the case of future teachers not so much depends on very extensive knowledge, but that they be useful men, able to accomplish something. Competent teachers of firm Christian characters are to be produced. (4:16-17).

**Other important trends.** The narrowing of the school's purpose to a definitive role was followed by other important trends and events between 1892 and 1919. Perhaps most significant, but without visible effect, "the Gemeindeschule" (the congregation's school) became more than a nursery for the perpetuation of the proud German's mother tongue. Men like Director (President) Schaller helped the Synod's pastors, teachers, and laymen to discern the scriptural principles on which education in the Christian day school rests. His statement of what should be expected of such a school is worth hearing especially in view of our topic. President Schaller said:

In the parochial school, children are to be educated in every direction, for life on earth not less than for life in heaven; they are not only to be brought into communion with God by faith in Jesus, but they are also to be taught how to exhibit this faith by love of their fellow men; they are not only to receive the powers of a new life, but they are also to learn how to employ these powers rightly in the service of God and of their neighbor. It is God's will that the talents which He has

given our children be developed for useful application. Therefore they must also be well trained in secular knowledge. A parochial school does not fulfill its mission unless, while developing Christian faith in its pupils, it also enables them to perform their everyday work in a Christian manner (5:20-21).

Among the more noticeable events that occurred from 1892 to 1919 are these three. First, St. Paul's congregation made its school available to the college for practice teaching, an arrangement still in effect. Next, beginning with 1896, by synodical resolution Dr. Martin Luther College was permitted to enroll women students (3:44-45). This occurred in spite of the fact that the Synod's German-trained schoolmasters maintained "teaching is not a woman's job" (6:20). But today's student body typically favors the women by a two- or three-to-one ratio. Finally, during these years an emphasis on thorough instruction in music was developed. This emphasis remains a distinguishing trait of the educational program on this campus and is reflected in its worship and social life. Incidentally, the push to give music some prominence appears to have come from the "grass roots" of the Synod.

**The historians' judgment.** The Synod's historians judge kindly the effect of the work done at the teachers' seminary. At a time when quite a few of the teachers had come from various other backgrounds and did not share synodical views on the teacher's office or on Christian education, we are told, "The graduates from New Ulm brought new blood into the ranks. A marked improvement in teaching methods and general harmony was soon noticeable" (6:20-21).

#### 1919-1928: An Era of Transition

Neither the college nor the Synod was left untouched by new challenges which presented themselves after the first great war of this century. These challenges received their due in conventions from 1919 to 1927. The 1919 Synod convention proved to be one of the most important ever for its educational institutions. At root, the decisions made gave an American flavor to the academic organization of the Synod's schools. With regard to New Ulm, a floor committee suggested that the two-year normal course be extended by one or two years "to meet the requirements of the state, and chiefly, to meet the needs of the church for well-trained teachers." The convention voted to add a third year "since this is the pattern of normal schools in Minnesota." One more synodical resolution was needed, however, before the third normal year was finally added in 1928.

Two other educational issues came before the 1919 convention. They were accreditation and need for a more central location of the teacher's seminary; for example, in Watertown or Milwaukee, Wisconsin. One proposal called for the merger of this college with Northwestern College at Watertown. Both issues generated a considerable amount of discussion. Both were set aside only to be debated over and over again in years to come, but under somewhat different circumstances and with a different set of characters.

This post-war era of transition closed in 1927 with the "Moussa Report" named for the secretary of a special committee directed "to consider the needs and requirements of Synod for its schools in the future." As for New Ulm, many of the recommendations from this farsighted report were set aside to appear again and again as agenda items in future decades, e.g., separation of the high school and college, variations in the teacher-training program for men and women, and an eventual fourth year in order to grant a valid bachelor's degree in education. The immediate effect of the "Moussa Report" was the construction, in 1928, of the building now named the Academic Center. The new building was deemed sufficient to satisfy the college's needs "for many years in the future."

#### 1928-1962: Too Little, Too Late

On this optimistic, or perhaps ominous, note Dr. Martin Luther College began a new chapter in its life. The "Moussa Report" professed that:

... Our schools in every grade can prosper only if they are manned by devoted, well-trained Christian men and women. It should be our aim to offer our students facilities to prepare themselves for their calling as thoroughly and as adequately as possible (7:28).

In the era from 1928 to 1962, the college and the Synod based their educational planning and decisions on these ideals. But these were years of economic depression, a second world war, and severe intersynodical and intrasynodical strife, none of them congenial to giving educational problems a top priority.

This is not to say that nothing was done or accomplished in this time. Much was. Above all, in the words of a past president, the college's aim always remained the same: "to serve the church of Jesus Christ in all sincerity and singleness of heart." One observer neatly packages the triumphs and the difficulties of this period with these words:

... During this interval the school, with but one change in its administration, ... expanded its program of student services, celebrated its fiftieth and seventy-fifth anniversaries, developed a full four year college, and, with limited resources, devised new ways and means to meet the double-edged problems of trying to accommodate burgeoning student attendance and burgeoning demands for teachers. Several new facilities were added, but it was often a case of too little, too late (2:27).

#### 1962-1984: Decades of Decision and Maturation

**The 1962 convention.** The overtaxed, limited facilities on this campus, perennial shortages of qualified teachers, the question of where the teachers college might best be located, and the never-ending debate over whether to seek accreditation were the issues in ferment when a special synodical convention to resolve educational problems convened in November of 1962 on this campus. Compounding the problems was what seemed to be waning confidence of the Synod's members in their teacher education institution.

These issues came before the convention in the form of another educational survey called the "Keller Report," which had been done by the University of Minnesota (8:Vols. I and II). When the business of this convention was finished, Dr. Martin Luther College found itself confronted with a monumental challenge. New buildings were authorized. The separation of the high school from the college, each under its own administration, was voted. Shortened programs of teacher education were to come under sharp surveillance. The curriculum should again receive thorough study. A bold program of recruitment was ordered. The reorganization of the administrative and academic structure was implied. The understanding prevailed that the college would complete its self-study for accreditation before the end of the school year (2:59-60).

**The Venture of Trust.** A program of such proportions begged for extraordinary action. It came in the form of a plan called Venture of Trust. It involved everyone directly connected with the school. A number of recommendations, programs, and procedures designated to strengthen the college were adopted. In less than a year with the resolution of immediate problems and with the groundwork laid for continued development of the college, the Venture of Trust passed honorably from the scene.

**A personal tribute.** These events occurred near the end of Professor Carl Schweppe's 32-year tenure as president. I should like to pay him a personal tribute for his part in these critical years. He knew changes were inevitable if the college was to continue its vital role in the Synod. But he also possessed a keen sense of the school's heritage and the Synod's welfare, a heritage and welfare that stood to be lost if rash action prevailed. With a firm but gentle hand he guided especially the typically impatient younger members of the faculty. As the master teacher he was, he helped us learn that the quietness of faith does not frown on responsible action. But he taught us also, when an enterprise is planned and carried out in the fear of God, that quietness awaits with confidence and accepts with calmness the Lord's personal blessing in whatever form it comes.

**An introduction to change and continuity.** Self-evidently, the activities that followed the watershed year of 1962 greatly transformed the internal and external landscape of the college. Many of this centennial year's seniors were born in 1962. More changes have come to this campus in these students' lifetime than during its first seventy-eight years. But the purpose these students have for being here remains the same as that for which about 4,125 graduates had come to this campus before them.

**Physical changes.** The physical changes since 1962 are obvious: Two women's dormitories, Luther Hollow picnic grounds, this multipurpose Luther Memorial Union, the football bowl and expanded athletic fields, continued renovation of the 1928 building and an addition to it, world-class tennis courts, a refurbished Old Main to house offices and services, and the ever-present black-topped parking lots which by contrast make more striking the beauty of grassy and wooded areas in this natural park.

One building deserves special mention. It is the library opened in 1971 after years of planning, and for which now an addition is being planned. In this treasure house of learning resources students learn to use the technology available for classroom teaching. In this vital extension of the classroom, students bring questions for inquiry, critically analyze information, and cultivate the skills that should make them active learners for life.

**The location issue.** Amidst the busyness of the 60s the issue of where the Synod's teachers college should be located exacted great amounts of time and energy. During that decade each synod convention endured deliberate discussion of this matter. Finally, in 1970, the merger of Wisconsin Lutheran College and Dr. Martin Luther College on the New Ulm campus settled the question of location — at least up to the present.

As the college increased in enrollment and continued to develop in all areas, especially in student services, the campus became overcrowded. The Synod took dramatic action and, in 1979, Martin Luther Academy moved to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and became Martin Luther Preparatory School. Thus, after 95 years the college became the sole occupant of this campus.

**Accreditation and some side effects.** The story of accreditation also deserves to be brought up to date. As the 1962 convention had directed, the faculty completed its self-study toward accreditation with the University of Minnesota in the spring of 1963. Accreditation was granted. Since the college and the Synod found the self-study to yield great benefit and concluded that the university demanded no compromise of principle, accreditation was accepted. The difficulties of state certification for our graduates, however, were only partially resolved.

The continuing problems of certification eventually led to seeking regional accreditation from the North Central Association. After many more years of cautious exploration, the college received this accreditation in 1980. The irksome problems of certification remain even as we now engage in another self-study for continued North Central accreditation.

Neither the Synod nor the college has ever taken lightly the voluntary alliance with any accrediting agency. For that reason we still remind ourselves of this guideline laid down in 1962:

A self-study toward accreditation need not be construed as an unwarranted seeking of recognition from the world, if the church holds such a program to its proper sphere, namely, subservient to the church's educational principles, for example, in determining what constitutes a qualified teacher and what is the meaning and purpose of quality education in the church. The principles of the church must stand in the forefront. If standards for accreditation do not conflict with nor compromise these principles, the church may seek the accreditation that an agency of the world may be willing to give it (9:11).

This wholesome caution has enabled us to capitalize on the positive effects of self-study. Some of these effects are seen in the way student, academic, and business affairs of the college are organized and carried out. Perhaps the case is not overstated to say that the experience has aided the administration and faculty to respond in meaningful ways to questions, criticisms, and requests from you whom this institution exists to serve.

Some evidence of this responsiveness can be seen in a comparison of early and later summer sessions. Originally, the offerings served primarily the short-term teacher preparation programs. As that need faded and new needs arose, we have added courses for synodical certification, an advanced study program in the Christian ministry, a program for principals in the supervision of instruction, an opportunity to earn a subject matter major, and workshops that deal with a variety of the timely and timeless aspects of the teacher's tasks.

**A new curriculum.** Other vital attempts to keep our teacher preparation program abreast of the times and in step with the needs of our congregations required several curriculum decisions. For example, the Synod responded favorably in 1965 to the college's recommendation to end all short-term teacher preparation programs.

Then, in 1968, the entering freshmen enrolled in a restructured curriculum which with some modifications is still in effect today. It is comprised of courses designed to offer students a broad background in religion, the arts and sciences, and specific knowledge and skills for teaching and serving, if capable, as church musicians. A departure from past practices permits students to choose courses in one field of study with the idea of exploring it more in depth.

A second feature of the present curriculum worthy of special mention is the "professional semester." This semester of the senior year includes courses on how to teach and the student teaching experience. Begun already in 1964, the professional semester has enabled more and more congregations to have a part in the training of their future teachers. Since 1964, students have done their eight-week student teaching experience at St. Paul's, New Ulm, or in one of the many cooperating schools in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois. During these weeks the student lives in the congregation in whose school he is teaching. There he receives the guidance of one of its teachers and his college supervisor. This shared responsibility, besides providing the student an excellent "trial under fire," has truly strengthened the bond between the college and the field.

Although these two innovations were a departure from the past, this curriculum has its roots deep in the earlier educational thought of the college and the Synod. The statement of basic principles which guided its development reads:

Dr. Martin Luther College, the . . . teacher education institution of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, exists in fulfillment of pedagogical principles based on the Word of God. These declare that education is inseparable from religion. They demonstrate that all knowledge in all areas of human thought and endeavor is worthy of inquiry when viewed in the light of human sin and divine grace. They assert that such evaluation of all things is granted alone through the God-revealed

Wisdom of the Bible, the God-man Jesus Christ. They affirm that education, a basic function of the Christian home, is also a concern of the church, namely, to equip the entire person in mind, body, and spirit for time and for eternity (9:19).

In this spirit the faculty chose a program of studies intended to imbue students with knowledge, skill, and love. Professor Theodore Hartwig explains the importance of these characteristics in the Christian teacher:

The good teacher draws easily from broad funds of knowledge. The good teacher packages that knowledge in skillful demonstration and attractive display. The good teacher labors at this high calling out of love for the learner. Without love, teaching becomes a stage on which the actor seeks applause. Without skill, teaching grows dull, and without knowledge its nourishment rapidly thins out (10:36).

Jesus possessed these characteristics of the good teacher in the highest degree. We strive to have our graduates be Christ-like teachers for you and your children.

**Today's students: A personal view.** This leads us to ask who are these students who are preparing themselves to be teaching ministers? Are they different today from students just a generation ago? On the one hand, yes, there are ways in which they are different and not only because there are more of them.

By comparison, today's students are more worldly-wise. Most of them have a more sophisticated grasp of technology. But, unfortunately, more are less well prepared in the basic elements of learning. Almost all are more open, frank, and ready to question. Their expectations and need for personal attention seem greater. Severe social and spiritual trials appear to be more common and to cut more deeply into their lives. None of this should surprise us. These young men and women have grown up in a society which offered them greater and more varied opportunities for learning. But at the same time that society forced them to contend with problems of the adult world at too early an age. That society generally required of them less commitment to meeting high academic standards and thereby gave them more time for leisure. That society impressed on them the terrible notion that no one is more important than "me, myself, and I."

But, on the other hand, distinct likenesses exist between today's and yesterday's students. The likenesses deserve greater emphasis than the differences. Like yesterday's, today's students have been baptized into the Body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. They too have had the Gospel taught and preached to them. They too have received the Holy Spirit as the seal of their salvation. Therefore, freed from the paralysis of self-concern, they also have the necessary motivation to desire to be teaching ministers. They too are young Christians grimly aware of the tension between the saint and sinner within them. True, there still remains the same diversity of gifts. Spiritual growth still shows itself in wide variations.

Nevertheless, in 1984 as in years gone by, the Gospel is not without its effect. Thus, for the most part, Dr. Martin Luther College students sense that education leads to learning and joy. But in a more profound way they also view their education as a vocation. This vocation is for them an act of worship in which they praise their Savior-God and exercise the best stewardship of the talents He has given them in body and in mind. This Gospel-induced spirit makes possible their readiness to serve as qualified educators for the teaching ministry in the Christian day school and in whatever other ways the Lord's will and work may require in your congregations.

**A look back.** This reiteration of the mission of Dr. Martin Luther College closes our review of the role the college has held during its first century in the Gospel ministry of the church.

Looking back, we are aware that some other decision or a different course of action in times past could have effectively changed the existence and purpose of this college. We stand in awe therefore of God's grace for these 100 years. We should also be keenly aware that He is providing a future in which He will use us and the gifts He has given us in ways He has determined. Let us therefore consider briefly several of the challenges that confront us as we prepare to cross the threshold into the second century of this institution's being.

### CHALLENGES AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE SECOND CENTURY

#### The Demands of Government

We begin not with a new challenge, but one that circumstances suggest is likely to increase in intensity — the demands of government. For example, the militant posture taken by some private schools (such as in Nebraska) may lead state officials to make more difficult the existence of all non-public schools. As a result we might soon find ourselves defending the legitimacy of our elementary schools. Then, too, the congressional response to the Supreme Court's decision in the Grove City College case may restrict for us the availability of student aid. We should also be aware of the rising public concern for the competence of teachers. Consequently, we may in the near future need to react to legislation that will result in state-mandated tests for our graduates. This concern reminds us that the problems of state certification have an abiding presence.

#### The Growth of Our Elementary Schools

A second challenge stems from what looks like a leveling-off of our elementary school system. The oversupply of teachers is seasonal and temporary. The dynamics of supply and demand will eventually take care of this oversupply. But our elementary school system appears to be at some kind of crossroad. Its future growth seems to be tied to the growth of the Synod in general, which is small. Thus our school system is faced with either stability or a change to use as a more active mission agency. If the former choice is made, then the work of the college could remain similar to what is now being done. If the elementary school is to be a more active mission agency, there may be ways in which the college should revise its preparation of the qualified teaching minister.

#### "To Meet the Needs of the Church"

The next challenge is a corollary to what has just been said. Its focus is the single purpose nature of the college and has to do also with preparing graduates "to meet the needs of the church." The college has already somewhat broadened its mission with the introduction of the subject matter major. For various reasons we are trying out or investigating other changes such as assigning graduates to Travel-Canvass-Witness teams, foreign language study, youth leadership and evangelism workshops. Will these temporary interests become permanent? Will they lead to planned, conscious changes? Will their impact be anticipated? Here are issues that fairly beg for cooperative study by several divisions in our synodical structure as well as for attention from the entire constituency. Such combined effort might prevent special interest groups from needlessly knocking down doors that may be already open.

#### The Changing World

Another continuing challenge is twofold. It embraces both the new kind of student we are receiving and the rapidly changing world into which we send our graduates. This challenge could

have far-reaching effects. For freshman, we may have to increase our rather modest efforts at remedial education. We are already pressed to provide a greater number of practical pre-student teaching experiences. In addition, early childhood education, counseling, and the changing home scene are now issues many are encouraging us to grapple with. The far-reaching effect is reflected in a question we have already asked ourselves, "Is a fifth year needed?" Counting the cost and mindful of kingdom work balance, it is not far-fetched to ponder whether the issue of combining Northwestern and Dr. Martin Luther College may not again receive consideration.

### Keeping Our Gospel Orientation

Finally, we face a challenge that is always with us and may be seen as opposite sides of the same coin. Our education at every level must keep its Gospel orientation. This happens when the child of God is kept healthy in his relationship to God and the man of God is equipped for this world. Even on this campus faculty and students are always tempted to let their personal professional interests narrow their lives so they become less than a ministry of service. The flip side of this coin is that for seemingly pious reasons we are persuaded to slight the secular knowledge which the child of God needs to perform his everyday work in a Christian manner. Either extreme does a great disservice to our heritage and the purpose for which this college exists.

### CONCLUSION

These challenges are similar to and no greater than those our forefathers faced. Their approach to meeting the challenges of their day is living confidence in the truth of the passage on which the theme of our centennial is based. "In quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). The Lord expects no less of us. In that spirit He looks for us to be faithful in our planning, responsible in our action, humble and patient in our trust of Him. Then, strengthened by Him, Dr. Martin Luther College will continue to serve in extending the testimony of His Son for however long He has chosen.

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