

*The Continuing Saga of the Struggles and Successes
of a Small Area Lutheran High School
Continuing in God's Guidance at Nebraska Lutheran*

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“Assisting parents and congregations by providing Christian training in the skills and values necessary for loyal, lifelong service to Jesus Christ.”

So reads the mission statement of Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School (NELHS). Mission statements are a fairly new trend in our churches and our schools touching off different business and management principles. The mission statement is designed to state the focus and purpose of a particular organization. NELHS’ mission statement gives a clear and concise picture of what this high school is all about. There are three words in this mission statement that help introduce the purpose of NELHS, assisting, training and service.

Assisting Since the first students enrolled in 1979 and to this day, NELHS has strove to assist parents and congregations in the education and maturation process of young Christians. A boarding school from the outset, NELHS has always recognized the importance of assisting not supplanting the role of parents and congregations.

Training NELHS was started to provide for the members of the Nebraska District an opportunity for Christian education. Christian education of course has two very important and congruent focuses—education and Christian training. While at times hampered by a small staff and resources, NELHS has worked throughout the years to provide the broadest and best education it could. Despite these common obstacles experience by almost all of our synod’s smaller schools, NELHS has for a long time shown excellence in the educating of young minds. ACT scores of students throughout the years have shown this to be true. More importantly all things at NELHS have revolved around the center of our Christian lives, that is our Savior.

Daily chapel services, religion as part of the curriculum and Christian fellowship form the basis of this training, but it is hard to confine the Christian training to a just a few activities. As is the case for our lives as Christians, “all things are done to the glory of God.”

Serving Service is really the purpose of the training of young Christians in which NELHS assists. Students are being trained for our Savior’s service for whatever vocation they may find and fulfill. One oft-mentioned accomplishment of the school is that NELHS has sent a higher percentage of graduates on to study for the ministry than any other WELS area Lutheran High School¹. This of course does not devalue the numerous blessings God has provided for his kingdom through graduates who have gone into secular careers. The present and future lay leaders of numerous congregations throughout the Nebraska District have continued their Christian training at NELHS. This area in particular has been a benefit for the whole district as was stated already back in 1988, “an ever-growing pool of NELHS alumni holding membership throughout the congregations of the district are all things which help to make NELHS a common cause and unifying factor among our churches.”²

Throughout its nineteen years of existence and the many years of formation, NELHS has continued to struggle with two of the common problems found in just about any of our synod’s area Lutheran high schools: faculty turnover and finances. One does not have to look for very long in just about any one of the different publications coming out of NELHS or in regard to NELHS to find statements referring to these two areas. Just by reading through one year of the proceedings of the Nebraska District one finds the following statements:

“Financial support continues to be the determining factor in how much of a blessing NELHS can be in our midst.”
“Because of financial restraints, this year’s budget is a decrease . . .”

¹ NELHS Building for Christ promotion pamphlet p. 3

² Nebraska District Convention 36th Biennium Proceedings p. 54

“As NELHS continues to go through a time of restraint and borrowed money because of underfunding of the budget . . .”

“We must work to eliminate the outstanding indebtedness at NELHS. The school must return to a sound financial footing in order to continue operation in the future.”

“ . . . the indebtedness which had risen through bank and member loans to a total of over \$700,000.”

“New faces on the faculty will again be the case for this coming school year.”³

On top of these ubiquitous problems NELHS has in the past few years really started to struggle with an image problem, namely its facilities and/or location. These problems are ones that seriously challenge the future of this high school.

So, why a paper on NELHS? The story of NELHS is indeed interesting enough on its own, but there are a few personal connections for me. I was privileged to have an opportunity to be a part of the unique struggles and successes of a small area Lutheran high school as a one-year emergency tutor. During just that one year I got to see each one of these struggles up close and personal. I was one of four new members on the faculty. There were occasional paychecks delayed. But the most prominent issue was the whole matter of the need for new facilities and possibly the need for a new location. This may be the most vital time in the history of the school and therefore a good time for evaluation and examination of its history perhaps gaining insight on where it may lead.

Formation of NELHS

Although NELHS is still a relatively young high school (next school year will mark its twentieth in existence), its history traces all the way back to the middle 1940's. It was in 1945 that official discussion of a high school in the Nebraska District began. In the early years it was thought that an academy would be established for the specific purpose of preparing students for

³ Nebraska District Convention 36th Biennium Proceedings pp. 54-57

the public ministry. In 1952 at the 18th biennial convention of the Nebraska District an official Academy Committee was inaugurated. The committee began meeting shortly after this.

This committee quickly set about trying to find a sight for the academy (NLA). From 1954 to 1956 the following sites were considered: York, Norfolk, Lincoln, Grand Island and North Platte. In a vote taken at the 1956 district convention Grand Island was chosen as the academy site. In the following year, a thirty-three acre lot was purchased (\$21,000) in Grand Island. Just when things looked like they were all coming together, at the synod convention in 1959 the request to begin construction and call a president was rejected. “This action marked a noticeable change in Synod’s desire for an academy in the Nebraska District. From here on, Synod began to lose interest in the project.”⁴

This led to some hard feeling and harsh words between those in favor of the academy from within the district and those in synod opposed to it. In 1965 when the deed on the land was losing its tax-exempt status, note the following exchange between Pastor W. F. Wichmann, Chairman of the NLA Board of Regents and Pastor Harold Eckert, Executive Secretary of the Synod Board of Trustees:

Wichmann: “Who owns the Grand Island site—the Synod or the Nebraska District? Will the Board of Trustees pay back a reasonable rate of interest on the money it took from the NLA fund to pay the Grand Island taxes? Is this NLA fund being used by the Trustees with permission from the Nebraska District?”

Eckert: “The deed is in the name of the WELS. The Nebraska District could not hold title to this property since actually the Nebraska District is no legal entity, . . . terrible thing, isn’t it, to be living and yet not existing according to law . . . The Board of Trustees has no intention of paying interest on this money which it is using to pay taxes . . . I am awaiting the roar from the West.”

Wichmann: “Here is your grade based on your letter: Composition (spelling and sentence structure) - A, Stewardship Integrity - F.”⁵

⁴ Forty Years of God’s Guidance p. 9

⁵ *ibid* p. 13

The tide had clearly turned from the initial interest in a synod-supported academy. The Academy Committee dissolved in 1969, and the land was sold in 1970.

While these events were a crushing blow, it certainly did not quell the interest in a high school for the district. Already in 1971 the district was considering buying the vacant John Pershing College in Beatrice, Nebraska. In 1975 NELHS obtained legal status as a corporation. In that same year, the Board of Directors put in a bid for the John F. Kennedy College of Wahoo. The bid of \$250,000 was rejected. Land was offered up in the Norfolk area that could be used as long as no debt was incurred in the building. Many however felt that in order for the school to start, it had to start in existing buildings. They simply could not afford to build a whole new high school.⁶ It was clear that NELHS would find just a spot soon, so the association began to extend calls for professors and an administrator in 1976.

Soon after this time a high school campus in Waco became available in 1977 when the public school in town shut down and combined with another public high school. The property was appraised at \$600,000 and included two classroom buildings, a gym, a shop and one and one half blocks of land. On April 15, 1977, the NELHS Association purchased the facility for the bargain price of \$38,000. The original intent was to open the high school already in the fall of 1978 for ninth grade only. The plan did not fully come together so the high school was delayed another year. During this year plans were set in motion to begin construction of dormitory facilities.

The Wonder Years 1979-1985

After over 30 years of official work toward starting a high school in the Nebraska District, NELHS began with an opening service on August 28, 1979. This was a fitting beginning for all involved as it was recognized that it was only through the blessings of a

gracious God that any of this was possible. Nineteen students in total were enrolled in the freshman and sophomore classes. The faculty was composed of three full-time and one part time teacher.

In the first few years at NELHS, the high school experienced rather rapid growth. With this growth came different areas of change. Already by the 1981-82 school year, the first year with all four classes on campus, the enrollment had reached seventy-three. The faculty was composed of nine part-time and full-time instructors and two dormitory house father/mother. Within two more years the enrollment was at 110. The budget had grown from a mere \$170,000 in 1980-81 to \$416,500 for the 1983-84 school year. During these early years of the school the Board of Control of NELHS also underwent some change. Originally a six member board it had blossomed into a sixteen member board by 1985. These sixteen men were to come from each geographical region of the district with representation according to communicant strength of that region.⁷

Along with this growth in the size of the faculty and board, growth in enrollment and growth in budget came the foreboding cloud of debt at the weighty sum of \$650,000. Despite this indebtedness the outlook for the school appeared quite bright. For at the end of his paper on NELHS, Freese writes, "NELHS has been *thriving and enjoying growth and stability*. By God's grace the members of the NELHS Association have consistently opened their hearts to provide the necessary funds to operate the school."⁸ (emphasis mine) I chose to emphasize those words because in the years to come I believe we will rather quickly and easily see a different outlook regarding the school. For a more thorough examination of the founding and early years of

⁶ Interview with Earl Heidtke

⁷ Nebraska District Convention 35th Biennium Proceedings p. 72

⁸ Forty Years of God's Guidance p. 29

NELHS, one is encourage to read Stuart Freese's "Forty Years of God's Guidance" that can be found in the file of church history papers at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Growing Pains 1986-1996

1986-1987

It is fortunate to see that through the years the tension stated previously between the Nebraska District and Synod quickly subsided. We see quite early on in the school's history an emphasis on preparing young men and women for our synod's worker training schools. The graduating class of 1986 (twenty-nine total) sent nine students to Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) and one student to Northwestern College (NWC).

Special High School Sundays were set aside to help support the work of the school and offset some of the different operating expenses. These met with a rather high degree of success and helped return the schools operating budget to the black. It was stated "this is truly a great blessing from our God in that it marks the first time in our school's history we will either meet or come very close or possible surpass the budgeted income total from district support."⁹ The matter of debt retirement still loomed large as total indebtedness stood at \$670,151. Most of that was owed in member loans at 7% interest .

The 1986 school year opened with an enrollment of eighty-eight students. A look at enrollment at just about any of our area Lutheran high schools reveals different peaks and valleys. A look at the enrollment numbers by class indicates that NELHS was approaching one of those valleys. The numbers by class were 29 in the senior, 22 in the junior, 22 in the sophomore and 15 in the freshman. This indicated an alarming trend for the future. The drop in enrollment brought many different affects. One significant change for the students was in the area of athletics as NELHS would be dropped in class from C2 to D1 for the following school

year. This has special significance in the state of Nebraska because D1 schools are eight-man football schools. Gone was eleven-man football until the 90's. This of course also affected with what schools NELHS would compete in all areas of student life including athletics, but also drama, speech, math, choir and band.

One area of student life where NELHS students have excelled and have continued to take the opportunity to display their God-given gifts has been in the area of music. The music program at the school has a fine reputation not only in the area, but also throughout the synod for consistently producing fine choirs and musicians. For this school year the band numbered forty-two, almost half the student body. It was noted by one individual who had heard both that NELHS' pep band sounded better than the University of Nebraska's.¹⁰

There were other positives to highlight for the school year, but evidently criticism of the school was growing. In a student written article in the same issue quoted above a student addressed these negatives pointing out many of the positives of life at NELHS. The following statements are all from this article:

Some know or hear of one bad incident or weak point of the high school and immediately think it is not such a great school. Others feel because it is an "area" Lutheran high school it can't be as good as our synod-run schools, *especially because of its location.* (emphasis mine)

The school is here to give the children of these congregations a Christ-centered secondary education.

Although the school is making big improvements each year, the enrollment doesn't show this.

There are however many positive aspects of the school that can and should be accentuated. For one, the school has a superior music program.

The academic program at NELHS is also excellent.

This year's average ACT composite score was 22.7. Compare this score with the national average of 18.6 and Nebraska's average of 19.5.

⁹ Nebraska District Convention 35th Biennium Proceedings p. 72

¹⁰ The Shield March 1987 p 2

One final aspect of school that is often overlooked is that people develop close friends here. The closeness experienced here makes it just that much easier to take that big step of living in the dormitory away from the family.¹¹

The faculty on campus for that year was as follows: Earl Heidtke – Administrator, Rev. Paul Birsching, Beverly Bornschlegel, Richard Everts, Gene Jaeger, Donna Kaye, Rev. Norval Kock, Gary Miller, Anne Otte, Paul Rakos, and Gerald Zeamer. Pastor Mark Bartsch accepted the call to be Dean in February of 1987.

1987-1988

The 1987-88 school year brought new faces to the campus, not only in the incoming freshman class but also in the faculty. Mr. Richard Everts one of the original faculty members accepted a call over the summer to St. Croix Lutheran High School. Gone also were Rev. Paul Birsching and Gerald Zeamer as tutors and dormitory supervisors to be replaced by Phil Petermann and Rev. David Martin. New to the staff in the science department was Jeff Spiaser with a one-year call.

Pastor Kock who had been at NELHS since 1983 and would end up serving eleven years at NELHS, looks back on these years of growing pains with fond memories.

“My family and I still think of our years in Waco and at NELHS with much love in our hearts. It’s where we ‘grew up.’ My family grew up there, enjoying all the niceties of small-town living. My wife and I grew up there (sort of) as husband and wife. And I grew up there as a minister, learning from the good and bad along the way. It was truly a struggle, in that the school faced many difficult challenges. But it was also a joy.”¹²

The joy would come from the fact that despite the struggles with facilities or lack of them, the whole school was a family centered on Christ. That was and is quite clearly the strength of the

¹¹ *ibid* p 2

¹² Written response to questions from Rev. Norval Kock

school. One story that he tells gives a picture of what life was like serving during these years at NELHS always trying to make the best of every situation.

I can still recall lining the football field before games on my hands and knees using little paint rollers to follow a string. That's right! Some volunteers, including my family, and I would roll lines across the field (they were really straight!). Why? Because we didn't have a nice sprayer to do that job. The one we did have would always "explode" and get clogged up. And we didn't have the money to get a new one."

It is no surprise then that financial matters were again at the forefront of news concerning the school during this school year. Added attention spawned a new program set to address this issue. During the summer of 1987 St. Paul's of Norfolk began the program, entitled "Be a Friend to NELHS," to end the debt of NELHS which was now over \$700,000. It was a five-year program designed to raise \$200,000 in members' offerings the first year with \$125,000 each of the following four years. The Lord in his grace moved an anonymous donor to give a gift of \$100,000 in matching funds for the first year of the drive.¹³ This program was accepted by the school's board of directors and by the members of the high school association. It was started in November of 1987.

The lower enrollment of previous years was shown in the smaller numbers of the graduating class for 1988, nineteen seniors graduated that spring.

On a lighter note, those involved with the school were using creating ways to raise money for the school. Mark Renner who was a graduate of the school in 1986 took pledges from members of his home church, St Paul's Norfolk, and rode his bike from Norfolk to Waco and to raise \$1800 for the school.

1988-1989

¹³ Nebraska District Convention 36th Biennium Proceedings p. 56

Noticing the dwindling numbers in enrollment, NELHS did not sit idly by. A recruitment committee had been formed under the leadership of Pastor Gerald Free. It was led by Pastor Mark Voss of Lincoln. Also on the committee at this time were Pastor Kurt Ebert, Teacher Don Kolander, Teacher Joel Mattek, Mr. Leonard Wasserman and Mr. Brian Hemphill. It is interesting to note that not one of these individuals was a called worker from the high school. The committee dedicated many long hours in the development of different recruitment tools. God blessed the efforts of these men and the many others involved with the recruitment process in a visible way in the new school year. There were thirty-six new students on campus in the fall, thirty-two of them in the freshman class. Total enrollment numbered 100. Twenty seniors would graduate in the spring.

Significant change again occurred on the faculty as Paul Rakos, head of the excellent music department, accepted a call to Manitowoc Lutheran High School. Daniel Neubauer was called as the new music teacher. Phil Petermann completed one year as dormitory supervisor and returned to the assignment committee. Daniel Johnson was assigned from DMLC as the new dormitory supervisor. Perhaps the biggest change and the most strenuous was when Pastor Mark Bartsch took a call to Renville, Minnesota. The dean position would remain vacant throughout the school year.

The first year of "Be a Friend to NELHS" surpassed its goal and totaled \$218,477 in total gifts given. The debt had been greatly reduced, but for operating budget, per communicant association member giving for the year was only \$35 and needed to be \$42. Despite relatively low enrollment numbers from Colorado congregations, nine this year and 11 the previous, talk of a Denver area Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School (RMLHS) continued to grow. The

potential RMLHS and NELHS recognized the need for the two to communicate and cooperate in the goal of a Christ-centered education for the youth of the district.

Looking through the student newspapers and minutes from the Board of Control one big issue for the students was whether they could have dances on campus or not. It was voted they could. This was just a small sign of the changing times and the changing image of NELHS. Perhaps a more concrete example of the change was a letter by Administrator Earl Heidtke. In this letter he addressed the members of the association on the matter of change. The thing that cannot change is the school's focus and basis on God's word and our Savior. What may change are the school size and the physical plant.¹⁴ Already at this time the need for better facilities in Waco was recognized. Ten years had passed since the school first began, and needs were changing.

1989-1990

The past biennium has seen some significant changes in the NELHS faculty.¹⁵ Rather than list the changes it is probably best to get a complete list. The faculty for the school year was the following: Earl Heidtke – administrator, Dan Johnson and Rev. Timothy Satorius – tutors, Sandra Arndt, Beverly Bornschlegel, Gene Jaeger, Donna Kaye, Rev. Norval Kock, Daniel Neubaur, Anne Otte and Jeff Spiaser. There was still a vacancy at the position of dean. Mr. Heidtke listed it as one of the more trying experiences that he experienced in his years there, especially how it affected everyone on staff.¹⁶

Enrollment numbers dipped to a recent low, starting enrollment was eighty-five but the school year finished with eighty students and nineteen seniors graduating. The demographics for the total enrollment show the widespread base of congregations and individuals that NELHS

¹⁴ Update February 1989

¹⁵ Nebraska District Convention 37th Biennium Proceedings p. 47

continued to serve. Nebraska 58, Colorado 9, Oklahoma 7, South Dakota 2, Missouri 2, Utah 2, Wisconsin 1, Idaho 1, Washington 1, Brazil 1 and Puerto Rico 1.

Reading through the student profiles of each graduating senior it was interesting to note the continued emphasis and appreciation by the students for the friendships they had formed in their years at NELHS, not only with other students, but also with the entire NELHS family. Perhaps even more startling were the answers to the question, "What would you like to change about NELHS?" Not one response mentioned location.¹⁷ Facilities and equipment did need some change. The school bus threw a rod and needed to be repaired, and the re-occurring problem of termites in the boys' dorm was addressed at a cost of \$2,250. In April Earl Heidtke moved to York to open up his home as the new dean's residence. Pastor Ray Beckmann of St. John's Longmont, Colorado had accepted the call and would move in the summer time.

One final change of note for this school year was the restructuring of the Board of Directors. The NELHS association was divided into nine regions. Six of these regions, located nearest to NELHS, would provide one layman and one called worker to serve on the board. The other three regions in outlying areas would provide one board member, either layman or called.¹⁸

In the world of sports, one headline from the Shield caught my attention. Without any sarcasm intended, the article stated the Lady Knights hoops team had finished the year with four wins and eleven losses. "That was tied for the winningest season ever!!"¹⁹ Competing in athletics with a small student body would be a constant struggle at NELHS. One of the coaches put it this way:

¹⁶ Interview with Earl Heidtke

¹⁷ Various Shield issues for 1989-90

¹⁸ Nebraska District Convention 37th Biennium Proceedings p. 47

¹⁹ Shield April 1990

The things that normally bring “esteem” to teenagers, such as success in athletics, were often hard fought. We were doing well many times just to be competitive with others. I coached football there for ten years . . . and we had only one season with a winning record. Basketball never had a winning record . . . Coaches would pour heart and soul into their work, often to see their teams struggle against better competition. But again, the “underdog” spirit can be a rewarding one.²⁰

At many schools, such a lack of accomplishment would be viewed as a statement on the worth of the school. Perhaps some did feel that way about NELHS, but many recognized the greatest purpose the school was serving. It was demoralizing for the students, “but the Christ-centered atmosphere would offset much of those feelings.”²¹

1990-1991

A new dean was not surprisingly the only change in staff. Patrick Miller was assigned from DMLC to replace outgoing tutor, Daniel Johnson. Also Donna Kaye who had served for eight years on the faculty, specifically in the math department and coaching, had accepted a call to Lake Mills, Wisconsin. Kathy Radue was assigned from DMLC to fill the vacant position. New faces on campus included thirty-three new students for a total of ninety-three. Fifteen seniors would graduate in the spring.

The budget for the 90-91 school year was set which continued the freeze on teachers’ salaries from April 1989. “Maintaining the salary freeze much longer has become a concern for the Board since the longer we go without an increase the farther from Synod code we get.”²² Further financial struggles existed in the “Be a Friend to NELHS” debt retirement drive. After strong initial support, in its third year “the amount given at this point (\$26,662) is about 18% of

²⁰ Written response to questions from Rev. Norval Kock

²¹ *ibid*

²² Nebraska District Convention 37th Biennium Proceedings p. 48

the goal for this year of the drive.”²³ Encouragement was made to continue to keep the school in members’ minds and prayers and to thank the Lord for the many blessings he had provided.

1991-1992

With the new school year came the new changes in the faculty staff. Mr. Gene Jaeger, Mr. Daniel Neubauer and Tutor Timothy Satorius left NELHS to serve the Lord in other fields. The Lord provided Mr. Timothy Malchow and Jonathan Pasbrig from last year’s DMLC graduating class to fill the vacancies in the math and music departments, and Steven Raddatz was assigned from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) to serve as tutor.²⁴

There was a major change in the appearance of the campus, as the demolition of the three-story classroom building began. This was by far the most prominent building on campus, but due to structural problems it was necessary for the building to be destroyed. Not only was this the most prominent building on campus, in this town of 211 the classroom building was the tallest building next to the grain elevator. The construction process to repair the wall common to the gymnasium/classroom building was quickly addressed.

The excellence in education continued to shine through in this year’s graduating class of twenty-six seniors. The average composite ACT score for seniors this year was 23.4. The state average was 21.2 and the national average was 20.6. Anne Otte who has been at the school as a part-time teacher since 1981 states, “We have always through the years had . . . fine academic standards.”²⁵ Throughout the years, while the school may not have had all the amenities, the faculty was always focused and dedicated to providing a quality Christian education. In reading through different materials about the school it is easy to spot different areas that have led some to

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Nebraska District Convention 38th Biennium Proceedings p. 38

²⁵ Written response to questions from Mrs. Anne Otte

seek improvement in the high school. The quality of education that the young people have received is something that all sides have been pleased by the blessings God has brought forth.

Fees for the 1991-1992 school year were as follows:

Tuition	Association member	\$1200
	Non-association member	\$1450
	Non-WELS member	\$3200
Board		\$1700

1992-1993

In comparison the fees for the 1992-1993 school year were as follows:

Tuition	Association member	\$1300
	Non-association member	\$1600
	Non-WELS member	\$3500
Board		\$1700

On June 7 the association adopted the Board of Control's recommendation that the Administrator/ Principal/ Business Manager/ Plant Manager duties that were all held by the administrator be split and a new Business Manager/ Plant Manager position be created.²⁶ Soon both positions would need to be filled.

Over the summer months of 1992 Mr. Earl Heidtke who had faithfully served his Lord in the position of administrator at NELHS since 1985 accepted a call to DMLC. While through the years he had suffered some rather great physical and emotional stress due to the widespread duties of his call, Mr. Heidtke looks back on his years at the school with great fondness. NELHS always remains close to his heart. Especially important to him were the opportunities to assist in the Christian upbringing of so many youths from the many great families across the Nebraska District.²⁷

²⁶ Nebraska District Convention 38th Biennium Proceedings p. 40

²⁷ Interview with Earl Heidtke

Mr. Heidtke's departure now left a big gap in the staff at NELHS. Not only was the administrator position vacant, but a new position had been created which needed to be filled. The administrator position would quickly be filled as the call extended to Mr. James Pasbrig (father of Jon Pasbrig) was accepted. However the business manager position would remain vacant. Another new face on campus was Tutor Steve Arndt (cousin of Sandra Arndt) who was called from WLS.

For years the school had enjoyed the use of the town field to host its football games. The village of Waco continued to show its commitment to the unique relationship between the town and school by building a two-story crow's nest at the field. This structure has helped house equipment and has served also as an announcing/taping/scouting booth. This close relationship with village and school has not always been appreciated as much by the students as by the staff in one area. Occasionally the informal "neighborhood watch program" will telephone the campus reporting inappropriate behavior by NELHS' students. Despite this fact, this effort by the village illustrates the tight relationship between the residents of Waco and NELHS.

1993-1994

This was a notable year in the school's history not only because it marked the fifteenth anniversary of NELHS, but also because "for the first time in the school's history, there were no changes in the full time called faculty."²⁸ There was one change in part-time teachers as Rev. Stephen Raddatz returned to the assignment committee and Jim Buboltz was assigned as a five year STEP graduate from DMLC. Delbert Pieschke from Phoenix, Arizona, was hired as the new full time maintenance engineer at the school to add a much needed presence for all the various repairs and projects.

²⁸ Nebraska District Convention 39th Biennium Proceedings p. 31

While finances continued to hang like a foreboding cloud with congregational support falling \$65,000 short of the \$255,000 budgeted. When pressing budget problems were hampering many of the efforts of the school, by God's grace NELHS was the recipient of a major portion of the Victor Klug estate. Totaling over \$450,000 this gift would help improve various aspects of the school. Half of the sum was earmarked toward the debt. One quarter of the estate was set aside for building repairs, and the other quarter was apportioned for various equipment and capital improvements. A list of just some of the much-needed items purchased with this money would include: new copier, stove for kitchen, furniture for faculty work room, new phone system, computers for work room, water heater for classroom building, sixteen passenger van, fax machine and furniture for boys' dormitory lobby.²⁹

On another positive note, enrollment had taken a clear turn for the better. At the end of the 1992-1993 school year the enrollment was ninety-two. This school year began with 111 students (final enrollment was 109). Anticipated enrollment for the following year was as high as 121. This created some positive problems for the school to wrestle with such as room in the dorms, classroom space and the like.³⁰

1994-1995

Unlike the year previous the 1994-1995 school year brought significant changes to the NELHS faculty.

Rev. Norval Kock accepted a call to Michigan Lutheran seminary after serving at NELHS for eleven years. . . Mr. Jeff Spiaser accepted a call to Illinois Lutheran High School. He has taught in the science department at NELHS for seven years . . . After five years of service at NEHLS, Miss Sandra Arndt accepted a call to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. . . Finally, Rev Steven Arndt completed two years as dorm supervisor and has been called

²⁹ Update March 1994

³⁰ Nebraska District Convention 39th Biennium Proceedings p. 32

to St. Paul congregation in Oconto Falls Wisconsin. . . The Lord has provided other teachers through the synod Assignment Committee. Rev. Jeff Mahnke will teach Latin, religion and assume coaching responsibilities. . . Mr Greg Schibbelhut, a secondary education program graduate of DMLC will teach science courses and coach. Miss Kristi Kobleske, another secondary education program graduate of DMLC, will supervise the girls' dorm and teach three classes. . . Finally Rev. Nathan Seiltz will serve as the boys' dorm supervisor and instructor.³¹

Those remaining on staff included: Mr. Jim Pasbrig, Rev. Ray Beckmann, Mrs. Beverly Bornschlegel, Tutor Jim Bubolz, Mr. Tim Malchow, Mrs. Anne Otte, Mr. Jon Pasbrig and Mrs. Kathy Stern (formerly Radue). Right or wrong, the perceptions of the school were rapidly changing. In just the past four years the school had undergone almost a complete overhaul in the faculty. Gone were many of the faculty who had seen the school grow and in their eyes come so far. New to the campus were many individuals who had either served or studied at various high schools throughout the synod. To them the school had a different image and different needs to be addressed.

Administrator Pasbrig writes:

NELHS must break the "status quo" mentality or it will die. If the same drive exerted for educational excellence could be shown toward providing a facility, the school will be much better off. NELHS must construct a quality facility not another tribute to "getting by."
NELHs must continue to strive to improve its athletic prowess. When traditions are built on losing season after losing season, it is not good for kids.³²

The school year started with renewed optimism on the future of the school. Financial matters had been relieved substantially by the Klug estate. There were many things being done to improve the life of the dormitory students with new equipment and furniture being purchased. Improved relations between students and dorm staff were helped greatly by the addition of the

³¹ Nebraska District Convention 39th Biennium Proceedings p. 31

first female tutor to work alongside the long-time housemother Mrs. Brittain in the girls' dorm. But sadly in the winter of 1996 tragedy struck the entire NELHS family. Aaron Heiderich, a freshman, was found dead in his dorm room. Strangely, it is sometimes in tragedy that we most fully see and appreciate God's blessings. The outpouring of care and concern for the family and the school family from the Nebraska District and beyond was a reminder of why NELHS exists. It is to serve the Lord and to assist parents in training disciples for Christ. It was indeed a tragic situation that called for the mourning of the entire NELHS family but also an opportunity to "give thanks in everything" and realize the opportunities to accomplish the goal of this school.

1995-1996

New changes again occurred in the faculty staff as Rev. Jeff Mahnke returned to the call committee to be reassigned to Immanuel in Medford, Wisconsin. Rev. Mark Neitzel accepted the call to teach religion and Latin. In the middle of the school year, Miss Karen Janetzke (permanent) and Miss Carrie Hillman (emergency half-year instructor) were added to the staff as Tim Malchow due to difficulties with Nebraska's stringent teaching requirements was necessitated to return to the call committee.

Perhaps the most important change in the 1995-1996 school year was the beginning of Mission/Vision committee (later renamed Building for Christ). The purpose of this committee was to consider the possibility of a major building program for the school. Surveys were taken that revealed that the greatest need of NELHS was to improve facilities. To address the inadequate facilities a three-phase program was planned.

- Phase I : classrooms, student union, library/computer lab, office gymnasium cost \$1.67 million
- Phase II : expansion and improvement of dormitories and kitchen cost \$750,000

³² Written response to questions from Jim Pasbrig

- Phase III: improve and beautify the campus—including a lighted and paved parking lot cost \$250,000³³

On May 31, 1996, the NELHS board of Directors unanimously resolved to support the wholeheartedly the work of the Mission/Vision Committee and to recommend the continuance of the building proposal.³⁴ The NELHS association also approved the plans and presented it to Nebraska District in convention at the 40th Biennium. There the following were resolved and approved concerning the Mission/Vision expansion:

That the Nebraska District endorse the NELHS Association's plan to seek direct support from every district congregation via the local pastor.

That the Nebraska District endorse the NELHS Association's encouragement that every pastor and congregation in our district participate in: . . .

3) the utilization of the the three options (with support material coming) listed in the Mission/Vision Expansion Program: aa) Option One involves a very substantial One Sunday Christmas Gift to Jesus Offering in December 1996 from savings or discretionary income and from funds saved and gathered personally before hand . . . bb) Option Two involves a gathering of offerings after Christmas 1996, given from weekly, monthly income on a 12 month basis. cc) Option Three is three special yearly appeals for those who do not wish to make an annual financial commitment.

That we encourage the NELHS Association to enter the Mission/Vision Committee's expansion program *only when no additional debt would be incurred* to NELHS by the construction.³⁵
(emphasis mine)

NELHS in the future

Since that District Convention relatively little has happened toward seeing the fruition of the Building for Christ plans, but many things have happened that could have an immense impact on the school. This past year an extensive feasibility study was done to examine the question of

³³ NELHS Building for Christ promotion pamphlet p. 8

³⁴ Nebraska District Convention 40th Biennium Proceedings p.62

³⁵ Nebraska District Convention 40th Biennium Proceedings p.62, 63

NELHS future in Waco and also the possibility of a RMLHS starting in the metro-Denver area.

The feasibility study brought forth the following recommendations:

- That the district initiate, in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of NELHS, a special effort to enhance appreciation for Christian secondary education in particular and all Christian education endeavors in general.
- That the two existing high school associations independently determine how best to serve their constituencies while striving to maintain the balance of Kingdom Work in the district.”
- That Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School establish an orderly planning process toward the goal of opening its doors in the fall of the year 2001.
- That Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School establish an orderly planning process toward the goal of relocating to the Omaha area by the fall of the year 2000.³⁶

This is a feasibility study and the recommendations are just that, recommendations. But it does appear that NELHS may be in for some drastic change. For years some have questioned and some have commended the location in Waco. More recently the subject of the need for new facilities has become quite evident to all involved with school. For a thorough examination of the differing opinions regarding the school one is invited to read the feasibility study. All high schools undergo some change in their histories; change is inevitable. However there is one thing that will not change in the school as its history has shown. No matter where the school may be located with whatever facilities, or who may be attending, or who is serving on the faculty, the school remains focused on “Assisting parents and congregations by providing Christian training in the skills and values necessary for loyal, lifelong service to Jesus Christ.”

What the future holds is indeed uncertain and left in God’s hands alone. It is obvious that throughout the years God has continued to bless this little dorm school in a little town in ways too numerous to count. In all things He alone deserves credit and praise.

He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

SOLI DEO GLORIA

³⁶ Feasibility Study NELHS and RMLHS