

Peace Lutheran School

Continuing by the Grace of God

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In Proverbs, God speaks of himself saying, "He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble" (3:34). Two New Testament writers, Peter and James, underscore their teaching on humility with this verse from the Old Testament.¹ We recognize that man-generated humility does not earn God's grace, but grace is wonderfully reciprocal. Grace-generated faith produces a humble heart. This humility, in turn, is rewarded with a continual shower of faith strengthening grace. Humility and grace are often found hand in hand. That is true in the history of Peace Lutheran School, a school carried on by the grace of God and humble in its work.

Peace Lutheran School² was not part of a congregation's grand plan to increase its efforts in Christian education. Peace was not established to rival the nearby elementary school of St. Peter's, Reedsburg's LC-MS church. Rather, this school grew out of the desire of determined parents to raise their children in the knowledge of the LORD. It was not that these parents didn't have a place to properly educate their children. Actually the parents already had their children enrolled in St. John's Evangelical Lutheran School in Baraboo. Their decision for a new school was a matter of convenience and availability.

1 I Peter 5:5 "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." [NIV]
James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." [NIV]

2 1400 East 8th Street, Reedsburg, WI 53959

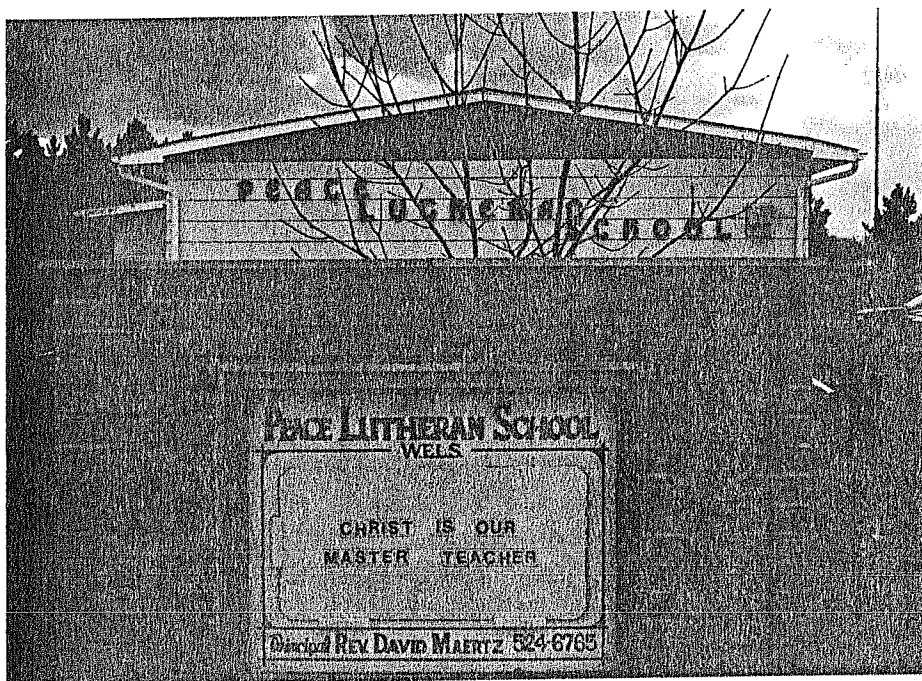
The people who founded the Peace Lutheran School Association were not within the Baraboo school district. This meant that they were not able to make use of the school buses for Baraboo. Their drive into Baraboo was a fifteen minute to half hour drive each way. Certainly it was not a big inconvenience for those determined to provide a decent education for their children; car pooling was one solution. Why would they want to build a whole new school?

Whether or not you are willing to rule out inconvenience, it does play an important part in today's society. The parents who transported their children to Baraboo were willing to do that, because their children's education was important to them. It is to their credit that they were not only thinking of themselves, but also of those who were not sending their children on account of the extra time and effort required. For many parents, when both are working, it isn't worth the extra driving *just* to send their children to a Christian day school. Having a school in Reedsburg would not only be convenient to those already taking the time to drive out of town, but it would also be available to those who saw that drive to be too much of a hassle.

The core group of parents who were eager for a new school came from four different congregations - Faith at Reedsburg, St. John's at Hillpoint, Trinity at Lime Ridge, and St. John's at Rock Springs. None of these congregations were large enough and willing enough to start a school on their own. None of the congregations were ready to join together as an association of congregations either. Though each

congregation as a separate a body was unwilling to move in the direction of starting a school, certain members in each were eager, even if it meant forming an association of parents rather than congregations.³

These parents were encouraged by the pastors of the congregations involved. Of special note was Pastor David Krenke, the minister of the dual parish at Rock Springs and Reedsburg. He was instrumental ⁱⁿ supporting their efforts and providing his spiritual guidance. He even came up with the school's name: "Peace Lutheran School." In his sermon for the opening service for Peace, Pastor Krenke explained the importance of that name. The greatest peace any person can enjoy is the peace between himself and God, that peace which was won for all people by the life and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. No greater teaching could there be for a school to



impart to its children. No greater peace is there for children to learn and to share.

Peace also represented the necessary relationship between the congregations that supported the school. If they were to be able to accomplish anything good and beneficial for the school and the students, it required a peaceful cooperation between the congregations, a cooperation that continues today.⁴

A third reason (which was not mentioned in the sermon) would be that none of the churches involved had the name "Peace." Since none of the churches were able to support the school alone and this was a joint venture on the part of their devoted members, it was important from the inception that the school be autonomous. The school was not just the responsibility of any one church, but it was desirable that the concerned parents of each congregation would feel a part of the school. The name of the school helped to illustrate that it was a separate entity, not the arm of only one church.⁵

February 3, 1980 marked the official beginning of what would become the parent association - "Peace Lutheran School Association." This was the very first meeting of the group. Elections were held. Stuart Pacl was elected the President, Larry Schara - Vice President, Marvin Holtz - Secretary, and Gerald Schulte - Treasurer. Two pastors were present as advisors: Rev. Dale Tollefson of Hill Point and Lime Ridge, and Rev.

4 Interview with Pastor David Krenke, April 23, 1995

5 Interview with Pastor David Krenke, April 23, 1995

David Krenke.⁶

On the eighth day of May, 1980, the parent association became legally incorporated as Peace Lutheran School Association, Inc.. The following were the initial directors and incorporators: Stuart Pacl, Reedsburg⁷; Larry Schara, North Freedom; Marvin Holtz, Rock Springs; Gerald Schulte, LaValle; Marvin Meyer, Hillpoint; LaVern Pepper, Loganville; David Kowalke, Rock Springs.⁸ Article three of the association's Articles of Incorporation states their purpose, "the establishment, operation and maintenance of a non-profit Lutheran elementary school in accordance with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod doctrine and practices."⁹ The parent association proceeded to do just that.

One of the first decisions they needed to make was the location of the school. Three options discussed were: the church basement of Faith Lutheran Church, renting rooms at the Methodist church, and actually building a new school. The first option was ruled out because the size of Faith and Peace were incompatible. The benefit of Faith

6 Minutes of Peace Lutheran Association, Inc., 1980-present

7 Stuart Pacl was (and is) also the registered agent of Peace Lutheran School Association Articles of Incorporation, Peace Lutheran School Association, Inc, Article 8, drafted by: Srenock & Seefeld, Ltd., 128 Fourth Ave., Baraboo, WI 53913; Mr. Seefeld, a member of the Rock Springs congregation and brother-in-law to Larry Sharra, handled all the legal work for the association; Meyer, Pepper and Kowalke were elected as directors at the meeting of March 30

8 *ibid*, Article 12
The communities listed next to the names are towns in the vicinity of Reedsburg.

9 *ibid*, Article 3

disallowing the use of its basement by the school was that the school remained autonomous. No one wanted there to be the impression that the school was only connected with Faith. Such an impression would alienate the other congregations from the new school, which in every way needed the support that came from the members of the four congregations.¹⁰

On June 8 the association was told that the second option was disallowed by the Methodist church.¹¹ The first two refusals in no way stopped the optimism on the part of the association. The idea to build a new school gained prominence once Faith agreed to give the association some of its property on which to build the school. To prevent certain legal problems, the property wasn't simply handed over for free. It cost the association a whole \$1.¹²

Having acquired property, the association kept its eye out for the most economical way of providing a school building. A trailer manufacturer near Tomah was contacted to find out if there was a used trailer that could be purchased for use as a school house. They directed the members of the building committee to a double-wide trailer that was up for sale in the Iowa Grant School District. On July 20 of the same year, a proposal was passed to offer \$20,000 for the trailer.¹³ They got their price and

10 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 24, 1995

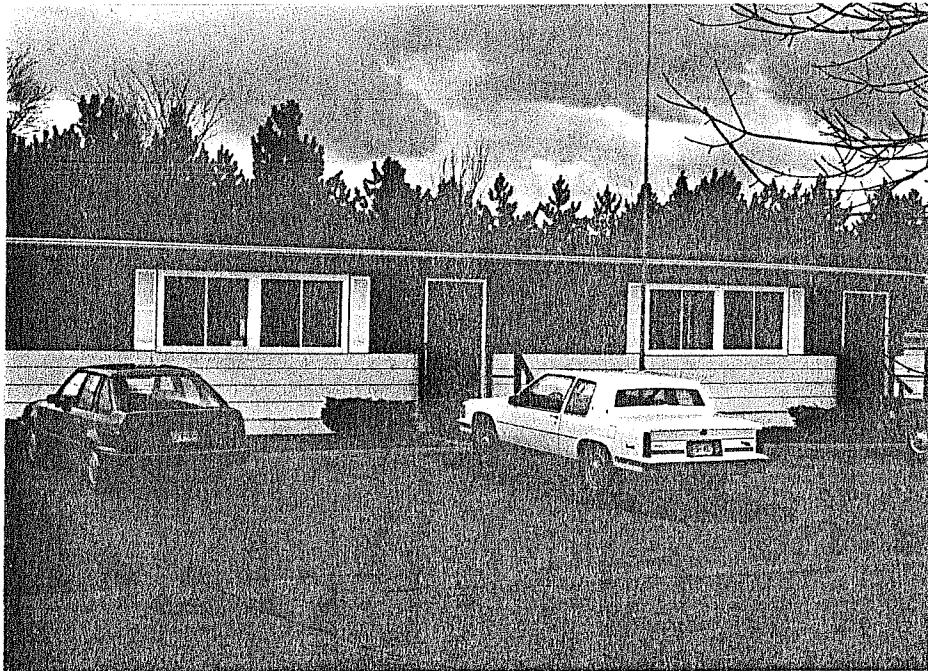
11 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

12 Interview with Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Pamela Peasall, April 17, 1995

13 Minutes of Peace Lutheran Association, 1980-present

got an estimate from the manufacturer of \$4500 to move the trailer from its location at Mt. Hope and put it onto the basement which the association would build.¹⁴

The basement was put in totally by volunteer workers. Both Larry Schara and Gerald Schulte were masons by trade. Their expertise, helpers (fellow masons¹⁵), and fellow volunteers set up the basement in time for the trailer to be placed on top of it. The trailer has worked perfectly up to this time, providing modular classrooms for the student body. The classrooms were furnished with old desks that came from schools in Rhinelander and Baraboo.¹⁶



14 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995; and the interview with Rev. David Krenke, April 23, 1995

15 Not Freemasons

16 Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

Though the association moved rapidly in 1980, it still held off an extra year before it opened and dedicated the school. The school grounds were not ready until late fall of that year, so it would not have been properly set for the beginning of the school year. Also, the association felt that it would improve their financial situation if they had another year to chip away at the debt.¹⁷ \$10,000 worth of pledges were still coming. Delaying this extra year was probably a strong reason why the school was debt free after only four years.¹⁸

The next thing on the agenda for the association of parents was the calling of a teacher. Dianne Pacl, the wife of Stuart Pacl, was called on December 10, 1980 to teach grades 1 through 8.¹⁹ Up to this point, Dianne was caring for her own family, while substitute teaching on occasion at St. John's Lutheran School in Baraboo. On March 1, 1981, the wife of Pastor Krenke was called to be the teacher for kindergarten class.²⁰ Pre-registration for classes was scheduled for April.²¹

17 To start the school, the association never had to take a loan from the bank. All of its loans (\$13,000) were private loans from friends of the association.
Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

18 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

19 Minutes of Peace Lutheran School Association, Inc., *ibid*; Stuart Pacl stepped down as chairman (July 1, 1981) to avoid a conflict of interest, since his wife was a teacher. Dianne stopped teaching after the first year, so that she could focus her attention on the upbringing of her own family. This in turn removed the conflict of interest as her husband continued to play an important role in the association. Later, in 1989, Dianne returned to teach PreK, and continues to teach in that capacity.

20 Minutes of Peace Lutheran School Association, Inc., 1980-present

21 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

Peace Lutheran School was dedicated and opened on August 9, 1981 at two in the afternoon.²² Thirty-two children made up the grades from kindergarten to eighth grade.²³ Pastor Krenke acted as the first principal of the school.²⁴ The school was off to a good start. The parents were involved and the outlook was optimistic. Certainly it was by the grace of God that the school was able to start out so well.

For the next school year, Pamela Lentz was called to teach grades three to eight, while Mrs. Krenke's call was extended to cover first and second grade. Below is a chart which lays out the changes in the school's faculty and the number of students that attended the school from

the beginning.²⁵ Peace started off with a good compliment of children. Since the school stayed around forty for the first few years, the school decided to call a principal, instead of

School Year	Enrollment		Teachers			
	K-8	PreK				
1981-1982	32		Betty Krenke (K)	Dianne Pacl	(1-8)	
82-83	38		Betty Krenke (K-2)	Pamela Lentz	(3-8)	
83-84	37		Betty Krenke (K-2)	Pamela Lentz	(3-8)	
84-85	32		Betty Krenke (K-2)	Pamela Lentz	(3-8)	
85-86	38		Susan Koepka (K-2)	Pamela Lentz	(3-8)	
86-87	31	7†	Susan Koepka (K-2)	Pamela Lentz	(3-8)	
87-88			***** Insufficient Information *****			
88-89	37	6	Pamela Lentz (K-4)	Jeff Sonnenburg	(5-8)	
89-90	33	10	Pamela Lentz (K-4)	Jeff Sonnenburg	(5-8)	
90-91	34	9	Pamela Lentz (K-4)	Jeff Sonnenburg	(5-8)	
91-92	34	10	Pamela Lentz‡ (K-4)	Steven Witt	(4-8)	
92-93	31	7	Pamela Peasall (K-4)	Steven Witt	(4-8)	
93-94	21	8	Pamela Peasall (K-4)	Marlene Gentz	(5-8)	
94-95	23	13	Pamela Peasall (K-4)	Marlene Gentz	(5-8)	

† PreK Teachers: Rebecca Hein (86-89) Dianne Pacl (89-95)
‡ Pamela Lentz married Jeff Peasall

22 Minutes of Peace Lutheran Association, Inc., 1980-present
 23 Interview with Rev. David Maertz (Faith, Reedsburg), April 21, 1995
 24 Interview with Rev. Lance Hoff (St. John's, Hill Point), April 21, 1995
 25 Chart compiled by Rev. David Maertz

requiring the local pastor to add that to his duties. The first principal called came straight from Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm. His name was Jeff Sonnenburg. Jeff was instrumental in charging up the athletic teams of Peace.²⁶ Though Peace is not a huge school, it still has had the usual sports: flag football, track, softball, basketball, and volleyball. The school team goes by the name "Cougars" with their colors being Gold and Black.²⁷ Local pastors have had the opportunity over the years to coach the co-ed teams of Peace, especially when there was no principal.

Steven Witt was the principal called after Sonnenburg. Steven was also called as a graduate from New Ulm. One difference between Steven and Jeff was immediately evident. Steven had a family. This meant that the cost of insurance on the part of the association for Steven was a bit more. That coupled with a decreasing number of students meant that the association was not able to support Mr. Witt after two years. Presently the responsibility of the office of principal has fallen into the hands of the pastor of Faith who is Pastor David Maertz.²⁸

I began this paper with the premise that Peace is a humble institution that has carried on by the grace of God. I think I am safe in calling Peace humble. It has not been a very large school, nor have I seen traces that it has ever desired to be a huge

26 Interview with Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Mrs. Pamela Peasall, April 17, 1995

27 "Peace Lutheran School Parent and Student Handbook" 1994-1995, p. 17

28 Interview with Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Mrs. Pamela Peasall, April 17, 1995

school. Peace was founded

"to assist parents in carrying out these commands (Prov. 22:6, Eph. 6:4)²⁹ of our Lord. The children at Peace will learn to know God the Father who created them, God the Son who redeemed them, and God the Holy Spirit who made them to be His temple by baptism. They will learn to live a life that is grounded in the Word of God."³⁰

The directors, teachers and supporters of the school have had one purpose: to raise the children entrusted to their care in the light of God's Word. If there are many children to serve, then Peace will be a big school. If the number ends up being small, then Peace will be small.³¹

Sadly the tendency of Peace seems to be toward the smaller scale these days. Mrs. Pacl and Mrs. Peasall reflected on the possible reasons for the shrinking number of students.³² It probably wasn't tuition. Only non-WELS members are required to pay a set tuition.³³ Parents who are members of the Synod are asked to support the school as much as they are able. They do this by making pledges at the beginning of the year.

29 Proverbs 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. [NIV]
Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. [NIV]

30 "Peace Lutheran School Parent and Student Handbook." 1994-1995, p.1,2

31 Of course, if the school gets too small, it would have to be evaluated in the light of "good stewardship."

32 Interview, April 17, 1995

33 Tuition for first child is \$1500 annually for grades 1-8 and \$750 for children in kindergarten. Parents are also expected to attend a Bible information class; "Peace

Obviously this is a system that can be taken advantage of and has been taken advantage of. I think we can conclude that the tuition is not a factor which discourages attendance on the part of WELS members.

A second reason could be the Missouri Synod school in town - St. Peter's. Simple principles of fellowship should take that school out of the picture, but some parents have forsaken principle in order to send their children to the big Christian day school in town. Another reason tied in with the above is athletics. Both the public school and St. Peter's have larger programs because they are larger schools. For the parents who have big dreams about their children's future in athletics, a little three-class room school doesn't seem to have much glory to offer.

Both teachers stood up for the Cougars. The one thing that Peace can say that the big schools can't is that everyone gets to play. Since the teams are small, the team needs everyone to play. You won't see a lot of bench warmers on the sidelines of the Cougars. With fewer players, the Cougars have to be a little bit more determined and ready to play as a team.

Another reason which fits in with the big school / small school prejudice, is that grades at Peace are combined under one teacher. Some feel that is the old-fashioned, outdated way of doing it. They would say that that teaching method just isn't as good as the modern setup of one teacher per grade.

In response the teachers pointed out that the size of the classes are still

relatively small. This provides the classroom with even a better student / teacher ratio than you would find in the public school. The students seem to enjoy being together, becoming a little family of their own. Some children like to listen into the lessons of the other classes when they should be doing their own homework. I suppose if we had our choice of what distracts our children at school, our choice would be: another lesson in which they are still learning something. Several grade classrooms are not as bad as some might make them out to be.

Other reasons rest in the congregations themselves. Lime Ridge is struggling to survive.³⁴ Hill Point has not provided many students because it is mainly in a district other than Reedsburg. The parents would have to transport their children themselves. Their district is also a small one. There is a sense of loyalty in the community which makes anyone who would take their children out of the district to go to another school seen to be a traitor.³⁵ Rock Springs is a graying congregation and doesn't have the children to supply Peace.³⁶

That leaves us with Reedsburg. To understand the situation at Faith, we have to look a little bit at the history of the church. Faith Lutheran Church came into being during the break between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod. Members of St. Peter's

34 Interview with Rev. David Maertz, April 21, 1995

35 Interview with Rev. Lance Hoff, April 21, 1995

36 Interview with Rev. David Maertz, April 21, 1995

broke away, formed Faith, and joined the WELS. Your reaction might be "Good for them!" The impression that seems to be out there is that it was not so much for doctrinal reasons that members of St. Peter's separated from their church. Rather, it seems, the members were dissatisfied with the money that St. Peter's was putting into its school. Apparently Faith was founded as an anti-school congregation.³⁷

Over the years, the pastors who have served the congregation have worked at increasing an appreciation of Christian education. These pastors were helpful in preparing the way for Peace Lutheran School. Pastor Moldenhaur, Krenke's predecessor, was known for his peace making skills, solidifying Faith's unity. When Pastor David Krenke came on the scene, the parent association was just getting underway. Krenke blessed the association with his administrative ability, organizing everything and keeping good records.³⁸

When Pastor Krenke took a call to Texas in 1985, the congregation extended a call to Pastor David Hein. Hein could be characterized as dynamic, outspoken, and very good with youth groups. His personality and talent were another glimpse of God's

37 Interviews with Rev. Gary Johnson (St. Paul's, North Freedom), Winter 1994; Rev. David Maertz, April 21, 1995; Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Mrs. Pamela Peasall, April 17; Mr. Stuart Pacl, April 24

38 Early on, the government was concerned about the school, worried that the school was organizing in order to provide a segregated school. The purpose of the school was suspect, since the association was not tied to a church, but rather a group of individuals. Pastor Krenke corresponded with the officials involved and was able to convince them that Peace planned on being a tool / arm of the church.

grace at work as He has used His servants to encourage Faith closer to a Christian education mindset.³⁹ Faith found itself calling another pastor in 1989 when Pastor Hein accepted a call to Oconomowoc, WI. They called Pastor David Maertz, who is still serving them today. He, too, has been implementing a program to heighten the awareness of the congregation of the importance of educating the children in the Word of God.⁴⁰

Though I say that there is an effort toward prioritizing education in Faith, that does not mean that they have gotten there yet. It is a long journey for a congregation to go from anti-school to pro-school. Right now the number of children attending Sunday School at Faith is growing, so much so, that the church has been making use of the classrooms at Peace to accommodate the growth of their Sunday School. On the other hand, the number of children attending Peace is growing smaller.⁴¹

The declining size of the school can be linked to one thing - a lack of devotion to Christian education by parents these days. The parents who got the school off the ground, now have all of their children through. They can support the school financially, but they wouldn't think of having more children just to fill the desks. The next generation of parents in that area simply are not minded to send their children or their

39 Interview with Mr. Stuart Pacl, April 24, 1995

40 Interview with Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Mrs. Pamela Peasall, April 17, 1995

41 Interview with Rev. David Maertz, April 21, 1995

funds. This lack of commitment is the Achilles' heel of a parent association. A parent association could go on and on as long as there are devoted parents to support its work financially and there are children to fill the seats of its school.

I'm not saying that a parent association has no benefits. It got Peace Lutheran School running, when it would not otherwise have happened. It got parents involved with their school and the education of their dear children. Evidence of the strong interaction between parents and teachers is the fact that, for as small as Peace has been, almost every year it has had one student go on to a Synodical school. When Matthew Krenke graduates, he will be the first of the students to become a minister. Jennifer Pacl, the daughter of Stuart and Dianne, has been one to already graduate from DMLC. These are the results of committed parenting / teaching.⁴²

Another benefit of the association: the parent association provided a school for several churches without putting a burden on any of the churches. In a way, Peace has always embodied Gospel motivation. Parents give what they can. No children are forced to attend the school.⁴³ No congregation is forced to support the work of Peace. People who do not have children have found their support of Peace to be their way of serving the Lord. Here, I especially have in mind the graying congregations. Although

42 Interview with Mrs. Dianne Pacl and Mrs. Pamela Peasall, April 17, 1995

43 Mrs. Peasall did mention, though, that some people have used Peace as a threat to their children. If they didn't behave, they would end up attending that private school - Peace.

they did not supply children, many of the older members of these congregations had Peace in their hearts and supported the school's work through offerings and prayers.⁴⁴ Again we see how grace worked to support Peace in humble ways.

Peace sounds like the perfect Christian day school. It would be, too, if more were dedicated to its purpose. Since the school is everyone's, the old adage can apply here, it is no ones. Without the school being any one congregation's responsibility, it is beginning to look like no ones responsibility.⁴⁵ Dr. LeDell Plath, the Associate Administrator for Parish Schools, pointed out that if the school were tied to a congregation, the survival of the school wouldn't rely so much on the enthusiasm of the parents; the bills would get paid because it was part of the church. Yet, since Peace Lutheran School hangs out there on its own, it is dependent on the devotion of the parents.⁴⁶ If that devotion disappears, the school probably will too.

It was not my intention to end this paper on a sour note, so I won't. I was impressed by Peace Lutheran School, the devotion of the few people involved. I think God has done wonderful things through the school and still is.⁴⁷ The school isn't dead

44 Interview with Stuart Pacl, April 30, 1995

45 Interview with David Maertz, April 21, 1995

46 Interview, April 30, 1995

47 When asked if there were any success stories in the history of grace, Mrs. Pacl and Mrs. Peasall responded to the effect that the children are the success stories as they leave this school, knowing who their Savior is. Working with the PreK children, Mrs. Pacl has had the privilege of bringing the Bible into parents' homes, teaching them to make use of it.

yet. Even now Faith is considering if it wants to devote itself more fully to the work of the school.⁴⁸ It would be a blessing to Peace, in my opinion, if it would become more united with its neighboring congregation. It might then rest a little more comfortably, knowing that one way or the other, the school would stay open and available to the growing community in Reedsburg. Maybe this is the way that God has chosen to continue to shower his grace on the humble school of Peace.

48 This may be a little hard in coming for Faith, since it has gone through a lot of changes lately. It has gone from a triple parish, to a dual parish under Pastor Krenke, to a single Parish under Hein. Recently for Pastor Maertz, it has built a parsonage. As the Reedsburg area has been growing, so has the church. I pray that God continues to give it growth and makes it part of the future of this church to go through one more major change, supporting Peace Lutheran School.

My thanks to the following people who helped me reproduce the history of Peace Lutheran School and Peace Lutheran School Association, Inc.:

Pastor David Krenke
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 Pastor Gary Johnson
 Pastor Lance Hoff
 Mr. Marvin Holtz
 Dr. LeDell Plath

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