

A History of God's Grace at Manitowoc Lutheran High School

Church History 3031

Daniel Foelske

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Preface

God's blessings to his church have no end. For the past 55 years God's people in the Manitowoc area have continued to be witnesses to this fact. Besides the blessings in individual congregations, God has also blessed his people in the Manitowoc area with a Lutheran High School where teenage students are able to continue to receive a Christ-centered education following their completion of their local congregation's grade school.

Yet do we continue to look at the existence of Manitowoc Lutheran High School as a blessing? Maybe we don't give it too much thought these days. Perhaps Manitowoc Lutheran High School (MLHS) has become something we take for granted. After all, by celebrating 55 years of existence, many people cannot remember a time when MLHS did not exist. It's even possible for some of the earliest students to have grandchildren attending MLHS by now.

Yet by going back and looking at the history of MLHS it becomes impossible to ignore just how great a blessing MLHS actually is. As we look back at its history it we see the Lord's hand at work, guiding, directing, and prospering the work of those who started, maintained, and expanded MLHS throughout the years. The Lord's hand is also visible as we look at the students who have graduated, who by God's grace have taken what they have learned into various occupations throughout the country, and even farther.

By looking back at the history of MLHS we see one more example of just how greatly the Lord has blessed his church. As we remember the past it is with grateful hearts that we give thanks to God for his numerous graces. As we look back at the past we are reminded once again to approach our Lord in prayer that he would continue to bless Manitowoc Lutheran High School that it may continue to be a blessing to his people.

A History of God's Grace at Manitowoc Lutheran High School

Ideas for a Lutheran high school for the Manitowoc area appear in the minutes of the Manitowoc conference as early back as February 1927. There must have been previous talk about the matter because the minutes mention that "Teacher Harmening brought up *again* the matter of a high school." However no previous reference to a high school was found in earlier minutes. ¹

Sixteen months later during a pastoral conference in June 1928, Pastor Edward Zell, the conference visitor, read a report from the district president, E. Benj. Schleuter. One of the points was about Lutheran high school. Pastor Edward Zell was appointed along with Teacher (?) Harmening, and Mr. Karl Struck to a committee to study the control and cost of upkeep of a high school. This committee was to report to the next meeting. Two decades passed before the subject of a Lutheran high school was explored in any meaningful way. The Manitowoc area was not immune to the effects of the Great Depression, and thoughts of an area Lutheran high school were put on hold. ²

On June 12, 1950 the subject of a Manitowoc high school was once again renewed at a delegate conference at First German Lutheran Church. A committee was appointed to study the possibility of establishing a Lutheran high school. The first meeting of this committee was held at First German on February 11, 1951 after "unavoidable delays." Following meetings were held by the committee at Collins, Brillion, and Newtonburg. A report was made and presented by this group to the Manitowoc Delegate Conference on July 9, 1951. At this conference session the

¹ 38. Schroeder, Morton A., "A Time Worth Remembering in the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (paper presented in Appleton, Wisconsin, April 28, 2000).

² 38. Schroeder, Morton A., "A Time Worth Remembering in the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (paper presented in Appleton, Wisconsin, April 28, 2000).

members of the Survey Committee were retained as the permanent Lutheran High School Committee. This committee worked bit by bit toward the organization of a Lutheran High School Association. On a meeting on October 19, 1952 such an organization was realized.³

Throughout the next few years various board meetings and association meetings were held. Publicity material, most notably "The Visitor," was published "in the interest of the Manitowoc Conference Lutheran High School." Little by little with God's blessing the efforts of the committees began to bear fruit. At a meeting of the Lutheran High School Association on May 13, 1956, the motion was passed by a vote of fifty to five to start a ninth grade the next fall.

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The location for the High School would be 606 State Street in Manitowoc. Permission had been given by the city council of Manitowoc to use the former Madison Grade School building. The building underwent several repairs to make it usable as a school. Heavy metal mesh window screens were made and installed on the 55 windows of the first and second floors. The window trims of the first floor and the basement windows were painted. The south entrance which was not usable was knocked apart and removed, and the stairs from the sidewalk to the schoolyard on the south side were repaired. Various other masonry work was done throughout the school as well, most notably in the boys lavatory. Railings were added and flooring was repaired. Although the use of the building had been permitted, the use of the third floor was not allowed as it was declared condemned by the Industrial Commission. Blackboards from the third floor were therefore removed and placed into classrooms on the first floor. The stairwell to

³ History of Manitowoc Lutheran High School

⁴ Rooted & Growing in Christ Since 1956: Manitowoc Lutheran High School 1956-2006 - 50th Anniversary Commemorative History

the third floor was then closed. All the floors, walls and ceilings were washed, and the halls, offices and four of the classrooms were painted. All of these repairs were done by volunteers.⁵

The first day of school was held on September 10, 1956. Fourteen “pioneer” students were enrolled for ninth grade. Four neighboring pastors lent their support and accepted temporary calls as instructors. Because no principal had accepted a call two additional part-time instructors were also needed. These six men who taught were Pastors Edwin Breiling, W. Gieschen, F. Knueppel, H.G. Kock, A. Hoekle, and K. Seim. During this first year one of the part-time instructors received a call and Pastor Samuel Kugler consented to take his place on the high school faculty. The plan for the association was for one third of the money to operate the school would come from tuition and two thirds would come from donations.

At the annual meeting of the association on November 18, 1956 the decision was made to add the tenth grade for the 1957-58 school year. On November 26, 1956 the Board of Directors called Pastor K. Seim of the Town Gibeon – Two Creeks Parish to be the principal of MLHS⁶. Pastor Seim accepted the call to serve as the first principal and was installed into his office at First German Lutheran Church on January 20, 1957.

God lead Mr. F. Manthey to accept the call as the second full-time instructor for the second year of operation and was installed at Bethany Lutheran Church in Manitowoc on September 6, 1957. The enrollment for the second year included twenty ninth graders and sixteen tenth graders. Throughout the newsletters (still known as “The Visitor”) emphasis was continually placed on the idea that *Christian* education was worth the cost and expenses of maintaining a high school. The association members agreed, and on February 2, 1958 at the

⁵ 2. “The Visitor Vol.1, No. 3,” December 1956.

⁶ History of MLHS

association meeting at St. John's Lutheran Church, Two Rivers, the decision was reached to add the junior year to the high school.⁷

The third year saw numerous changes for MLHS. Enrollment almost doubled from thirty-six to sixty-five. Two additional full-time instructors were added. Joining the faculty were Mr. Elwood Lutze and Mr. Alvin Spaude who were installed to their position on September 14, 1958 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Liberty⁸. This brought the faculty up to four full-time teachers and three part-time teachers. Two additional classrooms and a science room were readied. The home economics and library rooms were improved. The chapel was also furnished with pews, altar, pulpit, and lectern donated by Grace Lutheran Church, a Norwegian Synod church in rural Manitowoc.

It was also during this school year that the school chose the *Lancer* as its mascot and the *Lancet* as its school newspaper. A Lancer was a soldier, and the name was chosen because the Christian students at MLHS are soldiers of the cross, always ready to fight sin and Satan with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God⁹.

On February 1, 1959 at a special meeting of the high school association held at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Two Rivers, the positive vote of the association delegates made it official that the high school would be adding on the fourth year. The fourth year's enrollment saw another increase to one hundred five students. The course division for this fourth school year was listed as: Pastors' course, seven; teachers' course, thirty-eight; pre-college course, twenty-

⁷ History of MLHS

⁸ History of MLHS

⁹ Rooted & Growing in Christ Since 1956: Manitowoc Lutheran High School 1956-2006 - 50th Anniversary Commemorative History

nine; commercial course, eighteen; and general course thirteen. It is interesting to see that a breakdown of course division shows a very strong emphasis placed on preparing many of the students to enter the public ministry.

Mr. Heine Schnitker accepted the call to be the fifth full-time teacher and was installed on October 4, 1950 at St. John's Lutheran Church at Newtonburg. Pastors Samuel Kugler, Edwin Breiling, and Theodore Stern, as well as Mrs. Arno Nimmer were among the part-time staff. Many individuals assisted with their time and talents as part-time instructors during these yearly years of MLHS.

This fourth year began a tradition of singing the MLHS Christmas Concert at several area WELS churches during December. This tradition continued for several years. Basketball and baseball were added as interscholastic sports during this year. Basketball practices and games were at the Vocational School, and baseball practices and games were held at Red Arrow Park.

The story is told that the reason for the school colors being red and gray is that the local public high school, Manitowoc Lincoln, was getting new uniforms. The Lincoln Ships school colors were red and white. MLHS was able to acquire the old uniforms from Manitowoc Lincoln, but the white was a dirty and faded gray color. Thus red and gray became the school colors for MLHS¹⁰. The fourth year also saw the addition of the school yearbook, *Excalibur*. The "Pioneer" class graduated with seventeen members. The graduation service was held at Bethany in Manitowoc.

By this time it was becoming clear that the Madison School Building would soon be unable to meet the needs of the growing student body. At the November 13, 1960 association

¹⁰ Story told by Jean Schwalbee(Class of 1972), head of the MLHS Archive committee.

meeting it was decided to purchase the Sundt property, a property just over seven and one-half acres on the northwest side of Manitowoc, and to negotiate an option on three or five acres of the adjoining Fricke property. The Sundt property was purchased at a price which was almost a “gift.” The association went ahead with the purchase although many were skeptical about whether the small size property would be able to support a high school campus with all the activities that they hoped to add. Within the following year, the man who owned some adjoining land died and his estate needed to be settled. The association purchased the fifteen acre plot at the reasonable price of \$9,500. Although the buildings would not be built for several more years, MLHS was now a 22 acre campus.

The fifth year saw a change of leadership as Pastor Loren Schaller became the new principal. Enrollment continued to rise to one hundred eighteen, with a graduating class of twenty-two. The association newsletter which had been called the *Visitor* now became the *Clarion*.

The next year (1961-62) saw the addition of Richard Winter and Delores Lauersdorf as the sixth and seventh full-time teachers. During the following year (1962-63) the MLHS band was started with twenty members as well as the first MLHS football team with twenty-three members. The football practices were held east of the Madison school in the area which is now Maritime drive, and home games were played at Municipal Field. Much of the equipment in the early years was donated by various organizations and sporting goods companies.

In 1964 a building committee, consisting of men of various trades and crafts and from various congregations, was authorized and formed. Contracting numerous architects, it studied

building plans and considered ways to fund a building project. The firm of Perc Brandt & Son, of Manitowoc was selected and engaged to design the new building.

It was also at this time that necessary changes to the Association Constitution were adopted to prepare for the formation of a Federation of congregations to take the place of the Association of members. This change would not be fully realized for several more years.

The 1966-67 school year was an interesting and exciting year. The first half was spent at the Madison School, and the second half at the new Manitowoc Lutheran High School. The gymnasium overflowed with parents and friends at the dedication service.

MLHS hosted the basketball LIT tournament in the new gym just six weeks after moving in. The backboards arrived with a week to spare thanks to many volunteers rescuing them from a snowstorm in Chicago. The following year (1967-68) was the first year for a school play, and in the following year (1968-69) MLHS hosted the seventh annual WELS Band Festival for the first time. This was also the first year for the Lancer Singers, MLHS's swing choir group.

The 1968-69 school year was the year which began a Federation of congregations. The required thirteen congregations accepted the Federation Constitution and the first joint meeting of the Association and Federation Boards was held. The beginning of the 1968-69 school year was also the first year for enrollment to break two hundred after slowly approaching it over the last three years from one hundred ninety-four, to one hundred ninety-five, to one hundred ninety-seven. The two hundred mark was broken decisively with an enrollment of two hundred thirty students.

MLHS continued to grow until two years later (1972-73) enrollment hit three hundred eighteen. During the 1972-73 school year tuition was \$300 for a WELS student and \$175 for

each additional student from the same family, and \$450 for non-WELS students. MLHS was able to acquire used desks, tables, and chairs from the Manitowoc County Normal School, and science equipment from the Sheboygan County and the Door/Kewaunee County Teachers' Colleges.

The 1973-74 school year was a year that saw more changes to property of MLHS. The plot of land between county road R and the west leg of Lancer Circle, the Weyer property, became a part of the MLS campus, and the former Fricke Estate north of Westwood Drive was sold. Wildwood Drive and Lancer Circle were also paved during this school year.

The 1975-76 school year once again marked a change in leadership. Elwood Lutze served at acting principal until Pastor David Worgull accepted the call to become the third principal of MLHS in November 1975. Additional library equipment was purchased from the New Hosten Library. MLHS held a celebration of its twentieth anniversary in February of 1976. This was also an exciting year for the MLHS football team which went undefeated, and did not allow any conference team to score on them.

Things continued to go well for the MLHS athletic teams as MLHS became a member of WISAA the following year (1976-66). The next year (1977-78) in the first full year in WISAA, MLHS sent both its football and basketball teams to the state championships. Both came back with second place.

By 1978 preliminary plans were started for expansion. Bids for the addition came to \$589,808, with an additional \$5,000 to enlarge the parking lot and \$3,666 to build the athletic field. Gene Maloney and Associates, of Manitowoc was named architect of the new addition. The addition was completed the following year and dedicated on February 1, 1981.

The 1980-81 school year saw the addition of several new programs at MLHS. Color guard and flag bearers for the marching band were started as well as varsity wrestling. Publication of the academic honor roll also began. Pastor Philip Jahnke, a teacher since the 1972-73 school year was called to his eternal rest in May of 1981 after a heart attack.

In the 1982-83 the girls track team took first at state and would take first again the following year in 1983-84 and again a third year in a row in 1984-85. The 1983-84 school year saw several other exciting events. A new principal, Pastor Karl Peterson, was called to be the fourth principal of MLHS. MLHS also hosted its first foreign exchange student. Ingmar Niemann from Sweden was only the first on many foreign exchange students. This year also saw the beginnings of a pilot program of "Independent Study" to provide correspondence classes for students wishing to study subjects not offered at MLHS.

In 1985-86 the Student Council brought a request to the MLHS faculty to allow student dancing as social events. This request would not be approved until 1990-91 when dancing as a social function at MLHS was approved with specific guidelines.

Around this time enrollment decreased. As MLHS celebrated its thirtieth anniversary (1986-87), it had the lowest enrollment since 1968-69 with only two hundred twenty-four students. Student enrollment throughout the seventies and eighties had remained relatively steady. Breaking the three hundreds in the early seventies was followed by mid to high two hundreds with occasional breaks into the three hundreds until the mid eighties. Following its low point, enrollment increased to the mid two hundreds over the next several years and was back in the three hundreds in the 1992-93 school year. From the 1994-95 school year MLHS continued to break the three hundreds for nine straight years, with the 1998-99 enrollment of three hundred

eighty-one being the largest enrollment of MLHS's history. Since the 2003-04 school year enrollment has remained in the high to mid two hundreds.

The 1988-89 school year saw the addition of several new classes including Spanish, Family and Consumer Education, and Art classes. Wendy Stuebs became the first MLHS student to be a foreign exchange student in another country. She went to India. The following year (1989-90) Jennifer Brodtke spent the year in Brazil, and the following year (1990-91) Tom Habermann spent six months in Australia.

In 1991-92, Dr. George LaGrow became the fifth principal of MLHS. The following summer the Northern Wisconsin District Convention was held at MLHS. Throughout the next couple years the MLHS students would show tremendous capability in sports. In 1991-92 the girls volleyball team went to the WISAA state meet. In the 1992-93 year the volleyball team won the FVCC (Fox Valley Christian Conference) championship and the WISAA regional title. In 1992-93 the wrestling team finished as co-champions in the FVCC. In 1993-94 the wrestling team finished first in the FVCC and the girls track team took first place in the FVCC and the WISAA state meet.

In 1994-95 a cross country club and a soccer club were started. The football team went to state. The following year, 1995-96, the football team again went to state, the girls softball team went to state, and the wrestling team went undefeated and captured the FVCC title and was the WISAA Region 2 Champions, sending eleven of thirteen wrestlers to state. The wrestling team would win both the FVCC conference and WISAA region 2 championships the 1996-97, and was conference champ again in the 1997-98 year as well. In 1997-98 the boys cross country team finished first in the FVCC meet and won the conference title. The boy's basketball team

would go on to win the conference championship, LIT tournament, and become the Region 2 champ. They would continue to dominate the conference and be the conference champs for five straight years, several of them with undefeated seasons.

In 1996, Kurt Troge took over the principal position at MLHS becoming the sixth principal of MLHS. By 1998-99 MLHS had a record enrollment of three hundred eighty-one. This size enrollment was stretching the limits of the MLHS campus. Several other parts of the building were also in need of repair and upgrades. A site development committee was developed to evaluate the facility needs of MLHS. Tuition reached \$3,800 for a family's first child.

In October of 2000, Robert Richardson, the development director of MLHS, suffered a heart attack and was called to his eternal home. The following year (2001-02) Kurt Troge became the interim development director, and was replaced as principal by Dennis Steinbrenner. The terrorist attack of the World Trade Centers will forever remain in the memories of the MLHS students from that time, as the week of the attacks was the week that they were celebrating homecoming.

During the 2002-02 school year Kurt Troge was diagnosed with cancer. Scott Reinhard was called to the position of development director in his place. On April 1, 2004, ground was broken for Phase I of the building expansion area. Hoffman Construction Management was contracted to build the addition. This expansion would include a new commons area that was dedicated in the fall of 2004. However, in May of 2004, Kurt Troge was called to his heavenly home.

By the spring of 2006 Hoffman Construction Management was again contracted to begin Phase II of the construction project. This project would include redoing music and choir rooms and renovating several stairwells. This building project has since been completed¹¹.

The 2009-10 school year was the first year that MLHS began to actively recruit foreign students to come to study at MLHS. The year started with eight foreign students and ended with nine. Four were from South Korea, three from China, and one from Germany, with a fifth South Korean student joining later in the year.

It has only been by God's grace that Manitowoc Lutheran High School has survived and flourished for fifty-five years. By looking at the history we see the Lord's guiding and blessing hand at work, providing exactly what the school needed when it needed it; whether it be instructors, grounds and buildings, or financial support from members. May the Lord continue to prosper MLHS that it may continue to proclaim his name and wonders to the next generation.

¹¹ There is a gap in the sources for a few of these most recent years, so an exact date is unknown.

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