

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE OTHER 50%? THE VALUE OF A PREP EDUCATION
FOR THOSE WHO DON'T END UP IN THE MINISTRY

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Abstract

From time to time it's good to count our blessings. As we look around us, one of the blessings that we have in our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is a well-thought-out and well-set-up ministerial education system. In and among that system are our synodical preparatory high schools (Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School). These schools have the focus and purpose of training young men and women for the full-time gospel ministry. On average about 50% of these prep school graduates end up going on to Martin Luther College to continue their training and preparation for service in the kingdom of Christ. What a blessing that is! The first part of this thesis paper will outline one of these prep schools (Michigan Lutheran Seminary) and how it has carried out this purpose through the years. However, what happens to those who don't go on to MLC? What happens to the other 50% of graduating students? This thesis will also look at the value of a preparatory high school education for those students who don't go on to train for the ministry. It will answer that question, based on first hand experiences of Michigan Lutheran Seminary graduates and faculty members through surveys and interviews. It will frame the discussion of preparatory school importance from the lens of the graduates themselves and their personal experiences. After examining their responses and reactions to the questions asked and also alongside synodical evidence, it can be concluded: Yes, there is great individual and institutional value for a preparatory graduate even when he or she does not go on to Martin Luther College. These benefits include: 1) A Christian education, 2) Preparation for lay leadership and Christian service, 3) Continued ties to Lutheran friends and faculty, and 4) "Next Generation" benefits.

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Introduction

When I enrolled at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in the fall of 2004, you could say that I wasn't your typical prep student. My parents lived within 2 miles of the campus, therefore I was known as a "townie."¹ Rather than living hundreds of miles away and staying in the dorms like most of the students, I drove to school each day. I didn't attend study halls and have a bedtime like most did. I didn't get the high-school dormitory experience that most did, and so I'm writing this from a different perspective than most Michigan Lutheran Seminary graduates.

I am the middle child of 5 boys, with the 2nd oldest being a senior at MLS² when I was a freshman. Andrew had been through the system for three years. He knew what it was all about, and from my perspective, he didn't want any part of it. He was not a student who had a zeal for the ministry, and therefore hung out with many friends who thought the same way that he did. It almost seemed as though he resented that he was there. I never knew quite why, but I was no doubt concerned for him; where he would go after high school, what he would do, and most importantly, would he stay true to the faith and continue to go to church and be in touch with the means of grace?

Now fast forward ten years to May 20th, 2014; Vicar call day. As President Schroeder went down the list in alphabetical order he read, "Joseph Lindloff, Fount of Life Lutheran Church, Colorado Springs Colorado, Nebraska District."³ Colorado sounded amazing, but I also knew that my brother, Andrew, was a member of this congregation. My excitement for this ministry experience was only heightened by the fact that he would be a sheep in the flock that I was to serve.

Over the next 12 months of ministry, all those concerns that I had for him 10 years earlier went away. At twenty-seven years old, the church council had nominated him as the chairman of the school board for our pre-school. He had also been asked to lead the Sunday morning teen bible class. Neither of these tasks were small by any means, and in both respects he excelled. I don't say this because he is my family, I say this because this is a first hand example that has propelled me to write this paper. Adolescent men and women don't always know what they want to do with their lives. They aren't always certain, and that's just fine. The ministry isn't for everyone, and the fact is that about 50% of the graduates don't go on to be pastors, teachers, or

¹ A townie refers to anyone who doesn't live in the dorms.

² This is the abbreviation for Michigan Lutheran Seminary. It will be used frequently in this paper.

³ Spoken by President Mark Schroder in the WLS gymnasium on May 20th, 2014.

staff ministers. However, their high school experience plays a large role in shaping them as Christians out in the world, and specifically their Lutheran preparatory high school experience holds value for the rest of their lives. My brother is a living and breathing example of this.

I had the privilege of graduating from Michigan Lutheran Seminary in May of 2008. Over the past 7 years now I've witnessed numerous high school classmates drift away from their religious upbringing. Some of these classmates aren't attending church regularly anymore. Some of them aren't associating themselves with Lutheranism anymore, and some have even fallen to the extreme of not even associating with Christianity at large. I know for a fact that my graduating class is not the exception, and that this has happened to the many classes to come before us. Why is this happening, can it be prevented, and what are possible solutions?

On the flip side, however, not all have fallen away, and there are certainly still many who are faithful and have continued to grow in their faith and service to the Lord, although they didn't attend MLC to continue their ministerial education. Therefore the overarching question that this paper will seek to answer is, "What happens to the other 50%?"

What this paper is

Not much has been written, if anything at all on the value of a prep school for the non-MLC bound student. It's not normally looked at, because the "success" of a prep school is normally quantified by how many graduates enroll at our synodical college, Martin Luther College. This should be a fresh outlook on the benefits of a WELS prep high school.

Many will say that a preparatory high school is beneficial to the extent of sending young men and women on to Martin Luther College to continue their education for the full-time ministry. They are correct in the success that both MLS and Luther Prep have in this area. However, some will claim that these schools aren't beneficial to those *not* planning on being pastors and teachers. This thesis will attempt to inform the reader as to how a preparatory education is beneficial for those students who aren't ministry-bound, and that no matter who you are, a prep education is worth it.

The way in which I go about this thesis will be extremely important. For the sake of clarity and to provide a manageable amount of research and data, this thesis will solely look at synodical school on the east side of lake Michigan, Michigan Lutheran Seminary. However, aside from the history and background of Michigan Lutheran Seminary the results will certainly

pertain in many respects to our second synodical preparatory high school, Luther Preparatory School. These self-imposed guidelines should be able to give a good sample of what has happened to non-MLC attending MLS grads prior to those years.

Not only will this paper lay out the values of a preparatory education, but its intent is also to educate the reader on how MLS has gotten to where it is today. Therefore, it will begin with a brief history of MLS. It will then take a quick look at what the purpose of a preparatory school is and how exactly MLS has carried out its purpose as a ministerial education school through the years. In order to find out what is happening or has happened in the past, you need to go to the top of the food chain. I will get in contact with past MLS presidents⁴ to see their firsthand perspectives on the topics at hand. Also I will consult research papers from faculty members to see how they have talked about this topic amongst themselves in the school. Is this topic being talked about, and if so, how? Those are questions that they can answer. This will however, be a minority of the paper compared to the following section on the benefits of attending MLS or Luther Prep.

If I were to write the main portion of this thesis based solely on speculation, opinion and personal experiences, I wouldn't expect a single person to read it. The objective facts that this thesis is seeking needs to come from the mouths of those themselves who have experienced this educational system and then went out into the workforce, public universities, the military, etc. Therefore, in a more direct attempt to get specific answers as to what MLS has done or not done well to train lay leaders, surveys were out to randomly selected graduates from the graduating years of 2001-2005. Based heavily on these surveys, research and extensive data, this main section of the thesis will attempt to quantify and qualify the value for these graduates and also for the schools and synod. Amongst this research, this paper will lay out various ways in which our prep schools have integrated lay leadership training underneath and intertwining with their main goal of training full-time Gospel messengers.

⁴ Although he is my advisor, Pastor Paul Prange is the most recent President Emeritus of Michigan Lutheran Seminary who had a long tenure. He served from 1993-2009. Objectively speaking, his thoughts via interview will be interspersed throughout this thesis.

What this paper isn't

I fully expected that there would be both positive and negative responses found in the survey results. That was indeed the case. This is good- not in the respect that I wish anyone would have a poor high school experience, but that no doubt is the reality. One cannot pretend that a preparatory high school in our Wisconsin Lutheran Synod is a means of grace that will keep people in the faith no matter what. In fact, “We dare never identify our training system as synonymous with the Gospel itself. The prep school system has been part of a program that has helped us to preserve the Gospel in our midst.”⁵ One also cannot pretend that everyone has a perfect high school experience and therefore raves to everyone they know about it, because this is certainly not the case. This thesis will not neglect to address this elephant in the room; that not everyone has a great high school experience or is still in our fellowship. I will however center my attention on the percentage of those who had a good high school experience. There is great value in a preparatory education, and I will keep my focus on those who had the positive experience, but the negative responses and comments will not be neglected and are certainly not taken lightly.

It also must briefly be stated that this does not intend to be a persuasive paper on why a prep school is or is not better than an area Lutheran high school. By no means! It is not meant to pit one against the other, but rather to emphasize the purpose of a prep school and the benefits it has for all graduates.

“What happens to the other 50%?” This is certainly a broad question. This thesis does not intend to be exclusive in its results, but rather intends to be educational and objective. It will frame the discussion of preparatory school importance from the lens of the graduates themselves and their personal high school experiences. After examining their responses and reactions to the questions asked, and also alongside synodical evidence, it can be concluded: 1) Yes there is great individual value for a preparatory graduate when he or she does not go on to Martin Luther College. 2) There is also great value for the preparatory school itself and the synod at large, and 3) These “other 50%” are our synods lay leaders and beacons of light in their non-ministerial professions.

⁵ John A. Kelly, “WELS Prep Schools: Are They Practical in the 1980’s and Beyond?”, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2465/KellyPrep.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed November 18, 2015), 21.

The Prep School: What is it?

When asked what a “prep school” is, President Emeritus Prange⁶ used the following illustration. When you go to a strip mall and you walk around, from time to time you will see a United States military recruiting storefront. All the pictures on the windows are of travel places. These pictures show will sometimes show Hawaii, or the east coast, or overseas. Everyone knows that it’s a recruiting station, but it is disguised as a travel bureau. The prep schools are recruiting stations for the ministry, disguised as American boarding high schools.⁷ The word *disguised* may lead some to think that something is being hidden from them. This is not the case.

The Purpose of a Prep School

When one goes on to MLS’ website (mlsem.org), under the heading “mission and purpose,” it is very obvious that no one is shy about proclaiming the mission and purpose of the school. It states, “The special purpose of Michigan Lutheran Seminary is to prepare high school students for the public ministry of the gospel, encouraging them to enroll in the WELS College of Ministry, Martin Luther College.”⁸ Fourteen to eighteen year old young men and women are encouraged in many different aspects to consider a career in the full-time gospel ministry. This is why it exists today. The school’s website also notes this fact under the title of “philosophy.” It’s worthwhile for us to note these now.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) serves the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) as it: 1) Uses the means of grace so that the Holy Spirit encourages all students to consider full-time service in the public ministry. 2) Promotes the high calling of the public ministry of the gospel through the recruitment and retention of qualified students and through positive modeling of the ministry by faculty members. 3) Prepares students for admission to MLC through a balanced and challenging curriculum in religion, languages, sciences, math, history and the arts, with special emphasis on vocal and instrumental music skills.

We will talk more about these philosophies under the “Christian Education” section of the paper.

The purpose of Michigan Lutheran Seminary as a preparatory school is so at the forefront of how it operates that it most definitely affects the decisions that are made, from the smallest to

⁶ I will refer to him as Pastor Prange throughout the rest of the paper now the reader understands he was formerly the president of MLS from 1993-2009.

⁷ I conducted a phone interview with Pastor Prange on November 10th. Any thoughts or ideas from his from here on out will be footnoted with (*Pastor Prange, Phone Interview)

⁸ <http://www.mlsem.org/about-mls/mission-purpose> (accessed Nov. 11th, 2015).

the largest. Here is just one example: If the football team makes the playoffs in the fall, the coaches will most likely pull some sophomores up to join the varsity. This often happens at the same time as the yearly tour that sophomores take to visit Luther Preparatory School, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and Martin Luther College. Knowing from experience, it is unlikely that a sophomore who is pulled up to the varsity squad would rather go on that recruitment tour rather than play in that football game. And so the decision must be made. Will the players be allowed to stay for the game and miss the tour, or will it be mandatory for them to go on the trip and have his extracurricular aspirations crushed? With the purpose of recruiting men and women for the ministry, the tour cannot be missed, however that doesn't mean they can't also play in the game. The decision is often made to make special arrangements for those players. Either they will delay the bus until after the game or they will bring those who played in the game on a second bus to catch up to the main group.

One more example of a decision that has to be made more often than not is during a time of a possible expulsion. High-schoolers are fourteen to eighteen years old, and they often do dumb things. This is no surprise to us, but when they cross the line, do you expel them or do you allow them to face a lighter penalty and continue to be enrolled? Oftentimes public schools will have a no tolerance policy when it comes to expulsion. If a student crosses the line, he or she is kicked out of school. But in certain instances in a preparatory school, an expulsion could also lead a student to a separation from the church and from the means of grace. It has been communicated to me that this factor is taken into consideration with a possible expulsion. This is not to say that "expelled" is not in MLS' vocabulary, but sometimes it's more beneficial for the students to stay enrolled than to be forced to leave. These are just a couple of examples, but it is clear that in all decisions that the school makes, its purpose as a ministerial education school is the leading voice.

Some firsthand evidence helps to show that this is what is truly happening. When asked if this purpose is voiced in faculty meetings, Pastor Prange replied, "Every decision made was based on that. It was the purpose of the school everyone could articulate. The purpose of the school is key."⁹ He also went a step further and talked about the purpose being a part of synodical meetings. He articulated that, "Everyone in ministerial education knew it. There are

⁹ Phone interview, 11/10/15.

some who didn't want the prep schools to be open¹⁰ and argued that the prep schools weren't the best way to train men and women for the ministry, but the statistics speak for themselves. The purpose is always at the forefront.”¹¹

A group of men that no doubt know this purpose all too well is the Governing Board of the school. These are the men who oversee the operations of the school and help to keep it on track from year to year. They are the ones who prayerfully care for the school and everything that it does. It truly all goes back to the unapologetic purpose statement of MLS: The purpose of Michigan Lutheran Seminary is to prepare high school students for the public ministry of the gospel. This purpose encompasses the school. MLS has carried out this purpose at its forefront throughout the ages. In order to understand how the MLS of 2015 got to where is today, let us take a look briefly at the history of the school.

A Brief History of Michigan Lutheran Seminary

In 1884, the young MI synod recognized large need for well-trained pastors, and yet they had no readily available way to get them. As the plans developed around the possibility of a new school in 1884-85, discussion was had about exactly what type of school it should be. After much deliberation, the synod of almost 7,000 people knew that they needed a steady supply of faithful preachers. Quickly, in its yearly convention, they decided to establish an institution in which young men could be trained for the office of the holy ministry. They pursued the model of a *Prediger Seminar*, a “preachers’ seminary.” More than academic, this school would be of practical design to fit the need of the synod.

Where this institution was to be located was atop the list of questions still looming around the school to be. “In the young Michigan Synod, congregation competed with one another to have the new theological seminary in their backyard...The congregations listed in the minutes of the Michigan Synod’s October 1886 Kalamazoo convention were Ypsilanti, Zilwaukee, Lansing, Adrian, Saline, and Saginaw City.”¹² The mere idea of such an institution eventually turned into a concrete plan when Michigan Lutheran Seminary was born in August of 1885 in Adrian, MI. Various circumstances however, caused the new school to move to Saginaw

¹⁰ This paper will not touch on this subject any more than here, but numerous times in the history of MLS, people have thought it'd be best to close the school down.

¹¹ Phone interview, 11/10/15.

¹² William Zeiger, “Michigan Lutheran Seminary: Past, Present, and Future”, <http://wlsessays.net/files/ZeigerMLS.pdf> (accessed October 17, 2015), 4.

MI just two years later in 1887. Pastor Eberhardt of Adrian gave the plot of land in Saginaw to the synod as a gift. “Pastor Eberhardt gave the original land to the synod as a gift, a plot of three acres in size. This is the present corner of Court and Hardin Streets.”¹³ To this day, this is where MLS resides.

MLS wasted no time in getting under way, and already by 1888 the first two men graduated and were sent to their calls. What a blessing for the new synod to have its own theological seminary, training men for the ministry. Over the ensuing years, if there is one word to sum up the situation at MLS, it would be resilience. The dismissal of the school director over a doctrinal issue was one major hurdle. Another was a lightning struck building that caused great amounts of damage. These are just a couple of the tests that that new school underwent. However, despite these growing pains, in the first seven years of its existence, MLS prepared twelve young men for their first calls into the Michigan Synod.

The resilience of MLS was over the next fifteen-year period was to be even more severely tested. Without going into facts that are not pertinent to this paper, there was large confusion and unrest at this time in the Michigan Synod. Over time, the unrest wore on the relatively young school of ten years, not to mention a fire that almost burned down the school’s main building. It truly seemed that all odds were against the school, and the unrest kept mounting.

Throughout the first 15 years of its existence, MLS had steadily seen an enrollment of around twenty young men. Though with a shift at the helm of the school came unwanted change. Director F. Beer stepped into the role of director, and after only 4 years, the student body declined to just eight. “It is said that Pastor Beer was partially to blame for what happened at the Seminary over the next five years because of his strict disciplinarian tactics, but no one knows for sure.”¹⁴ On top of that, the synod was trying to work through some problems of it’s own. “While the Synod was experiencing a revitalization the years 1902-1907 marked years of deterioration for Michigan Lutheran Seminary.”¹⁵ In the matter of one more year, the student

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ Phil Koelpin, “It was a Necessity for the Michigan Synod to Transfer the Training of its Seminary to the Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod”, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2631/KoelpinMichiganSynodSeminary.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. (Accessed Nov 13, 2015), 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

body dropped to seven, and then to just three. “At the year’s end, two of those graduated, leaving a student body of one and faculty three times that. The school was officially closed by the Michigan Synod and mothballed on August 10, 1907, after twenty-two years of service to the synod.”¹⁶ “During the 20 years of its existence as a theological seminary, the Michigan institution trained 40 men for the ministry. Of this number 28 were serving as pastors in the Michigan Synod. Eleven had joined other synods and one was deceased, when the Michigan Seminary closed.”¹⁷

This was not the end of the school- praise be to our God! Over the next three years, those supporting the school and the synod at large had the chance to evaluate the situation. The synodical unrest was starting to taper off, and plans were made to reopen MLS (not yet known as MLS). “Michigan Lutheran Seminary was founded by the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other states at its 10. Session, held at Ft. Atkinson, Wis., Aug.11-17, 1909.”¹⁸ It had to be decided upon as to what kind of school this was to be. It also resolved that the “New Seminary” should be reopened as a *Progymnasium*. “Its curriculum was to be similar to the German secondary system that prepared young men for university work. Today we call that a preparatory school.”¹⁹ Those surrounding the decision to reopen MLS were under a lot of pressure to change the mission of the school. They could have easily changed the focus of the school to at least a hybrid school or an area Lutheran high school, but they didn’t. From 1910 on, it was clear to everyone that the overlying purpose of the school was to prepare young men and women for the ministry. It was even recorded by our Lutheran ancestors:

“The chief aim of the school was to serve as a feeder for the church’s college at Watertown and New Ulm. It carried out that goal in commendable fashion. The students it graduated and sent on...were able to hold their own in meeting the challenge of college standards and studies....This hold true also, and perhaps especially for the rigorous language demands of the ministerial program of study.”²⁰

The history of Michigan Lutheran Seminary as a preparatory school had begun.

¹⁶ Zeiger, 7.

¹⁷ Korthals, James F. “Our Help in Ages Past.” Paper presented to Michigan District Pastor, Teacher, Delegate Conference, Adrian, Michigan, June 8-9, 1999. (Accessed November 6, 2015), 18.

¹⁸ O.J.R. Hoenecke. “History of Michigan Lutheran Seminary: 1910-1950.” <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2243/HoeneckeHistoryMLS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Accessed November 3, 2015), 1.

¹⁹ Zeiger, 8.

²⁰ *Michigan Memories: Things That our Fathers Have Told Us*. Published by the Michigan District of the WELS, 1985. p. 248.

As the new school opened its doors with an opening service, only two dozen people were in attendance and classes were to begin with only 5 students in the desks. “Furthermore, when the school opened, it had no official name. It was Dr. Ernst, who at a board meeting, proposed ‘Michigan Lutheran Seminary’ for historical and sentimental reasons.”²¹ As quoted by O.J.R. Hoenecke, “He (Dr. Ernst) said that the word “Seminar” was so intimately connected with the history of the Michigan synod, that whatever name would be chosen, the school would still be the “Seminar” in the hearts and minds of the synod’s members.”²² The frail beginning, however, was rewarded with a stronger enrollment in the ensuing years, and MLS graduated its first class of 7 graduates on June 16, 1914. Things were looking up for the revamped school, and the turmoil that had surrounded the MI Synod at the turn of the century seemed to be a thing of the past. It was now replaced with yearly routines, and the school seemed to have found its niche.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary seemed to be gaining ground in the world of education. It was indeed a preparatory school, preparing young men for university, but “during the period from 1910 to 1945, Michigan Lutheran Seminary became more and more like American high school”²³ rather than a German one. Already at this time, it’s undeniable that the purpose of MLS was shining through in its very essence.

As it gained ground in the world of education and the enrollment increased, the faculty structure too was improved. In 1921, the tutor system was put into place. “During the years 1921-1931 the tutors stayed for two years each. All the tutors were graduates of the Theological Seminary. Besides their duties as assistants in the dormitory, the tutors were of great help to the faculty. As far as MLS is concerned the tutor system²⁴ functioned well.”²⁵

As early as 1922, MLS recorded in its catalogs that the purpose of the school was to prepare students for Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN, and Northwestern College in Watertown, WI. Professor Bill Zeiger sums up this area for the revitalized school when he states,

As the curriculum of MLS expanded and the student body grew, so did the faculty...By 1930 the school had a faculty of five full-time professors and one tutor. By 1945 the faculty increased by one tutor. The *Progymnasium* years were years of stability and slow

²¹ Korthals, 20.

²² Hoenecke, 6.

²³ Zeiger, 9.

²⁴ This tutor system, that has been in place for nearly 100 years, is still the same practice put in place today. All tutors are graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

²⁵ Hoenecke, 13.

growth. By the beginning of the depression, the enrollment grew to 80 students. Michigan Lutheran Seminary again proved its resiliency. It had survived its re-birth and slow growth. It weathered the financial storm of the great depression. It grew quickly during World War II. The school was poised for greater growth.²⁶

As we follow MLS through it's history, the years following WW II were vital. Lutherans were no doubt part of the great Baby Boom that followed the war and it led to many benefits. As churches and schools grew in number and size during the decades following the war, so did the Seminary. But a situation arose that looked like it could very well destroy the Seminary's steam. The 1950's saw difficulties arise between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. Those difficulties turned into a severing of fellowship in 1961, and eventually a departure from the Synodical Conference in 1963. One must understand that around 50% of the current student body at MLS consisted of kids from Missouri Synod families. In a situation like that, one would expect the school to crumble under the weight of diminishing numbers and a lack of funding. However, praise be to God that this did not happen. With resilience, one-by-one, Wisconsin Synod students filled the void left by the Missouri Synod students. During that decade from 1960-1970, the average enrollment stood at 320 students.

By the early 1960's, MLS had already reached the landmark of 1000 graduates. Of those graduates, nearly 200 had become or were currently training to become WELS pastors and teachers. An equal number had become or were currently training to become pastors and teachers in the Missouri Synod. The purpose of the school had not changed over the school's first seventy-five years, nor had its achievement in preparing future workers for the church.

But even as the numbers of graduated continually rise in number, the leaders of the school knew that recruitment was increasingly important in post World War II years, as more and more career choices became readily available for young men and women. In the mid 1960's the position of recruitment director was instituted in order promote and encourage the possibility of a ministry future. New programs were also instituted to make the experience at MLS the best possible for each and every student. With these new programs in place, and with this recruitment director as part of the faculty now, MLS grew beyond anything that their forefathers would have dreamed. The small school grew to a staggering 365 students, 360 more than it had begun with 75 years earlier. God had truly blessed the work of the school as it continued to be true to its purpose, and more importantly, true to God's Word.

²⁶ Zeiger, 10.

As always, as the school progressed it was concerned with self-evaluation. With the purpose in mind of being a worker training school, they wanted to make sure they were achieving what they wanted through it. “Early in the 1980’s the administration and faculty of MLS went through the newly popular planning exercise known as SWOT analysis. Its purpose was to learn whether or not the school’s entire program was truly supporting the school’s stated mission. A thorough synod-required self-study indicated that there were some thing that could be improved.”²⁷ They acted on the study and made improvements in various areas. One improvement was in the area of the curriculum. MLS implemented a six-day cycle, which created opportunities that were not previously available. The school even dropped the pastor, teacher, and general courses. It established one unified course of study: ministry. There were certain expectations that came along with this course of study. Students coming into the school were fully aware that they were to seriously consider the ministry as their vocation. They also knew that a part of every day student life was to receive encouragements to consider the pastoral or teaching ministry.

Another part of the updated curriculum that still remains of large importance today is the school’s recruitment-to-ministry programs. Taste of ministry is one that you will hear students speak of often. It occurred for pastors and teachers, and was a practical way in which the student would get firsthand experience in the classroom or in the parish. It was a just another way for the student to be encouraged to think about the ministry. Early in the 1980’s MLS also instituted Project Titus. It started simply as a means to enhance the foreign language curriculum of the school, but soon took on a new role with an emphasis on recruitment. Hundreds of students today, including myself, have had amazing off-campus ministry experiences that they will not soon forget. Both the taste of ministry experiences and Project Titus, were created for the purpose of further encouragement for the ministry, and both have and continue to accomplish this effect.

In addition to the said new opportunities for students, Michigan Lutheran Seminary increasingly made it financially easier for students to attend high school there. Up to this point in history, financial aid was certainly made available for those who desperately needed the help, but now they took it a step further. The school set up a well thought out tuition assistance program for families in need. “The system developed consistent funding from synodical funds, local

²⁷ Ibid, 13.

funds, and special gifts. A fair and honest means of determining who should receive support was developed.”²⁸ On top of that, scholarships were set up specifically for those planning to attend Martin Luther College upon graduation.²⁹ These scholarships very well may have permitted students to attend MLC that wouldn’t have if they weren’t available. Above all, the goal of these updates and experiences was to make it as easy as possible for a young man or woman to consider the ministry. Some would say that this focus on ministry is single-minded and irrational in our world today, but that has been and will continue to be the purpose of MLS for years to come.

As MLS continued on into the new century, the enrollment boomed to over 380 students. However, along with the blessing of more students in the chairs came financial struggles. The synod needed to decide what the best plan of attack was for the ministerial education system as a whole. Despite these financial struggles and other hurdles to overcome, Michigan Lutheran Seminary remained open and continues to serve the WELS as a pastor and teacher training school. One can praise the Lord for the abundance of blessings he has poured out on this school through good and bad times. One can revel at the fact that where God’s word is taught and preached, there He is too. His Word certainly does accomplish what he wants to. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”³⁰

Prep Schools Through the Ages

As of this year, our synodical preparatory school, Luther Preparatory School, is celebrating its 150th year of existence. What a blessing it has been for our synod! I cannot help but think of our forefathers who thought it so important to begin a worker training school, that they made it happen with their dollars, hard work, and prayers. As previously stated, as of this year, Michigan Lutheran Seminary is celebrating its 105th and 130th anniversaries respectively.

²⁸ Ibid, 15.

²⁹ Personal disclaimer: Coming from a family of 5 boys, and knowing what it’s like to have to pay for school, these scholarships help tremendously. They only further encourage you to attend MLS and MLC by making it as easy as possible for a future student.

³⁰ NIV 2011.

The road for both of these schools has never been easy, but they have certainly set the standard for academia surrounding ministry.

Back in 1986-1989, a preparatory school study commission was conducted for the purpose of analyzing our synod's school system. It was meant to specifically draw out the positives and negatives of our synodical schools, and ever more pointedly, the necessity of them. The report on this commission, outlined by John Korthals in 2003, lays out specific points that we should take into consideration regarding the necessity of these schools. It lists out both positives and negatives, of which I will list the positives that they outlined. For the sake of the focus of this paper, I will not list the negatives, however one must again understand that I by no means feel as though our training system is perfect, because it isn't. It constantly needs to be evaluated and updated. The principles of them stay the same however, and so do the benefits. The following is what the commission found to the advantages of these synodical training schools.

- A) It fulfills the objectives of our worker training system.
- B) It places the student into a mind set for worker training.
- C) It allows for religious and academic growth, while focusing on the ministry with fewer distractions.
- D) The frequency of worship opportunity, which it provides.
- E) The strong music, history and language programs.
- F) Encouragement for the qualified student to continue in worker training is provided on a regular basis.
- G) Common approach to subject matter allows for easier transition to college.³¹

For years, MLS has shown that these advantages are indeed reality and not merely speculation. "Year in and year out, MLS has produced for the ministerial education colleges."³² And, "Year after year the school has sent 45 percent of its graduates to the synod's college programs for ministry."³³ Before the break with the Missouri Synod in 1961, it was an equal producer for the LCMS schools, namely Concordia Ann Arbor. To those who were watching, it

³¹ John Korthals, "Prep School Study Commission; 1986-1989", <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2675/KorthalsPrepSchoolStudy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed October 24, 2015), 14.

³² Pastor Prange Interview.

³³ Zeiger, 17.

became clear that MLS graduates were going out into the “real world” and were succeeding as active ministers of the Gospel. “In 1949, when the synod decided to go and do exploratory work in Africa, it was MLS graduates that had the privilege to go. As mission churches were beginning to start in Florida, MLS grads had the privilege of being the bulldozers, even when times were tough.”³⁴ They were the ones who started the aid and relief funds when there were disasters in the world. They were some of the first mission administrators, and the list goes on. MLS grads were proving themselves to be active ministers of the gospel.

Many times, the “success” of a preparatory school is quantified. In other words, however many students go on to Martin Luther College equals the success that school had that year. It’s hard not to do this, when the purpose of this school again is to prepare the young men and women for further synodical training. But this approach doesn’t account necessarily for the quality of training that those students got. This paper will expound much more on this later, but the proof of the education quality is in the results. Graduates coming out of MLS were often times driving forces for ministry. The following map is a great example of showing the benefit of a prep school, by bringing to light just how many men and women who graduated from MLS over the years were serving in the ministry back in 2007.

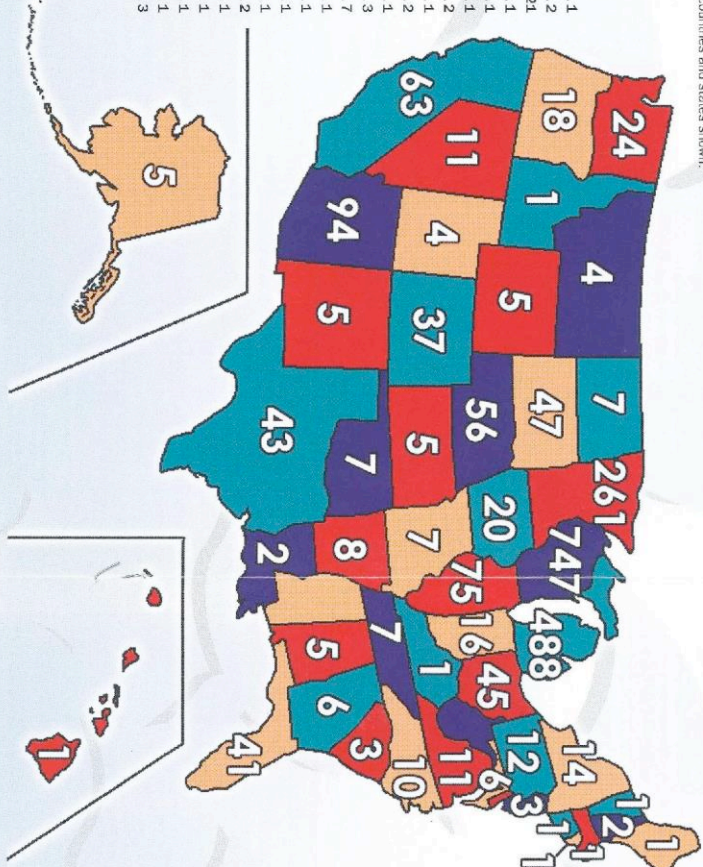
³⁴ Ibid.

MILS GRADS IN THE MINISTRY

M/S Administrative Assistant Laurie Stern (lss@msem.org) is coordinating the research and documentation of every one of the 4,247 graduates of MILS who have served as pastors, teachers, missionaries and staff ministers, both home and abroad, since the first graduating class of 1974. The numbers reflect the service of graduates we are aware of in the countries and states shown.

International Fields

Africa	1
Brazil	2
Canada	24
China	1
Columbia	1
Cuba	1
Czech Republic	2
Germany	1
Granada	2
Hong Kong	1
India	3
Japan	7
Korea	1
Malawi	1
Mexico	1
Philippines	1
Russia	2
Sweden	1
Taiwan	1
Thailand	1
West Africa	1
Zambia	3



United States

AK	5	NC	10
AL	7	ND	7
AR	8	NE	56
AZ	94	NH	2
CA	63	NM	5
CO	37	NJ	3
CT	1	NV	11
FL	41	NY	14
GA	6	OH	45
HI	1	OK	7
IA	20	OR	18
ID	1	PA	12
IL	75	RI	1
IN	16	SC	3
KS	5	SD	47
KY	1	TN	7
LA	2	TX	43
MA	1	UT	4
MD	6	VT	1
ME	1	VA	11
MI	488	WA	24
MN	261	WI	747
MO	7	WV	5
MT	4		

TOTAL..... **2288**

The Survey

Up unto this point, the majority of this paper has focused on the history of MLS and its purpose as synodical prep school. These are important for us to know, and it's obvious where the students go upon graduation from MLS if they are or have been in the ministry. But what about those who don't go into the ministry? "The fact remains that there is more than one person who attended a synod prep school and never intended to enter the ministry, nor did he/she consider the work to be preparatory for such."³⁵ I certainly know many of those who felt that exact same way. What happens to them? Simply because they don't end up achieving the "purpose" of MLS or the prep schools at large, they are often not spoken of in our synod. Did they fail the purpose, or was it still valuable for them to attend? This is the focus, then, of the rest of this paper.

I would like to first iterate how the data that I'm about to present before you was accrued. Going into this paper, I knew that there would be a lack of relevant sources. This is due mainly in part because no one has written to an extent on this topic before. Also, the history of the school can only be written on so many times, before it is covered in depth. Therefore, the data you will see comes directly from the graduates that I have surveyed. This is an example of the tandem survey/interview research method, and carries much more validity than my personal high school experience or the speculation of how others benefitted from it.

I first of all narrowed down the graduation years of the students that I wanted to survey. It needed to be a small enough number that the data would be manageable to organize, and also large enough that the data wouldn't be skewed. I ended up choosing the years of 2001-2005. Over the years, MLS has done a thorough job of keeping track of its students. Through the front office I was able to gather contact information for those that I potentially wished to survey. I then took the group of non-MLC attending students as a whole³⁶ and randomly selected 50 of those students that I would send the survey to. Of those 50 survey invitations that I sent, I received 22 responses. With a 44% survey return rate, this number is large enough for us to gather valuable data from.

Some of these students thought about the ministry, but decided that it wasn't where their skills or passions lied. Others knew from freshman year on that they wouldn't be a Pastor or teacher. These are the students that that attended community colleges, public universities, and

³⁵ Kelly, 1.

³⁶ This totaled 247 potential students to survey, as you will see on the chart on the following page.

perhaps went straight into the workforce. These are the students who are members in our churches. These are the graduates that I surveyed. I will admit that the men were easier to track down than the women. When the women marry and move away, their contact information sometimes falls by the wayside. Also, out of those 50 survey requests sent, there are no doubt some who did not receive the request due to outdated contact information.

Overall there are many positive responses that have come out of these surveys, as you will soon see. Some will (and have) made the comment though that only those who had a good experience responded to the survey. This carries some validity. I suppose a graduate who had a good experience is more willing to share their thoughts than someone who didn't. Also, as previously stated, I acknowledge that there are graduates who did not have a good high school experience. In fact there are responses that include such information. This doesn't make anyone feel good, and it's all the more reason to continue to pray for our schools. The devil works hard to tear the flock of sheep away from their shepherd. He can even use sinful teenagers and this fact has been acknowledged. The following data is not meant to be the final law, but rather proof of the values in preparatory education in the WELS. The following chart lays out the graduation statistics of 2001-2005.

Grad Year	Number of Grads	Going on to MLC	% Going on to MLC
2001	81	35	43%
2002	76	35	46%
2003	82	38	46%
2004	87	32	37%
2005	65	26	40%

The following survey questions were sent out to the 50 randomly selected graduates of 2001-2005. The responses to these questions will be interspersed throughout the remainder of this paper.

1. *Do you still hold membership in a WELS/ELS congregation?*
2. *What church do you call your “home congregation”?*
3. *How frequently would you say that you attend per month?*
4. *How are you involved in your congregation?*
5. *Do you feel that MLS prepared you for leadership in a congregation?*
6. *Would you consider sending your children to MLS for high school?*
7. *How would you rank your overall MLS experience?*
8. *Is there anything that I didn't ask that I should have?*

How does a Prep Education Benefit These Graduates?

#1- A Christian Education (survey questions 1 & 3)

Previously on page 5 of this paper, we noted the philosophy of MLS as it operates as a prep school. However, even before stating its philosophy of preparing men and women for ministry, it states, “Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) serves the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) as it sustains a campus life centered in the Word of God as it is professed in the Lutheran Confessions.”³⁷ This is not just a philosophy of the school; it is the lifeblood. Along with encouragement for the ministry comes an education that is centered around God’s word every single day.

The curriculum at MLS is organized in a way that the students delve into their Bibles in multiple classes per day. From freshman Bible class, all the way to senior doctrine class, God’s Word is the center of life at MLS. Multiple students saw life from both sides of the fence³⁸ and they talk about the importance of the Christian education verses the public education. One says, “I received a greater than average education in doctrinal matters.” “Another grad puts it succinctly when he says, “I wasn't a traditional student - I started out in public school, but

³⁷ <http://www.mlsem.org/about-mls/mission-purpose> (accessed Nov. 18th, 2015).

³⁸ In regards to Public high school vs. MLS

wanted more of a Christian education. I started MLS my junior year and felt behind the curve in terms of my religion knowledge, but everyone made me feel so welcomed. Transferring to MLS was the best decision I ever made.”

On top of the biblical-based curriculum, MLS offers an educational structure that few secondary schools have. One graduate talks about the affect that this kind of structure had on her life. “MLS gave me structure and discipline that I didn’t have before. The study hours, bed times, and structure was really good for me. Also, the sense of moral character that MLS gave to me is deeply embedded in who I am. It’s not just something that you walk away from.”

For 14-18 year old students, this kind of education has a huge impact on their lives. Not just for the four years that they are in attendance, but the rest of their lives. The curriculum is meant to encourage students for lives of faith as well as lives of service, and this certainly is for all students in attendance. Pastor Prange also sees the impact that this education plays in his continued relationship with graduates. “Students who go to public colleges often contact me about how to react to a professor or another student at their college. I can tell that they truly are being salt and light in their public universities by exercising their faith in an appropriate way. When it comes to personal faith, I see them pushing to stay in the faith and to be witnesses.”

Most would agree that attending a public university is a challenge, especially in regards to your faith. One graduate talked about how hard it actually was. “Admittedly, anti-God and the universal relativistic ideals taught by almost all faculty at the university level caused me to question my faith in college as well. High school and early college years are an age when students are extremely vulnerable to new ideas and ideals.” It is vital to have a strong Christian foundation before entering into public universities like this, and although MLS doesn’t have specific courses in apologetics, the curriculum itself lays a strong biblical foundation that is apologetic in nature and crucial for each student to have.

President Petermann³⁹ sees how important this kind of education is for these students when he says,

Students come back and tell me about all of the challenges to their faith they are facing in every class. One of the main things (about the curriculum) is that it builds your faith while you’re here, and they get to show that once they’re out of colleges they get into the life of the church. You anecdotally here about this kid or that kid, and the dropout rate (from the church) is pretty high when kids go off to college. Very few stay in the church,

³⁹ Pastor Joel V. Petermann accepted the call to serve as the President of MLS in 2012, and is still serving in that capacity.

and you pray they come back but they are often sucked away. MLS counters that with daily devotions, Christian encouragement, and biblical studies. It has proven to positively affect the students when they too are tempted to drop out in their college years.⁴⁰

One graduate says that this is exactly what he received at MLS. “MLS gave me a good foundation in knowledge of the Bible that still serves me today in discussions.” A fascinating aspect of this quote is that this graduate stated that he did not have the best experience at MLS, and that he would not send his kids to school there. However, putting aside his relational experiences, he is confident that his biblical foundation instilled in him at MLS is still serving him today.

Further proof that this is indeed true lies in the responses to survey question #1: *Do you still hold membership in a WELS/ELS congregation?* Out of twenty-two responses, twenty-one responded, “yes”. I understand that this percentage would not be so high if the entirety of these classes would have been surveyed, but for this many students to have gone through various public universities and still remained faithful, is a testament not only to the impact of their Christian educational foundation, but even more so to God keeping his children safe in his arms.

The access to the means of grace that the students of a prep school have is priceless. This largely is due in part to the importance that a prep school places on worship. Twice a day, students have the privilege of gathering together and worshipping in chapel. Not only are students given a Christian education, they are daily hearing the message that saves. Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.”⁴¹ God’s word is the center of life at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Through it, each student not only receives the strengthening faith and knowledge, but also the setting into place of future values on the means of grace.

This can be shown to a degree in the amount of times that these graduates go to church per month. By no means am I stating that this indicates levels of faith, but rather that worship and Christianity at large are of high value to them. These are no longer 14 year-olds that are told they have to go to chapel. These are grown adults who are making sure that it is a priority in their busy lives to be in contact with God’s word and fellow believers. I asked them in survey question #3, *How frequently would you say that you attend per month?* They responded with the

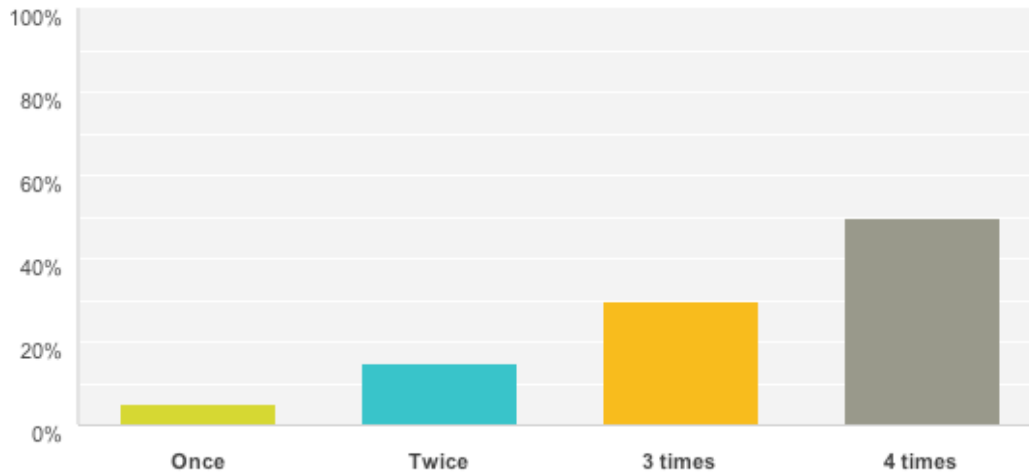
⁴⁰ Phone interview, conducted on 11/13/2015.

⁴¹ NIV, 2011.

following answers documented in the graph on the following page. I believe that the results are self-explanatory and that this doesn't need to be explained to any further degree.

How frequently would you say that you attend per month?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses
Once	5.00% 1
Twice	15.00% 3
3 times	30.00% 6
4 times	50.00% 10
Total	20

A more in-depth look at the benefits that a student receives through his or her education will be covered under the next section entitled, “lay leadership”. It will expound on the education benefits in regard to preparation for work in the church. In conclusion, a primary value of a prep education is the Christian foundation that he or she receives. Not only is there contact with the means of grace daily, but also a Christian foundation is instilled for his or her life to come.

#2- Lay Leadership (survey questions 2,4 & 5)

Whether he or she knows it or not, the second main value that a graduate not going into the ministry has, is the preparation that he or she receives for lay leadership in the church. The reason I phrase it that way, is because there aren't any specific courses on the MLS campus for lay leadership.⁴² This would perhaps be a confusion of the purpose of the school, which this paper stated earlier. The purpose is first and foremost to train future pastors and teachers, but you could say that the training of lay leaders is a bi-product of such an education.

I'd first like to point out that MLS and Luther Preparatory School are unique in the fact that they train students from all over the United States and even other countries. As these students graduate, not only are these future pastors and teachers receiving calls to different states and countries, but so also are the other 50% serving their respected congregations in so many different places. Before diving into how MLS prepares lay leaders, let us note where these survey responders are serving the Lord. It is documented in the map below.



⁴² The only exception would be the senior doctrine class. It is set up to prepare students for lay leadership, but not labeled in that way.

As these students graduate from high school, and especially as they graduate from college, they are the next generation of lay workers⁴³ in the church. A church cannot function without these workers and they are crucial to the work of Christ's kingdom. "Graduates of Seminary serve as faithful lay leaders in congregations across our synod."⁴⁴ Their preparation for work is vital, just as it is for called workers into the ministry. The first way that a prep school prepares these workers for the work in the harvest field, is through the Christian education that they receive. Yes, the previous section laid this out in extent but what I'm proposing takes it even a step further. Not only are the students receiving a Christian education, but it is that same education that is preparing them for work in the church.

When asked, "Do you feel that MLS prepared you for lay leadership in a congregation", more than one survey responder alluded to this point. One said, "Absolutely. MLS provided such a Christ-centered education and helped me see the needs of the church more clearly. Lessons taught there, both in and out of the classroom, better equipped me to serve the church in any capacity and made me more comfortable with 'faith talk.'" Another refers to the "foundation" for leadership that this education gave her. "Absolutely. It has given me a strong faith foundation which has and will continue to help me lead the church in its vision." Finally, a 2003 graduate points to the Christian education as something that gives him confidence now that he is a worker in his congregation. "Yes, in the broad sense of being in God's Word every day - more than anything I feel that the confidence of knowing what God's Word says has best equipped me. Also, knowledge in Lutheran theology and doctrine and being confident that I can answer questions or issues prepared me the most." The Christian education that a prep school gives to its students, not only benefits them in their personal lives of faith, but it also prepares them for leadership in their Lutheran congregations, wherever that may be.

I believe here to be a good place to admit that my survey question would have better served this thesis topic had it read, "Do you feel that MLS prepared you for *service* in the church(at large)", rather than only for *lay leadership*. President Petermann brought up an excellent point during my phone interview with him. He made the distinction that not everyone is a leader in a congregation, but everyone can serve the church in some aspect in their lives. He said, " Not all students will necessarily be leaders, but all will serve in different ways. There is a

⁴³ A "lay" worker refers to anyone in the congregation who serves and does not hold a called position.

⁴⁴ Zeiger, 17.

distinction to be made, because those who aren't necessarily leaders can still serve by acting as Christians." A 2004 grad even alluded to this with her response- ". I understand the importance of supporting Christian education because I've seen its impact on my own life. I feel I do more lay leadership/ representation in my life outside of church, in my work and personal life." It is certainly true that not everyone has the personality or gifts to necessarily fit into a lay leadership role in a congregation, but everyone can certainly live lives of sanctification for Christ, no matter what his or her profession may be. It's worth also noting a student's response on what preparation meant to him;

I think it's important to note that MLS prepares young people extremely well for whatever they do after leaving MLS. While it's true that MLS does encourage attending MLC, I was more than prepared for an engineering degree program and have had a number of great jobs as a result of the foundation laid by MLS and my WELS k-8 education before that. While I didn't realize it at the time, I think MLS helps me see and appreciate all the blessings in my life that I may otherwise have taken for granted. God works in miraculous ways and it's amazing to look back and see how he led me to MLS (where I also met my wife) and how he has blessed me afterwards (well prepared for college, marriage, fatherhood, successful career, opportunities to be involved in my congregation, etc.).

The second way that a prep school prepares these graduates for service is through the opportunities that it gives to its students. I've often heard that the best way to learn how to do something is to simply do it yourself. This certainly holds true when it comes to future lay workers in our congregations. A school needs to give the students ample opportunity to learn by doing, and I can say with confidence that MLS does that.

Project Titus was developed as a service opportunity back in the 80's. It has now blossomed into a yearly opportunity for students to go overseas, view different ministries, and serve in various ways. If you ever get into a conversation with a graduate who was able to participate in a project Titus, they will often rave about their "Project Titus experience". Luther Preparatory School gives a similar opportunity to their students through Project Timothy. Both schools see the necessity of hands on service.

Back in 2007 I had the opportunity to take a trip to China. We went under the umbrella of Project Titus, but it was not a traditional Titus format. MLS partnered with friends of China to set up something with similar goals. Not only were we to keep up relations with our Chinese friends who attended MLS, but we were also to help teach English classes and get a first-hand

view of that specific ministry. That 10-day trip is one that I'll never forget. Service wasn't just something for others to do; it was something that I could do. I wasn't there to just watch, I got to participate. That made ministry and service real to me, and I'm sure it did for the rest of those on the trip. Just this past year, MLS started up a new opportunity with "Project Titus- Saginaw". The thought process behind it is the same, but now it allows students to serve right in Saginaw, and not necessarily only over seas. Students are able to go on shut-in calls, visit nursing homes, etc. It's just another opportunity to learn how to serve close to home.

Another main opportunity that is offered to students is the "Taste-of-Ministry" experience. Through it, students are able to shadow either a pastor or a teacher in a congregation or a school. They won't go for an afternoon or two, but many times for a full week. The students will stay with a host family and really see what ministry is like. By the end of the week, they are helping to teach classes or helping in the church. For those that don't go into the ministry, they have a fuller picture of how they can serve a congregation. One graduate specifically mentions his experience as a way that MLS prepared him for leadership. "I was an usher since confirmation, but the doctrinal classes at MLS as well as Taste of Ministry helped to prepare for leadership within the congregation." Oftentimes, it's the hands on work that makes it real for a student, and these various opportunities can bring leadership and service to life.

The education that a student receives, along with his or her service opportunities, prepares a student well for life in the "real world". I don't want to go too in depth on how these students are serving, but it is pertinent information for our topic. No one serves in the same way, but as they feel prepared, they can now serve the Lord in whatever way is best for them. Here is a list of how just some of these grads are serving the Lord with in their lives...

- ❖ Helper for fellowship activities
- ❖ Church organist/musician
- ❖ Sunday school teacher / Organizer of church events
- ❖ Helper for community outreach/teen events
- ❖ Leader of a mentorship program for girls
- ❖ Church Vice President and chairman of buildings/grounds
- ❖ Chairman of the school board/teacher of the Sunday morning teen Bible class
- ❖ Church council secretary
- ❖ Voting member
- ❖ Member of the board of evangelism / Church website designer/began a 20's/30's group
- ❖ Participate in Bible study
- ❖ Church deacon

This list does not contain the numerous graduates who don't necessarily hold positions of leadership, but simply are faithful church members and are lights for the kingdom of God in how they act and live. A preparatory school not only gives its students a Christian education, but it also prepares them for lives of leadership in the church and Christian service for their Lord.

#3- Continued Ties (survey questions 5 & 8)

In a less direct way than the first two, the third main value that a graduate not going into the ministry has is continued ties to both Lutheran friends and to a Lutheran faculty and school. This may seem obvious, but it runs deeper than surface value. Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School are unique in many ways, and one way is that they are boarding schools. "Because they are boarding schools, the emotional connection is tied much more closely."⁴⁵ Not many 14-18 years olds live with their friends, play sports with them, eat three meals a days with them, study with them, and worship with them every day during the school year. This is very unique, and therefore the tight-knit friendships that come out of these schools are also unique. I can say with confidence that they are unlike many other high school friendships, and many of them last for much longer than 4 years.

If you've ever been around MLS, you'll often hear the phrase "The MLS Family." This isn't unique to just MLS however, because I'm sure at one point or another you've heard a school refer to itself as a family. In fact, by the very virtue of the phrase "MLS family," skepticism follows closely. In my interview with President Petermann, he shared a story with me about such skepticism. A young lady came to MLS earlier this fall with her mom to visit the school. She was currently attending a public school and was looking to transfer somewhere else. After two days of visiting the school, she got back into the car with her mom and said, "I had heard about these kids, and it's real- every bit of it!" She was skeptical about the tight-knit family aspect of the school, but in just two days of visiting she was able to see that there was something different about MLS than what she had experienced elsewhere. MLS truly is a family atmosphere that fosters incredible relationships.

President Petermann shared how he sees these relationships playing out. "I really have seen that there is a really tight bond between the graduates. The graduates get together and do things together more so than with others." It is in these relationships that not only friendship is

⁴⁵ Pastor Prange Interview.

fostered, but also faith life. One grad in the survey mentioned how important these relationships have been to her. “I have maintained connections with friends who went on to serve as pastors and teachers. Being able to continue to talk to them as friends I think gives me a unique perspective on our called workers and some of the challenges they face. I believe MLS helped me understand that the church body really benefits when as many members as possible can work together in God's word.” It is specifically this kind of faith support that truly benefits the graduates of MLS and Luther Prep.

These friendships are oftentimes continued well into adulthood, and from personal experience, they are your best friends. There seems to be such a strong bond built here, even if friends don't stay in touch because they are Christians, they keep in touch because they both graduated from the same school. So, when people stray away or question their faith, and they do, their friends are there for them. Even while attending MLS, a graduate talks about how important this was to her. “I loved my time at Sem. Being surrounded by believing friends gave me support at a time when I questioned my faith.” Because friends keep touch with each other after graduation, it keeps them in contact with God, and their friends are not afraid to encourage them. Grads simply feel that it's their right and responsibility to reach out to those who have fallen away. In a non-threatening way they are able to encourage them to not forget what they learned while at MLS.

The faculty also understands how important this family aspect is to the students. Pastor Prange stressed that, “Ministry decisions are made so that students won't be cut off from those ties.” When dealing with possible expulsions or disciplinary situations, the staff will often go with ministry over administration, striving to keep its students in the Word of God and in the family of MLS. The faculty has certainly seen that they too are part of this family. Students have shown their ties back to the faculty, even years upon graduation. Both Pastor Prange and President Petermann, in their respective interviews, talked about how much contact they continue to have with graduates. Both receive e-mails from graduates, almost on a daily basis, about how to handle certain life situations. One graduate had a friend who didn't understand the practice of close communion. He reached out for help on how to explain it from the Bible. This is just one example of the hundreds of connections these faculty members continue to have.

Another compelling story that Pastor Prange shared was about a student that he had to expel some years back. The student had a drug addiction and needed some help. Years later, the

student fathered a child, and he started to get his life back in order. After numerous years of no communication, this student contacted Pastor Prange and asked him to perform his marriage ceremony. The stories go on and on, and they are not rare in fashion. As prep schools, when MLS and LPS realize that they have a pastoral connection to those who have fallen away, they embrace it and work on bringing these people back. There are no doubt continued ties that graduates receive upon attending a preparatory school. They have continued ties to friends that will often last a lifetime, and to friends and a faculty that will be there for them throughout their lives of faith.

#4- The Next Generation (survey questions 6 & 7)

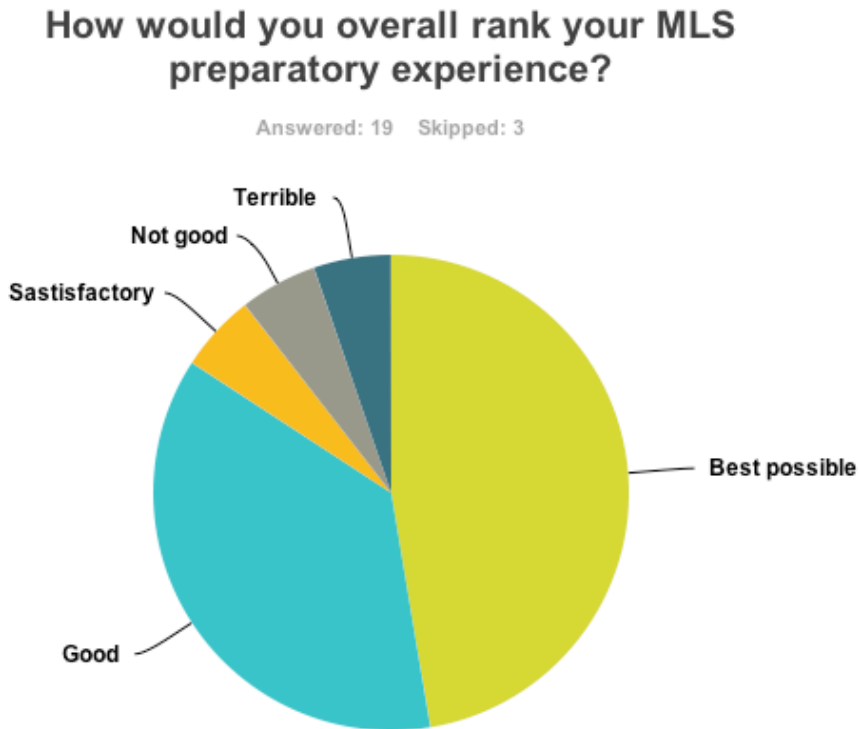
Finally, the fourth main value of a preparatory education for those not going into the ministry is that these graduates are oftentimes the ones sending their children back to these schools. One could say that is a benefit for the graduate, the school, and the synod all at once. When graduates send their children back to their alma mater, the cycle begins again. If history repeats itself and the LORD doesn't return by then, roughly 50% of those students will continue on for training in the ministry. Maybe a certain young man or woman didn't go on to be a pastor or teacher, but there is definitely a possibility that their children would go back to school there, and then they too have the privilege of considering ministry. Oftentimes, it's these students that do go on to be pastors and teachers, and what a blessing that is.

In order for a graduate to even consider sending their children to MLS or LPS, they themselves would have had to have a good high school experience. As previously stated, there is sin everywhere and the devil certainly lurks the hallways of these schools, so not everyone has a good experience. But these schools are highly concerned with the Christian education and high-school experience that its students are receiving. After all, "Making it a good experience at MLS is a huge part of their future faith life. When you are a teenager at MLS, if it was a good experience, it also makes you feel good about your Lutheran identity. You are proud to be Lutheran and a cardinal."⁴⁶ If a graduate is proud of his or her identity as a Lutheran and Christian, then they often raise their families in this same way.

These personal experiences can certainly affect graduates for the rest of their lives, and in the survey I wanted to understand more fully what kind of high school experiences these

⁴⁶ Pastor Prange Interview.

graduates were having. In survey question #6, all of the survey participants were asked, “How would you overall rank your MLS preparatory experience? (Best possible, good, satisfactory, not good, terrible)”. 19 participants responded to this question, and 3 elected to skip it. Their responses are laid out in the chart below.



	Best possible	Good	Satisfactory	Not good	Terrible	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	47.37% 9	36.84% 7	5.26% 1	5.26% 1	5.26% 1	19	1.84

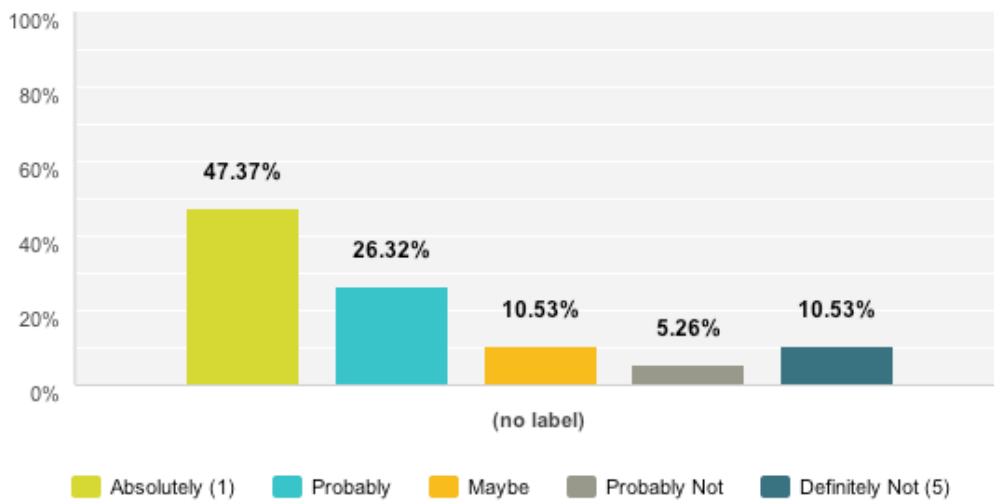
Based on these responses, over 89% of the survey participants had a “satisfactory” or better high school experience. Now, one could say that that only those who had the good experiences responded to the survey invitation. This is certainly a valid consideration. However, taking the results at face value, these responses shows that even graduates not going into the ministry are having good high school experiences that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. It has been said that the adolescent years are some of the most important for shaping a young man or

woman’s life. In speaking to many men and women who have donned the cardinal red on graduation day, their high school experiences changed them for the better.

These experiences are no doubt directly connected to the next generation of students as one can see in the next survey question. To see the correlation, I asked the survey participants in questions #6, “Would you consider sending your children to MLS for high school? (Absolutely, probably, maybe, probably not, definitely not)” Their responses are laid out in the chart below.

Would you consider sending your children to MLS for high school?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 3



	Absolutely (1)	Probably (2)	Maybe (3)	Probably Not (4)	Definitely Not (5)	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	47.37% 9	26.32% 5	10.53% 2	5.26% 1	10.53% 2	19	2.05

Based on these responses, over 73% of the participants said that there is good chance they would send their children back to MLS for high school. An addition 10% said that they would consider it, making over 83% of the responders open to the thought of their children following in the footsteps as cardinals. These are the types of numbers that will greatly affect our synod’s called workers and lay leaders. These children are and will be the next generation.

The proof of this is currently being played out in the enrollment process within the walls of MLS. In speaking with President Petermann, he said that 26 applications are already in for the

2016-2017 school year. Out of those 26 potential students, 21 of those are children or siblings of MLS graduates; one can refer to them as “legacy kids.” MLS is expecting a class of around 70 kids, and after doing a quick count within the faculty, it is not impossible that 50 legacy kids will be enrolled. These parents are strong supporters of MLS already, and they tend to be devoted to the school and send their kids back. Some view this process as a negative- the reality is that this is sustainability. This is just another benefit of the preparatory school. This is the future. This is the next generation.

Conclusion

From time to time it’s good to count our blessings. As we look around us, one of the blessings that we have in our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is a well-thought-out and well-set-up ministerial education system. Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School have the focus and purpose of training young men and women for the full-time Gospel ministry. That have successfully carried out that purpose for over 125 years each, and on average about 50% of these prep school graduates end up going on to Martin Luther College to continue their training and preparation for service in the kingdom of Christ. However, through surveys and interviews one can see that there is also great value of a preparatory high school education for those students, like my brother and many of my close friends, who didn’t go on to train for the ministry. These benefits include: 1) A Christian education, 2) Preparation for lay leadership and Christian service, 3) Continued ties to Lutheran friends and faculty, and 4) “Next Generation” benefits. All praise, glory, and honor to our God who continues to bless us through our ministerial education schools.

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