

An Open Door:

The International Program of St. Croix Lutheran High School

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Thirty-seven colorful flags hang on the walls of St. Croix Lutheran High School's commons.¹ The flags represent the various states and countries from which students have come to attend St. Croix. This kaleidoscope is a vivid reminder that St. Croix has reached beyond its local limits to attract and to teach young men and women from diverse regions, cultures, and nationalities. St. Croix's international program has expanded the horizons of Christian education in the Twin Cities well beyond the twenty-two "Pioneers" who formed the original freshman class in 1958.² God's providence is apparent throughout the history of the international program as he has worked through the trials and errors of his servants to accomplish his greater purpose.

St. Croix's international program began officially in 1995, but the seeds of the program were sown several years earlier. In 1990, students filled to capacity and beyond St. Croix's facilities located at 110 Crusader Avenue, West St. Paul, Minnesota. That address had served St. Croix for thirty years. The buildings had already been renovated and enlarged several times, most recently in 1978. But by 1990 space was in short supply once more. A new campaign began, with a goal of raising funds to expand and renovate yet again. According to St. Croix's website, "The price tag was high and fervent prayers were directed to our omnipotent Lord to make this vision possible."³

¹ As of 27 November 2004.

² Tim Schwartz, "Impressions of SCLHS: The Founding Principles and Facts of St. Croix Lutheran High School," (Mequon: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1999), 12.

³ "SCLHS – History," [website] available from <http://www.stcroixlutheranhs.org/about/history.htm>, accessed 8 December 2004.

The Lord did indeed make this vision possible, but in a surprising and unexpected way. Approximately two miles from St. Croix's Crusader Avenue campus lay Archbishop Brady High School, operated by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. During the 1990-91 school year, Brady High School, with its attendance at less than 200 students, faced a huge debt. Under Archbishop John Roach, the Archdiocese made the difficult decision to close the institution's doors. A local newspaper reported, "A group of Brady parents had tried to persuade Roach to keep the school open; they even attempted to buy the building and operate the school on their own. But Roach reaffirmed his decision to close the school several times, citing declining enrollment and a debt of more than \$2 million."⁴ The archdiocese owned a school building it could not afford to operate, while St. Croix was seeking out money to renovate a building it had outgrown.

Even before Brady closed its doors, representatives from St. Croix were involved in talks with Brady officials about purchasing the school building. Sister Nathalie Meyer, the director of education for the archdiocese, reported that they had even discussed a joint venture, a combination Catholic and Lutheran school.⁵ Officials never completed such a plan. Talks did continue regarding St. Croix's purchase of the facilities.

In fact, the purchase very quickly became a reality. Officials agreed to a purchase price of \$2.23 million in October 1991, pending approval from the governing boards of both the Twin Cities High School Association (TCLHSA) and the archdiocese.⁶ On Thursday, 21 January 1991

⁴ James Walsh, "Lutheran school may buy old Brady High," *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 26 October 1991, 3B. Hereafter cited as Walsh, "Lutheran School."

⁵ James Walsh, "St. Croix Lutheran Deal Approved," *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 23 January 1992, 3B. Hereafter cited as Walsh, "Deal Approved."

⁶ Walsh, "Lutheran School."

the TCLHSA Governing Board voted unanimously to approve the purchase.⁷ After approval from the archdiocese and financing plans were in place, the deal closed in April 1992.⁸

Before school opened in the fall of 1992, St. Croix had plenty of work to do. After being underused and neglected by Brady High School in its declining years, the “New St. Croix” had fallen into disrepair. Extensive renovations were needed to prepare the building to legally host approximately 220 students, the number of students who had attended St. Croix the previous year. At the time of the purchase, Ron Hansen, chairman St. Croix’s Board of Regents, reported that renovations would cost between one and three million dollars. While that was a large expenditure, especially together with the purchase price, the total cost would be comparable to, if not less than, the expansion and renovation costs at the former site, an anticipated five and a half to ten million.⁹

The price tag would have been far greater, too, if St. Croix had not been able to enlist the help of a large number of volunteers. While some of the work by necessity was hired out to contractors, two coordinators spearheaded an enormous volunteer help campaign. They contacted all the congregations within St. Croix’s association, and many of the congregations sponsored particular areas of the building. Each congregation organized their own volunteers to do the necessary work on those areas. Mr. Merlyn Kruse, then principal of St. Croix, estimated that over 1,000 volunteers had a hand in preparing the new St. Croix school building for use.¹⁰

The efforts of many paid off, and St. Croix was ready to open its new and newly refurbished school building to 230 students in the fall of 1992. St. Croix’s address was no longer

⁷ Walsh, “Deal Approved.”

⁸ “School Purchased,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 29 April 1992, 3WD.

⁹ Walsh, “Lutheran School.”

¹⁰ Merlyn Kruse, interview with author, West St. Paul, 27 November 2004.

Crusader Avenue, but 1200 Oakdale Avenue. The student annual from that school year reported, “Everyone loves the new facilities,” even though “among the seniors there was a bit of nostalgia for the old ways and traditions.”¹¹ More classrooms, larger hallways, and fewer stairs were warmly welcomed, though some lamented losing the windows of the former campus and the chance to walk outside for some fresh air between classes (which was much easier with classrooms closer together).

The new facilities certainly benefited the ministry of St. Croix, but at the time of the relocation, the facilities had more to offer than St. Croix was ready to use. A dormitory facility was attached to the school building, which the archdiocese had built in 1964. It originally housed the order of Christian Brothers who taught the male high school students. Nearby was a free standing dormitory. Its floor plan was identical to the first, and it originally accommodated the nuns who taught the females. The students remarked in the yearbook that these dormitories “may house out-of-town students in the future.”¹² Kruse, now president of St. Croix, noted that the two residences “did not go unnoticed” at the time of the purchase.¹³

St. Croix did not make immediate use of the residences, but they did not go unused either. During the renovation process, officials from Dakota County, Minnesota, arranged to use the facilities. The dormitory connected to the main building became the home of Mary’s Shelter, a transitional housing facility for women. The other residence housed what eventually became known as Dakota County, Inc., a home for disabled adults. Former residents NET Ministries, a Roman Catholic organization which trains and sends out evangelism teams, purchased the former St. Croix building and moved its operations there.

¹¹ *Shield*, St. Croix Lutheran High School student annual, vol. 32 (1993), p.3.

¹² *Ibid*, 1.

¹³ Kruse interview.

Kruse reported that throughout St. Croix's history parents from outside the Twin Cities area had indicated a desire to send children to St. Croix. At times host families were used by those too far away to commute. But by the early nineties, it was becoming more and more difficult to accommodate students this way. So at the time of the relocation, St. Croix officials hoped one day to offer on-campus housing to these families.¹⁴

And it was not long before St. Croix began exploring this possibility. As early as 1994 a committee began looking at what would be required to open a dormitory. They quickly learned that it was not an easy task. Again the facilities were underused and were not prepared to accommodate a full complement of high school students. The dormitory would have to be renovated to comply with state and local building codes for such use. Additional beds would be necessary, as well as plans for preparing meals and supervising the student residents.

Though it would be difficult, the committee had a determined desire for St. Croix to serve not only locally, but also more regionally. They assembled a plan for opening one of the dormitories, to house forty-five to fifty students, and presented it to St. Croix's General Board. At the Board's September meeting, the plan was rejected as too risky. The Board members wanted more time to settle into the new campus and wanted to see a more firm financial plan. But the committee members were disappointed and confused. Kruse summarized their reaction, "Lord, I'm sure you want us to do this. How come you let the delegates vote no? So we knew [the dormitory] was there, [God] wouldn't have given us this campus if he didn't want us to use [the dormitories]."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Within months, new enthusiasm was injected into the dormitory planning. It was then that principal Kruse met with Yue-Him Tam, PhD. Dr. Tam, a naturalized American citizen, was born in China and had studied in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States. At that time he was a professor at Macalester College in St. Paul, a position he still holds.¹⁶ Dr. Tam's wife had connected with missionary Loren Steele, who worked with the Asian community in the Twin Cities. Dr. Tam, though not a Christian himself, heard of St. Croix's interest in opening a dormitory, and he had a plan to assist them.

Dr. Tam was well-connected in Hong Kong and China and knew of families who were interested in sending their children to an American high school. These students would then be ready to attend an American university without having to spend a great deal of time learning the culture and language. Tam agreed to help St. Croix make contact with these families, and St. Croix agreed to reserve half of the dormitory space for these Asian students.

The plan still had to be approved. Even after the earlier rejection, Kruse was convinced that this plan would be approved. He saw in the new plan God's purpose for St. Croix. "This is what he wanted us to wait for. He didn't want us just to go off and serve our own. He wanted us to look at serving [his] kingdom in a much larger branch than we could have ever, ever dreamed about."¹⁷

The Board of Regents also recognized the unique opportunity to share the gospel that this plan afforded. At their 15 December 1994 meeting the Board decided to present the plan to the General Board for final approval. They clearly placed a high priority on the spiritual opportunities this plan would afford. The resolution that they recommended called on "our

¹⁶ "Yue-Him Tam," [website] available from <http://www.macalester.edu/~tam/Bio-sketch.htm>, accessed 7 December 2004.

¹⁷ Kruse interview.

students, staff, and congregations” to share Christ’s love with the international students “in every way the Lord allows with the good (sic) of winning them for Christ.”¹⁸ The General Board unanimously passed the resolution 17 January 1995.¹⁹ They apparently shared principal Kruse’s conviction that this plan “was better than ... any plan that we could have possibly come up with. And it was beyond ... anything we could have ever thought of on our own.”²⁰

The approved plan seemed to be solid. It provided a source of students who could fill the dorm to a volume that would allow efficient and effective operation. In addition, St. Croix looked forward to the opportunity to provide a Christian education to students from across the world, students who would even pay for such an education.

An important consideration was how much these students would pay for the education. Recognizing that Asian economies at the time were not as strong as that of the United States, St. Croix examined similar programs in the States to establish a price for international students. They found that tuition rates for similar programs were quite high. St. Croix set its international student tuition at fourteen thousand dollars. While this was well above the tuition rate for local students, it still represented a value unmatched by similar programs. According to Kruse, “We were able to establish a market value for the tuition for international students.” The extra revenue generated by the international students would help fund not only the dormitory, but also the necessary curriculum adjustments that would be required.²¹

The next step for the program was to prepare a residence for full-time student use. The program would start with one dormitory, the one attached to the classroom building, with the

¹⁸ Minutes, Twin Cities Lutheran High School Association Board of Regents, 15 December 1994.

¹⁹ Minutes, Twin Cities Lutheran High School Association, 17 January 1995.

²⁰ Kruse interview.

²¹ Ibid.

intention that it would expand to eventually include the other dorm. Mary's Shelter relocated out of the building when their lease expired 30 June 1995.²² Improvements were still needed to bring the residence into conformity with applicable codes. An anonymous foundation seeking to support gospel outreach invested just over \$750,000 toward the renovation of the residence. Work was completed quickly, and just in time for the start of the 1995-96 school year St. Croix opened a dormitory with a capacity of approximately fifty students.

The initial reality of the dormitory and the international program fell short of high expectations. The student residence in its first year of operation housed sixteen students. Fifteen of the students were American. The administration recognized that the program could not be cost effective at that size.²³ At the time, however, they looked for the positive aspects of even this disappointment. The yearbook reported, "Dorms at St. Croix became a reality at last. 'We opened the dorm with about twelve residents this year which was a good way to get our feet on the ground before we have large groups to deal with. We have a waiting list for next year already,' commented Principal Kruse."²⁴

In order to sustain the program, St. Croix would require the larger groups Kruse anticipated. The disappointing start led him and others to realize, as he put it, "If you want young people to come to St. Croix Lutheran High School, you probably have to invite them."²⁵ Kruse and Religion Department Chairman Pastor Rod Pudell set out on 20 March to do exactly that.²⁶

²² Bill Gardner, "Homeless Shelter Now in Need of Home Itself//Women's Refuge Displaced by High School Dormitory," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 16 April 1995, 1B.

²³ Kruse interview.

²⁴ *Shield*, St. Croix Lutheran High School Annual, vol. 35 (1996), p. 38.

²⁵ Kruse interview.

²⁶ *Shield*, vol. 35, p. 38.

Dr. Tam introduced the two men to several contacts in Hong Kong and China, and they made the trip overseas to meet and recruit. They met a number of school teachers and guidance counselors, and they spoke at several schools on the subject of American education. They did not receive the welcome for which they had hoped, however. Kruse reported that many of his contacts were openly hostile, believing his time would be better spent taking care of the school in Minnesota. In retrospect he understood that these teachers and guidance counselors had no intention to lose their best and brightest students to an American institution.²⁷

The trip did serve a useful purpose for both of the participants anyway. They met with WELS missionaries and learned a great deal about the cultures from which they were trying to attract students. It was truly an immersion experience for Kruse, who reminisced about visiting an outlying congregation with a native evangelist. He was the only westerner in the congregation.²⁸ Pudell likewise learned a great deal about the culture and religion of the area. He reported two learning experiences as the highlights of his trip.

When I first went to Hong Kong, Missionary Schroeder ... took me to the Hong Kong funeral home. There you really saw the need and importance of the work you were trying to do. Outside the funeral home, they had all sorts of papier-mâché houses, cars, people ... kind of like little parade floats. And I was informed that as part of the funeral process, these would be burned so that this person might have a house wherever they were going, or a car All they had were dying wishes, not a living hope like we have. When I went inside I noticed that in each funeral room there was someone burning pieces of paper in a little furnace. It was paper funeral money so that this person might have a little cash wherever they were going.

The other highlight had to be when I preached at Grace Lutheran Church in Kowloon. I remember asking my interpreter why all the high-rises around the church had mirrors in their windows facing out. They reply I was given was that all the people there knew that this was a very powerful "God-Church" and that evil spirits do not like it; so the people put mirrors in their windows facing out so

²⁷ Kruse interview.

²⁸ Ibid.

that when the evil spirits want to run away from our church and enter their apartment, they will see their reflection in the mirror, get frightened, and go somewhere else. WOW.....²⁹

That sort of cultural interaction and immersion helped as Kruse and Pudell worked to shape and mold the international program. Pudell reported that his primary responsibilities to the program involved shaping a religion curriculum for the international students, as well as working to develop a mission mindset among both students and faculty.³⁰ He was in a position to illustrate firsthand the great need these souls had of hearing the gospel. The St. Croix family had a mission field right in their midst.

After the disappointment of the first recruitment trip, Pudell and Kruse refined their purpose and returned overseas. Pudell explained that this trip “centered around recruitment trips with American Education Opportunities on a whirlwind tour of college/boarding school fairs in about 6 countries.”³¹ This trip, like the previous, also included personal visits with prospective students and their families. Instead of relying on those who had a vested interest in retaining Asian students in their home countries, St. Croix was working through established programs to advertise and recruit.

This trend developed over the initial years of the program. The school came in contact with agencies that existed for the purpose of helping foreign students to find and attend American schools. These agencies therefore also assisted the American institutions in their recruiting and advertising efforts. St. Croix continued to develop relationships with these agencies, eventually determining which particular agencies to trust as reputable businesses. According to Kruse, St. Croix presently works with at least a dozen such agencies. They look

²⁹ Rev. Rodney Pudell, electronic mail interview by author, 29 November 2004.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

forward to the day when the agencies are unnecessary by virtue of the schools reputation. They have nearly reached this goal in South Korea, and efforts there are aimed much less at recruitment than at affirming and updating the parents and families with students attending St. Croix.³²

In other countries, however, St. Croix continues to deal with recruitment issues that have plagued the program from its inception. Perhaps the biggest hurdle is name recognition. Kruse indicated that foreign students are familiar with United States cities like New York and Boston. They don't recognize Minnesota or the Twin Cities nearly as readily. And when they do develop a notion of Minnesota and its location, the mental picture is often troubling. Many of the families live in warm or temperate climates and have never dealt with the cold and snow of a Minnesota winter. Because the winter weather is an unknown commodity, it tends to frighten them. Kruse shared an experience from one of his recruiting trips to illustrate the point. "I had a father come up, and take look at the picture of the snow, and just turn around. I didn't even get my mouth open to talk to him."³³

Over the years, St. Croix has learned to anticipate and answer these concerns. It takes effort to explain to a family in a tropical climate that central heat keeps the inside of a building warm and comfortable even when it is freezing outside. After establishing the program with students from these warmer climates, St. Croix now has another valuable tool in its effort to reassure families and students alike. "Fortunately, now we have students here from ... southern cities," Kruse reported, "where we can tie them to the parents, and the current parents can say, 'here's how they handle that,' and, 'It's OK, they will not die. They will not freeze to death.'"³⁴

³² Kruse interview.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

As St. Croix looks to recruit international students, they end up competing with many other schools, including some well established boarding schools, especially on the East Coast. These schools have had success with international students, and have developed a reputation in foreign countries. Since its program is even now a relative upstart, St. Croix has been working hard to develop its own reputation. Students and families want to know what sort of success they can anticipate. They want to know if students have attended schools like Harvard and Yale after graduating from St. Croix. They want to know St. Croix's results on college entrance exams. Understandably, they have high hopes and look for an institution that can handle such expectations.

St. Croix has developed in this area as well. While Kruse reported that St. Croix has not had a graduate attend an Ivy League school yet, they have distinguished themselves in many ways.³⁵ St. Croix graduates have attended very reputable universities. On their informational website for international students, St. Croix lists such schools as Cornell University, the University of Minnesota, West Point Academy, the University of Denver, Arizona State University, and Chicago University as schools where St. Croix graduates have been accepted.³⁶ In addition, St. Croix has on its faculty a Physics teacher with master's degree from Harvard, also a possible benefit in the area of recruitment.³⁷

Some recruitment difficulties have been specific to certain countries. In particular, it has been difficult for Chinese students to attend St. Croix. Although the interest in attending St. Croix is relatively high in China, as it is in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "SCLHS – International Program Information" [website] available from <http://www.stcroixlutheranhs.org/international/programinfo.htm>, accessed 8 December 2004.

³⁷ Kruse interview.

Chinese students have run into difficulties in procuring visas for study in the United States.

Kruse reported that as many as thirteen Chinese students attended St. Croix in one year, but since then, and especially since 11 September 2001, Chinese enrollment has dropped significantly.

Currently, one student from China attends St. Croix, and two more are hoping to attend.

Even in this area there are reasons to be hopeful. The United States government does not easily allow Chinese students into the country at least in part because past students have spent over a decade in the States, through high school, college, and often graduate school, and many have been uninterested in returning to China. Because of this difficulty, Kruse said,

For two springs now I haven't even tried (to recruit Chinese students) . . . because I just couldn't stand outside the embassy and watch them cry anymore. It's too discouraging. It just seemed like I was talking to the wall in talking to the officers who make these decisions. Well, this past summer, without any help, God just gave us a student. He went on his own and applied. The officer didn't even ask him one question, just gave him his visa. Well, now there's huge interest again. Oh, maybe America is changing. And I'm hearing some rumblings out of Washington that maybe the state department is lightening up on . . . Chinese. . . . So we're going to try and see if we can't get the gospel to some of those kids.³⁸

In spite of these potential recruitment difficulties, St. Croix does have some definite strengths as they advertise to international students. Parents are often concerned about safety. High profile cases of school violence have tainted their view of many American institutions. St. Croix's location in the Upper Midwest, in a safe suburban neighborhood, has done much to allay fears.

Education is also generally strong in the Upper Midwest. St. Croix is able to show statistics that top college entrance exams scores are often found in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and neighboring states.

³⁸ Ibid.

And perhaps surprisingly, being a Christian school has been helpful to St. Croix's recruiting efforts. Except in Japan, said Kruse, people respect Christian schools and expect a level of excellence which they may not expect from public schools. Even in many foreign and largely unchristian societies, Christian education has a good reputation.³⁹

Even with such strengths, sending out recruiters from St. Croix is not the ideal recruiting technique. According to Kruse's experiences, parents and families will believe and place high value on only fifty percent of what a school representative may tell them. Recruiting agencies who have studied the schools fare somewhat better, but "the best recruiting material is the parents—the word of mouth. [Parents] will believe ninety plus percent of what another parent will tell them. So today, now that we actually have graduates and parents, whenever we can, we give—with permission—information, telephone numbers of current or past parents to new parents. (We tell them:) 'Call, ask.'"⁴⁰

In this way St. Croix's international program has grown steadily from its humble beginnings to accommodate about fifty students per year. St. Croix's website boasts of over fifty international students from thirteen different countries for the 2004-05 school year.⁴¹ Kruse, as president of St. Croix, continues to be active in recruiting for the program and in visiting families of students. He estimated that he has made eighteen to twenty overseas trips in connection with the program.⁴²

A concerted effort has been made to recruit students from beyond the Pacific Rim, where the program started. According to the flags in the school commons, this effort has been

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "SCLHS – International Program Information."

⁴² Kruse interview.

successful. Though the majority of international students have been from the Pacific Rim, students have attended St. Croix from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Croatia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Haiti, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, and Thailand as well.

The program benefits national students as well as international. In a world of global commerce, business, and communication, St. Croix's students learn to interact with students of a variety of cultures and nationalities. American students expand their horizons as they have contact with international students.

The ultimate benefit of St. Croix's international program is the opportunity it provides for sharing the good news of God's love in Christ to those who have not heard it before. Pudell said that the most important aspect of the international program is "without a doubt, the opportunity to share the Savior. How neat is it that a school or an individual gets the chance to carry on real world mission work right in their own backyard? There should really be no other reason (financial, etc.) for carrying on a program like this." He called the experiences of seeing students profess their newfound Christian faith "moments of gold."⁴³

Seeing the expansion of God's Kingdom has been a highlight for Kruse as well. He said, "We want to be careful that we never ever take that for granted because that is such an awesome blessing. But every year God has allowed St. Croix's ministry to be the catalyst to bring the word to someone's heart so that God could have them." In fact, he estimated that one to three students have come to profess the Christian faith every year since the inception of the international program.⁴⁴

⁴³ Pudell interview.

⁴⁴ Kruse interview.

This benefit could well carry over from students to their families and acquaintances as well. Students who come to know Jesus as their Savior at St. Croix carry him with them wherever they go after high school. “We’re sort of waiting for the day ... when God’s going to begin using them embedded back in their home countries,” said Kruse. At the very least, they may prepare the way for further contact with the gospel. The very first male graduate of St. Croix’s international program, for example, became a Christian and was baptized during his time at St. Croix. He is now studying medicine at a university in Southern China. He has been a Christian witness to his parents and undoubtedly others. And this has provided opportunities for Kruse, who said, “Whenever I can, I see his mother and father, who are not Christian yet, I don’t think. At least they’re not professing Christianity yet, but they have really supported their son in being Christian. ... It would be such a blessing to see how [God]’s going to use them.”⁴⁵

Yet the program also has faced many challenges and difficulties. An ongoing difficulty is trying to communicate spiritual and religious truths to people of different cultures, often ones that do not relate easily to these concepts. Pudell explained, “When students come to you from a communistic, atheistic society, they really have no terminology in their language for concepts like a soul. So you have to create your own language and way of understanding that a soul is ‘life inside that keeps on living.’ That they could grasp and understand. . . . every day presented these kinds of challenges.”⁴⁶

Another challenge has been explaining to students why a religion class is even necessary. “They understood why they needed to take math and science,” says Pudell, “but could not grasp any importance for a religion class.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Pudell interview.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Attempts have been made throughout to “mainstream” the international students into the same classes as American students. While a year or two of introductory material was often necessary, especially in religion classes, after that international students would attend the same classes as the American students. “But to teach a high school mainstreamed religion class that did not leave [international students] in the dust but was not so simple so as to bore lifelong Christian teenagers to death was an exceptional challenge,” according to Pudell.⁴⁸

From a spiritual aspect, Pudell saw yet another challenge for St. Croix. After high school, these students, including those who were recent converts to Christianity, would leave St. Croix for other pursuits. That made it difficult to follow up on these young Christians and to nourish their faith. Such follow up was very important, “especially when they would immediately return to the spiritually difficult situations of unbelieving families or cultures where Christianity was persecuted.” Fortunately, stateside campus pastors and foreign missionaries have been able to keep in contact with many of these international graduates.⁴⁹

Perhaps the greatest difficulties were those put in place by the American students. One of the greatest difficulties and disappointments for Pudell was “inconsistencies that the Christian student body would demonstrate to these new Christians. They could not abide with hypocrisy - “false face”; and when they would see that demonstrated in actions by individual students, it could undermine so much work that had been previously done.”⁵⁰

Kruse also recognized this problem. “The devil is not going to take this sitting down,” he remarked. “Satan uses our own bias Do you think the cultures of our own country get along? Of course we don’t Satan will use the differences between us to minimize that

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

opportunity (to share the gospel) or just to have you become discouraged. It is not perfect.”

Students would often remain segregated at lunch or pass up opportunities to interact. But Kruse was not discouraged because, “The Holy Spirit has just been marvelous about that.”⁵¹ And Pudell agreed. A highlight of his involvement in the program was “just seeing the Holy Spirit at work - taking a hardened heart that thought all of this Christianity was nonsense, and slowly but surely filling it with faith and love for the Savior.”⁵²

And St. Croix would love to see the Holy Spirit continue to work that way on their campus for the foreseeable future. While only the Lord knows what lies in the future for St. Croix, their vision statement suggests that the international program will continue to be an important aspect of St. Croix’s ministry. According to the statement, St. Croix seeks “to be a ministry with continued interest in sustaining the richness brought about by inviting the attendance of international students.”⁵³

Kruse pointed out that to carry on such ministry effectively, St. Croix seeks to keep a balance between international and American students. A healthy balance in his mind would have international students comprise about ten to fifteen percent of the student body. “They’re looking for a truly American education. We don’t want to become California. Today . . . when I visit parents in almost all of the five Asian countries they already recognize that California is not the place to send their son or daughter They understand that their son or daughter can live in California, go to school there, and never have to learn English.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Kruse interview.

⁵² Pudell interview.

⁵³ “SCLHS – Vision Statement,” [website] available from <http://www.stcroixlutheranhs.org/about/vision.htm>, accessed 8 December 2004.

⁵⁴ Kruse interview.

That still leaves the possibility of expanding the international program along with the size of the student body. The student body has nearly doubled in size in its time on the new campus, and St. Croix hopes to someday fully utilize the campus, which has a capacity of over 500.⁵⁵

And St. Croix's international program could also benefit other WELS high schools. Many have seen in St. Croix's program a paradigm for similar programs elsewhere. Pastor Charles Raasch, formerly a teacher at Shoreland Lutheran High School, remarked, "Personally I believe the St. Croix model should be the one every area Lutheran high school should follow." He believes it has "potential for developing an authentic mission mindset--especially among Christian youth."⁵⁶ Shoreland has looked into the St. Croix program as a potential model for their own ministry. Pudell said that by working with St. Croix, hopefully other schools, "can avoid some of the trials and errors that accompany any new, frontier ministry."⁵⁷

Kruse summed up his view of St. Croix's international program:

It is a story about exactly what God says he does—he will do and he does. He promises, "You preach the gospel. You plant it and water it. I will make sure it grows. I have a plan." It's God's example to us humans how he uses that. We couldn't have even thought of this. We couldn't have thought of it. How would little St. Croix, sitting in West St. Paul, Minnesota, ever play a role to bring the gospel to souls from across the Pacific rim . . . You can't do that with a high school. This is a Lutheran high school for goodness sakes. And yet he not only has figured out a way to do it, but he has made it a way that we can carry out world mission work and afford to do it because they pay us to do it for them.⁵⁸

The Apostle Paul spoke of his successful mission work as a door which the Lord opened to him. He remained in Ephesus because "a great door for effective work" was open to him (1 Cor. 16:8-9). Likewise in Troas the Lord "opened a door" for him (2 Cor. 2:2). And Paul

⁵⁵ "SCLHS – Vision Statement."

⁵⁶ Charles Raasch, electronic mail to author, 4 December 2004.

⁵⁷ Pudell interview.

⁵⁸ Kruse interview.

requested of the Colossians, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains” (Col. 4:3). Likewise, the international program at St. Croix has truly been an open door to gospel proclamation. It is a door that God alone could open, and in spite of man’s errors and inconsistencies, he has. May God continue to provide an open door for the spread of the gospel to many cultures and nations through St. Croix Lutheran High School.

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