Chapter 1

The Birth of the Vision

Arthur J. Wiebe

The story behind the events that transformed Pacific Bible Institute and Junior College in 1960 into Pacific College of Fresno as an accredited Christian liberal arts senior college in 1965 is both a personal and institutional one. The personal saga began during the 1959 Christmas season. Our family had returned to Reedley, California to spend the holidays with my parents and family. The visit provided a welcome break from doctoral studies at Stanford University. Little did we realize how events during this visit would impact our future.

During the week after Christmas, Peter A. Enns, a member of the Mennonite Brethren Board of Education, called to ask whether I would meet with the Board's West Area Committee for the purpose of discussing Pacific Bible Institute. Arrangements were made to meet with Enns and fellow members Menno S. Gaede and Peter Funk at Gaede's residence. We were all well acquainted because of my twelve years of previous service at Immanuel Academy, a Mennonite Brethren high school in Reedley.

"We would like to discuss the future of PBI with you," Enns stated at the outset. "You are familiar with the program and history of PBI over the years. We are trying to find out where we should go from here and would like to hear your suggestions. Our enrollment
continues to decline and we soon need to make a decision about its future. Shall we close PBI, revise its direction, or continue to struggle along with the present program? What do you see as the future for Pacific Bible Institute?"

What surprised me most was that they even were discussing the possibility of closing Pacific Bible Institute. It quickly became clear, however, that these men were seriously considering all options.

I had some knowledge about PBI and its program from numerous visits there with senior classes of Immanuel and occasional discussions with faculty members. I quickly realized, however, that my limited knowledge provided an insufficient basis for making any thoughtful observations. After sharing this feeling of inadequacy with the board members, I suggested that they discuss their observations and concerns further to understand why all three alternatives were being considered. We devoted several hours to a wide-ranging, informative discussion of questions and issues surrounding the PBI's program that provided a better understanding of why the members considered the Institute to be at the crossroads.

Behind their concerns was the short but changing history of the Institute. Established in 1944, Pacific offered a typical three-year Bible institute program. Enrollment had grown steadily, peaking in 1949-1950 with 190 day school students. By that time PBI was evolving into a four-year Bible college offering B. A. and Th. B. degrees. The first baccalaureate degrees were conferred in 1953.

During this time there was a growing concern within the Mennonite Brethren Conference about the viability of supporting two four-year higher education institutions, Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas and PBI in Fresno. As a result, the 1954 conference made a historic decision to unify all Mennonite Brethren higher education programs within the United States. A newly-elected Board of Education was charged with the responsibility for designing and carrying out a unified program. After extensive and prayerful consideration the board developed a master plan that designated Tabor College as the conference's senior liberal arts college, proposed the establishment of a seminary, and reduced the role of PBI from that of a four-year Bible college to that of three-year Bible institute. The seminary was to be established in Fresno and affiliated with PBI. The two West Coast schools were placed under the administration of a single president. Further, the board decided that steps leading to the accreditation of Tabor College should be given high priority.

Understandably, this decision had a demoralizing impact on the administration and faculty of Pacific and its supporting constitu-
ency. During the December 1954 board sessions, President Rueben M. Baerg observed "the need for a stabilizing of our Bible Institute program." The urgency of the need was evident from the general unsettled feeling among students and faculty. The school had undergone a reversal in attendance—from 190 in 1950 to 80 in 1954. Furthermore the records of the past five years made it increasingly clear that demand for more liberal arts was rising. If, therefore, PBI could offer a more expanded program in liberal arts education, lower division work, and Bible institute, Baerg believed the "immediate urgency could be met rather satisfactorily." The board responded positively and accepted the recommendation "that the program of the West include the development of the junior college." The target date for this initiative was set for the fall of 1957.

Rueben Baerg resigned as president in 1954, at which time an administrative committee was established until a new president could be chosen. In a report to the board in May 1955 on behalf of that committee, faculty member G. W. Peters reported that "the attitude towards the Bible Institute is one of neutrality. It will take much and hard work to build up a Bible Institute complex." He anticipated no more than twelve to fifteen students in the Bible institute. Some students would return for the sacred music diploma, but the entire Bible institute program needed to be "sold to our constituency." Peters further reported that most students would be attracted to the liberal arts courses. In spite of this gloomy analysis, he reassured the board that the administration and faculty were determined to give their best efforts. "We have succeeded in pulling ourselves out of a spirit of depression. There is interest and enthusiasm. . . . Much hard work and tactful selling will have to be done to recapture the interest, sacrifice, and willingness of our churches and especially the students." Enrollment continued to decline, causing increased concern within the Board of Education. In his September 1956 report to the Board's West Coast Area Committee, newly-appointed President B. J. Braun recommended that "in order to captivate the interest of as many of our youth as possible for our own conference educational program," the Board of Education should immediately establish a junior college program consisting of sixty hours of liberal arts work and eight hours of Bible. The board responded positively to Braun's recommendation by authorizing the inauguration of the junior college program in 1956. This move marked the first departure from the initial master plan that the Board of Education had articulated in 1954.
Meanwhile, in spite of many reasons for discouragement, the Board of Trustees of the Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches began searching for land in southeast Fresno on which to locate a new campus for the school. In 1955 the board purchased fifty-three acres, from which they withheld thirty-three acres for the development of a residential subdivision and church. The income from selling those lots would make possible a gift of twenty acres to PBI. Enough lots were sold to bring the project to a successful conclusion. Now PBI had the land for a campus, but there was no money to develop the newly-acquired property.

This lack of progress in campus development added to the feelings of discouragement. The 1954 master plan included the construction of facilities on both the Fresno and Hillsboro campuses. Two separate fund-raising programs were initiated, one to support operations and the second to fund capital improvements. Because regional accreditation of Tabor College was a high priority, the first construction project to be authorized was that of the Tabor College library. The second project was to be the construction of a classroom-administration facility on the new PBI campus. Both fund-raising efforts lagged and it became necessary to use all funds for operations. The campus improvement program ended with the construction of the Tabor College library.

In his May 1958 report to the West Coast Area Committee, President B. J. Braun expressed his frustration at these developments:

Your president was greatly burdened by this state of affairs. He [clings] to the conviction that there is a need for such a school as P.B.I. in this vast San Joaquin Valley. If we fail and P.B.I. closes down, someone else will come and do the job. Furthermore, the brethren now on the Board and administration would never outlive the accusation that we had sold P.B.I. “down the river.” The prophets of doom would triumph and the proponents of faith would have to hang their heads in shame.5

The board responded as best they could by approving the construction of a classroom building. It was to be financed largely by a loan against the existing downtown campus and constructed with as much volunteer labor as possible.

The new twenty-acre campus, construction of the classroom building and addition of the junior college liberal arts program, however, failed to stem the continuing decline in enrollment. By the fall of 1959, only sixty-four students were enrolled, with a full-time
equivalency of fifty-eight students. The fact that forty-one were first year students underscored the problem of rapid student turnover.

With such experiences during the first five years of unification, it is small wonder that these members of the board were open to all options in our December 1959 meeting. At the close of the meeting P. A. Enns commented in parting, "If you have any further observations or suggestions, we would be happy to hear from you." I felt helpless and discouraged as I left the meeting. These friends of mine were so committed and cared so deeply about PBI and yet there was so little I could offer them.

The drive back to our home in Belmont, California began with sharing the joys of the Christmas season and our visit with the parental family. As our conversation lapsed into silence each of us turned to our private thoughts. My attention soon returned to the haunting question posed by the Board members. Stubbornly, the question persisted despite attempts to think of other things. Could it be that the noble work begun through PBI, sustained by the prayers and dedicated efforts of so many, would have to end? Such a defeat seemed so unthinkable. Surely, there must be a solution so this mission of the church could continue!

For many miles I thought about ways in which the Board could address the question of PBI's future. What was the full range of alternatives? Which were the most viable? What was the potential of each course of action? What information did we need for intelligent decision-making? What necessary information was available and what needed to be assembled? How should we procure the needed information?

It became increasingly apparent that a lack of appropriate information had made our meeting in Reedley inconclusive. Therefore, high priority would need to be assigned to assembling and analyzing the necessary information. But who should take the responsibility for conducting such a study?

While rounding a well-remembered bend in the highway just east of Gilroy, I was struck that a remarkable match existed between this need for information and my current studies in higher education at Stanford. The abundant resources of the university, its faculty in higher education, and the many visiting educational leaders would be readily accessible. Should I suggest to the board that they undertake a thorough study of alternate courses of action? Should I offer my services to conduct it? I wrestled with these questions for the remainder of the trip, finally concluding to share my thinking with these men.
That evening I called P. A. Enns to suggest such a study and to indicate my willingness to take responsibility for conducting it. He immediately expressed a strong interest in the suggestion but wanted first to consult with the other members of the West Area Committee before responding. Later that evening, he called and requested that I fly back to Fresno as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.

At the ensuing meeting the rationale for and scope of the proposed study was discussed at length. Board members agreed that it was essential to assemble all the information necessary for making a recommendation that would chart the future direction for PBI. They would give all options thoughtful consideration but would recommend only the one with greatest promise. By consensus the board agreed that I was in the best strategic position to conduct the study and make the recommendation.

During the return flight the magnitude of this new responsibility began to dawn on me. Any recommendation, if adopted, would significantly impact many lives and shape the future mission of an institution built through the dedicated efforts of so many faithful supporters. On the one hand I battled serious misgivings about having consented to undertake such a serious assignment; on the other, it was a stimulating and exciting challenge and I became eager to begin.

The weeks that followed were marked by intense activity. I consulted with officials in key agencies, including the regional accrediting association, the State Department of Education, local colleges, and higher education faculty. From these contacts emerged an external assessment of the viability of the alternatives. Communication with many junior college administrators provided alternatives for designing the liberal arts program. An in-depth study involving the churches in the Pacific District allowed us to calculate how many Mennonite Brethren students expected to graduate from high school for each of the next fifteen years. I consulted studies analyzing the choices Mennonite Brethren students were making in higher education, and explored the potential for attracting students from other evangelical churches. The possibility of attracting qualified Mennonite Brethren faculty members was given serious study.

I also analyzed the status of PBI and its program. The major obstacles Pacific faced became apparent. Neither of its programs was accredited, a matter of growing concern to students, administration and board. Faculty turnover was a very serious and continuing
problem. Joel Wiebe, the dean, had resigned to complete his doctoral studies, leaving only two full-time faculty members—Dietrich Friesen and Donald Braun—committed to returning for the 1960 fall semester. The operation was divided among three locations: the library, dining hall, and women's residence were housed in the downtown building; the men's residence was at a second downtown location, and the classroom building was located on the new campus in southeast Fresno. Library and laboratory resources were woefully inadequate. The student body was small and lacked continuity. Few students remained for more than a year. Meager financial resources prevented timely completion of necessary campus improvements. The operating budget was minimal. The conference financing plan for constructing a building on the new campus collapsed after the library building at Tabor was completed. The conference master plan imposed severe restrictions, limiting options for action. The non-Mennonite public was largely uninformed about PBI's existence. Most troublesome was the lack of a clear sense of direction that negatively impacted faculty and student morale.

But there were positive factors as well. Dedicated board members were highly supportive of efforts to find ways to empower the institution in fulfilling its mission of Christian education. Time and again they displayed a willingness to take bold action in facing daunting challenges. The recent emergence of the junior college liberal arts program had sparked a slight increase in interest in the institution as evidenced by the enrollment of forty-one first year students in the fall of 1959. Their retention could form the base for enrollment growth in the following year. Acquisition of the new campus through the efforts of the Pacific District Conference and the construction of the first classroom building showed conference support and the board’s determination to move ahead. The school was strategically located in a major metropolitan area. A population of nearly a million resided within a hundred miles of the campus. Pacific would be the only accredited Christian college in this region and thus would have the potential to draw many students.

The study reviewed all these factors, both positive and negative. While helpful, this information was not sufficient in itself to serve as the basis for charting the course for the future. The spirit and mission of the Mennonite Brethren Church, the historic factors that had led to the founding of PBI, and what it meant to be an Anabaptist-Mennonite college somehow had to be addressed as well.

How could all of this fit together? How could it be woven into a meaningful plan of action? Where was the lodestar to guide the
task? The establishment of an ambitious international mission program and the founding of Tabor and PBI were ways in which Mennonite Brethren expressed obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. The future PBI had to fit into this picture.

By 1960 Mennonite Brethren were face to face with new challenges resulting from growing urbanization, increased interaction with the broader society, and a broadening participation in the professions. All of this called for a liberal arts education. Increased interest in advanced education was also evident in those third world countries where the church had missionary programs. It was imperative, therefore, that any expansion in the PBI mission and program meet these growing challenges. All of this led me to the conclusion that Pacific could best meet its objectives by offering a quality liberal arts higher education program based on Anabaptist-Mennonite principles.

All of the factors began to point in one direction: Pacific would have to become an accredited, Christian senior liberal arts college in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition with a strong biblical studies division at the center of its program. At that time it seemed reasonable to assume that a strengthened Bible institute program could survive only if included as one component of such a division.

But this option presented a serious problem: it was in sharp conflict with the conference higher education master plan! How would I dare propose it? If proposed as the guiding vision for the future, the conflict would have to be resolved at the outset since the move to becoming a senior college was the cornerstone for all of my other proposals. Despite this obstacle, I was determined to submit a proposal for institutional development based on the senior college option. After all, it was only a recommendation and the board could always reject it.

With this decision as a foundation, clarity emerged as to necessary first steps. Both the Bible institute and junior college curricula would have to be rethought and reshaped to align with this vision. In the belief that Christian institutions must be among the best, academic excellence would have to become the hallmark of Pacific's programs. The focus would shift to the training of leaders, requiring that student recruitment focus on attracting students with leadership potential. Committed and highly qualified liberal arts faculty members would need to be recruited and encouraged to give extended periods of service to the institution. Faculty salaries would have to be raised. The library collection and laboratories resources would need major expansion. Additional facilities would need
construction. Financial support would have to be broadened to provide the funds required to achieve these objectives.

The first draft was ready for submission to the West Area Committee of the Board at its meeting in late January 1960. Attending this meeting were Ed J. Peters, Chairman of the unified board, and West Area Committee members P. A. Enns, M. S. Gaede, and Peter Funk. After reviewing the findings, I presented three recommendations.

First, the only viable long-term option for PBI was to become an accredited senior liberal arts college in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition with the Bible institute as one of its major programs. Therefore, at least the West Area Committee of the Board would have to support moving in this direction for any of the remaining recommendations to have meaning. For the move toward this long-term goal I outlined an incremental approach in which each successive step would be fully tested. The most important steps were to be accreditation of the junior college program, success in faculty recruitment, significant growth in enrollment, and demonstrated ability to construct and equip the needed facilities.

Second, immediate priority should be given to strengthening the three-year Bible institute program through expanded course offerings, augmented faculty, and an energetic, conference-wide student recruitment program as permitted under the master plan. During the 1950s administrators had frequently raised the question about whether a demand for the continuation of a Bible institute still existed. Implementation of this proposal would provide a thorough, good-faith test of the viability of the Bible institute program. If successful, these efforts would help recapture the support of Bible institute enthusiasts, increase enrollment, add continuity and maturity to the student body, and restore this program to its former level. If unsuccessful, it would show that there was insufficient interest within our conference to justify retaining the Bible institute program as such and require finding an acceptable alternative that would serve the same mission.

Third, the junior college liberal arts program should simultaneously be broadened and realigned with the typical lower division offerings of a senior college. Such strengthening of the curriculum should be accompanied by an intensive recruitment effort. In contrast to recruitment for the Bible institute, the Mennonite Brethren Pacific District Conference master plan restricted junior college recruitment primarily to the West Coast. Biblical studies would remain the central component of the liberal arts curriculum. Academic expectations in all areas would be raised and
additional well-qualified liberal arts faculty recruited as soon as feasible.

The recommendation that Pacific should plan to become a senior liberal arts college at an appropriate time in the future engendered the liveliest discussion. Surprisingly, it seemed to find ready acceptance from all those present, though they must have been keenly aware of the difficulty such a move would face in obtaining conference approval. Fortunately, their extensive professional and business experience provided them with a necessary perspective on higher education to consider this recommendation.

In support of this, I presented a ten-year projection of the impact that implementation of these recommendations could have on annual enrollments. This projection was based on a careful analysis of the data and observations gathered during the study. In my mind it was realistic and achievable with energetic leadership. Nevertheless, it was optimistic to expect board members to view it with confidence given a history in which enrollment had not passed ninety students since 1954. Were they shocked, amused, trusting or disbelieving when I projected an enrollment of 350 full-time equivalent students for 1970? This represented a six-fold increase over the current enrollment and was twice the previous record enrollment!

Their reaction to the projection was not easy to read. However, their immediate reaction was that this was the kind of optimism and enthusiasm they had been waiting for. "We have said 'Giddap!' long enough," Peter Enns responded. "We want to be able to say 'Whoa!'"

How did my projections square with subsequent reality? The following table compares the 1960 projection with the actual enrollments as supplied by the registrar's office. Both are expressed in full-time equivalents. In retrospect, the projections were not optimistic enough! God prospered the college beyond our highest hopes! Instead of a six-fold increase, God blessed us abundantly by making it seven-fold. My report also targeted 1970 as the year in which the decision about becoming a senior college would have to be made assuming growth reached these projections. The move to senior college status actually took place in 1965.

Toward the end of the session, Chairman E. J. Peters turned to me and asked, "When are you coming to make it happen?" Taken by surprise, I paused for a considerable time to absorb the enormity of the question. I responded that I considered my task completed with the submission of the study and its recommendations. I was not prepared to consider any further involvement.
Projected vs. Actual Enrollment
at Pacific College:
1962-1971

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
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But these board members were not readily deterred. During the discussion that followed they repeatedly urged that I consider assuming leadership for the implementation of the proposed program. With reluctance, I promised that Evelyn and I would give their invitation serious and prayerful consideration, looking for God's clear direction before responding. It was clear to me that a positive response would require making a long-term commitment to achieve the recommended objectives. It would also require a complete reorientation of our plans for the future, given the promising chance for an internship with the U. S. Office of Education sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

Making the decision preoccupied our thinking in the days that followed. Because of information uncovered by the study, it was easy to visualize the great potential for Pacific. Accepting the invitation would open a unique opportunity to develop an accredited senior Christian liberal arts college built on Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings in a populous region of the country served by no other Christian college.

On the other hand, the task would be daunting and require tremendous effort. So little of what was envisioned actually existed. Consensus would have to be developed before we could begin
moving in the direction recommended. A faculty of high quality would have to be recruited. We would need to design and construct facilities. Economic challenges would need successful resolution. Prospective students would need to become convinced that Pacific could meet their needs, and much greater support from the constituency would have to be rallied. I became tired just thinking about the energy that would be required.

Finally it was the vision of a Christian senior liberal arts college expressing an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of Scripture and mission that led us to accept the board's invitation. However, agreement would have to be reached on several matters. Foremost among these was the need for the West Area Committee to affirm its commitment to the vision presented with the steps deemed necessary to transform it into reality. We arranged a meeting with the West Area Committee for mid-February 1960 to resolve these remaining questions.

The most significant matter needing agreement was my recommendation that “should the natural growth dictate, there will be no bar against having a senior college on the West Coast.” This required that at least the West Area Committee immediately come to grips with this fundamental question. It will forever be a tribute to these men that they had the courage and foresight to pursue this goal even while recognizing that it would require a basic revision in the master plan. These men had a deep appreciation for the role of liberal arts education and also Bible institute training. Clearly they shared the conviction that Pacific as a Christian liberal arts college could greatly expand its mission and make a significant contribution to California's Central Valley and beyond. Their education and extensive experience in the professional and business worlds balanced by their strong allegiance to the church provided them with the required perspective for addressing the questions raised by the vision. Finally, these men had the requisite courage and resourcefulness, valuable assets for charting the new course.

A second decision had to do with administrative structure. In 1960, the seminary and PBI were under the administration of a single president. Day-to-day operations at Pacific were under the direction of its dean. The lack of clear role definitions for the president and dean often created duplication of effort, frustration and even embarrassing situations such as each scheduling a speaker for the same chapel. (In at least some instances they resolved this situation by giving both speakers an opportunity to speak, giving the greater time to the one coming from the greater distance). To
provide for effective leadership, I requested that the administration be restructured so that Pacific would operate independently from the Seminary with the president of Pacific reporting directly to the board.

A third recommendation dealt with using the designation "Pacific College" in all literature to replace "Pacific Bible Institute and Junior College." The rationale was that it would more clearly and accurately describe the emerging program. While we recognized that deleting "Bible" from the name might create misunderstanding, we reasoned that the aggressive plan for interpreting the new vision would mitigate such negative reaction.

Finally, arrangements were made for me to complete my doctoral residence at Stanford before coming to the campus full-time. During the interim I took responsibility for institutional planning and implementation, while the dean handled day-to-day on-campus administration. Since Joel Wiebe had resigned as dean to resume his doctoral studies, the board appointed Theodore R. (T. R.) Nickel, a long time public school administrator, as the on-campus administrator. With agreement on these matters, I accepted the leadership position. During the February 20-23, 1960 meetings the full Board ratified my appointment and approved the administrative restructuring.

Acceptance of this new assignment occasioned a personal re-examination of all the issues raised during the study. The challenge was now very personal and inescapable. While aggressive action was called for, each step of implementation would need to be taken with great deliberation. My central concern was that the "spirit and mission of the Mennonite Brethren" should guide program development. Such an understanding is always a deeply personal one. Therefore, I devoted many hours to clarifying this understanding while walking the streets around our home in Belmont. I asked myself many questions: What does it mean to be Mennonite Brethren and what is the mission of that church? Does Christian higher education fit into our idea of mission? What special contributions could Mennonite Brethren make to the larger society through Christian higher education? What spiritual and intellectual resources can we bring to bear on this mission?

My growing up "Mennonite Brethren" had been a positive experience that had shaped my understanding of our "spirit and mission." My father was a longtime pastor and evangelist deeply involved in conference programs. Our home in Corn, Oklahoma was the "motel" where visiting Mennonite Brethren leaders dined and lodged, much
to my delight. Each visitor contributed in a unique way to building my understandings and values. Dinner time provided the setting for many interesting and instructive experiences. The humorous stories of Rev. Cornelius N. Hiebert, the "behind the scenes" information shared by missionaries, and the insightful interpretations of Scripture by Rev. Abraham H. Unruh reflected the range of these powerful influences. Four years as a student at Corn Bible Academy and another at Tabor College, a year of teaching at Corn Bible Academy and twelve at Immanuel Academy, extensive involvement in church activities, and a growing appreciation for our Anabaptist heritage developed during Civilian Public Service in the Second World War all contributed to my understanding of Mennonite Brethren identity. This perspective was broadened and enriched through the completion of degree programs at two public universities and a doctoral program in progress at Stanford. Assuming the leadership role would put the composite understanding gained through these experiences to the test.

We assigned first priority to the review and revision of the curriculum with the goal of building strong three-year Bible institute and two-year junior college programs. In the process we negotiated additional instructional time from seminary faculty to make possible an immediate expansion of the biblical studies offerings. After accepting appointment as campus administrator, T. R. Nickel was forced to resign for health reasons. Joel Wiebe consented to delay resuming his doctoral studies and accepted the on-site administrative role.

Because of the rapid changes being made, we decided not to print a catalog for the 1960-1961 academic year. Rather, we printed two brochures, one for interpreting the Bible institute and the other for the junior college. Students had to decide in which program to enroll.

The Bible institute brochure was mailed to every Mennonite Brethren family in the United States. It described the expanded Bible curriculum and augmented faculty. Students of all ages were encouraged to consider spending a year or two in Bible study at Pacific. Two open letters describing and promoting the Bible institute appeared in The Christian Leader to inform the constituency that this program was returning to its former breadth. Letters were sent to all Mennonite Brethren pastors in the United States urging them to promote the Bible institute. By policy, the junior college brochure mailing went out only to the west coast but included both Mennonite Brethren and non-Mennonite families.
In an effort to retain as many students as possible, particularly the forty-one first year students, we immediately informed them about the developing program and plans for the future. We tried to identify other denominational groups that would welcome recruitment among their students. Service to the larger Christian community was an important component of our mission. In recruiting potential young faculty members I frequently articulated that ecumenical aspiration by suggesting that "Pacific College can be a significant education center for the Christian young people of many evangelical denominations."

We immediately consulted with Dr. Mitchell Briggs, Secretary of the Western College Association, regarding steps necessary for regional junior college accreditation. For several years Dr. Briggs had been urging the administration of PBI to seek accreditation. He believed it was the only way that Pacific had a future. He was very responsive to our expression of intent and immediately scheduled a preliminary visit. Because of this visit, the regional accrediting agency approved a full-scale visit for the fall of 1960.

We were advised it would not be necessary to prepare the normal self-study since their primary attention would focus on our plans for institutional development. Nonetheless, Joel Wiebe and I decided to complete the normal full self study. We submitted it to the regional accreditation commission in May 1960.

Because of a favorable recommendation from the visiting team, Pacific College received junior college accreditation in early 1961. Pacific College thus became the first Mennonite Brethren institution to receive regional accreditation and the first Christian junior college ever accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Simultaneously, we gave serious attention to building the faculty. The college was fortunate in that it could draw upon the seminary faculty for instruction in biblical studies. The development and implementation of a long-range strategy for recruitment was imperative, however, particularly for the liberal arts faculty. Our immediate strategy was to aggressively recruit young Mennonite Brethren scholars emerging from graduate schools. In March 1960 I wrote enthusiastically to Dalton Reimer, a young MB student completing a Master's degree at Northwestern University, that "I am interested in tapping the top young men of our conference for this program. . . . With the experience and maturity of the seminary faculty and the enthusiasm, recent training, and scholarly minds available in the young men being added, we should have an unbeatable combina-
tion." Reimer became the first such young scholar to join our faculty in the fall of 1960. He immediately inaugurated a strong speech curriculum that served both the institute and college programs well.

Within three years, Reimer was followed in quick succession by Gary Nachtigall, Peter Klassen, Daniel Isaak, John E. Toews, and Larry Warkentin, all young scholars. Elias Wiebe's appointment as academic dean in 1962 added maturity and experience. By 1966, Harold Enns, Wilfred Martens, John Redekop, Jonathan Knaupp and Wilbert Reimer had joined the faculty. In retrospect, the decade of the 1960s was unique in the number of young scholars with an Anabaptist-Mennonite orientation emerging from graduate schools eager to join the Pacific College faculty.

Also important was the length of tenure that these young faculty members would give to Pacific College. The previous experience with frequent faculty turnover had made the board cautious in their expectations regarding tenure. Given the high quality of the emerging faculty, the board cautioned the administration to be satisfied if these scholars gave five years of service to Pacific. Half of those on the faculty in 1966, however, still serve today or did so until their retirement. Many of the others gave extended service. This stability provided a firm foundation for institutional development.

Recognizing that Pacific College could provide a quality experience for young men wishing to fulfill their national obligation through government-recognized voluntary service instead of military service, we aggressively sought Selective Service System approval for the establishment of an alternative service unit. Representatives of the Mennonite Central Committee were most helpful in helping us to obtain approval of such a unit in the spring of 1960. Within weeks, Robert Klassen entered our unit as college librarian. He brought excellent credentials, holding a graduate degree in library science, and had valuable experience as a librarian in the California State Library. His coming was most fortunate. Having made a sharp upward revision of the library acquisitions budget we needed Klassen's experience and expertise in making selections, supervising processing and screening out books no longer of value. After screening was completed only about six thousand remained. The rapid growth resulting from new acquisitions strained all available resources but Klassen never compromised the excellence of his work.

How should the library be housed on the new campus? The lone building on the twenty acres had classrooms and offices only. Improvisation was the order of the day. Two classrooms were set
aside to serve as the "library." Somehow, Robert Klassen made it function in that severely limited space. But that was soon to change.

A fortunate development occurred early in 1961. I received a call from P. A. Enns, who was attending the board meetings in Hillsboro, Kansas. He informed me that Cornelius and Elizabeth Hiebert of Los Angeles were willing to fund the construction and furnishing of a library with a gift annuity, replicating the Tabor College library. Enns asked, "Would you favor accepting the offer and could the budget be revised to include the annual annuity payments?" Without waiting a moment, I responded with a resounding "Yes!" We could always worry about how to revise the budget later.

Two significant forces were now complementing each other: rapid book acquisition and the construction of a beautiful, spacious and highly functional library. The new library became an outward symbol of Pacific's move into a new and brighter future. In 1965 the tragic demise of Upland College in southern California led to the acquisition of its library holdings in exchange for our assuming custodial responsibility of its academic records. With this acquisition, the Pacific College collection doubled to forty thousand volumes almost overnight. Processing this addition was a monumental task, accomplished under the leadership of librarian Adonijah Pauls.

Would the constituency accept the new vision for Pacific College? To obtain the answer we conducted a series of presentations in Mennonite Brethren churches and at the Pacific District Conference to interpret the vision for the institution's future and its underlying rationale. We included four themes in each presentation.

I emphasized that broadening the nature of Pacific's program represented a legitimate expansion of our historic commitment to missions. As a denomination we had sent missionaries to the far corners of the world. Through Pacific College we now had the opportunity to minister to those in the San Joaquin Valley in a similar manner.

As the college would grow in recognition, our character as Mennonite Brethren would be tested. More ecumenical relationships would require us to constantly engage in self-examination about whether we were representing the Christian faith at its best.

To accomplish its mission, Pacific College would have to earn the respect of the public for its academic excellence and spiritual vitality. Too often, Christian schools and institutions are associated with mediocrity. Pacific could not afford to be so identified. Our reputation must be above reproach. Therefore, high academic standards must become a hallmark of the institution.
Pacific College was shifting its emphasis to leadership training for all walks of life. Therefore, its program would progressively be expanded to offer sound and relevant training to a broader spectrum of students.

The reception to this interpretation of the vision was generally positive. A few constituents expressed concern that the emphasis on high standards of scholarship would overshadow the Christian mission of the college. The great majority, however, recognized that a college of excellence would serve both the church and the larger society. Mennonite Brethren laypersons, in particular, evidenced a remarkable understanding of the need for Pacific to develop as a liberal arts institution and rallied to give the vision strong affirmation. Many seemed energized by the new developments. But we also received words of caution amid the encouragement. "Remember that PBI represents the sweat and blood of many of us," A. A. Schroeter, one of the founders of the institution, admonished, "Don't forsake the purpose for which it was founded!" He voiced the concern of many that we stay true to the institution's original purpose even while recognizing that the new approach was necessary to effectively serve our mission and the changing needs of Mennonite Brethren youth.

An experience in November 1960 significantly fortified my resolve to make a long-term commitment to Pacific. The Shafter Mennonite Brethren Church invited me to give the afternoon address during their fall harvest thanksgiving festival. My parents accompanied Evelyn and me on this occasion. During the trip down my father and I engaged in an extensive and memorable discussion of challenges facing the Mennonite Brethren just as we had on many previous occasions. He encouraged me to render my best in the mission to which I had committed myself. I was already keenly aware of his prayerful support.

We shared the noon meal with several of our many friends in the Shafter congregation. My father had been their interim pastor for several years. Following lunch I went to the car to meditate in preparation for the message. Shortly, someone rushed to tell me that my father was very ill. I found him in the church's anteroom in excruciating pain. He had suffered a massive heart attack. Recognizing his end was near he spoke longingly that "I would like to stay with the family longer." With the final words, "God's grace is sufficient even for this hour," he left us to go to his reward.

It was a difficult choice to remain and make the presentation but I knew my father would have encouraged me to do so. Graciously,
Pastor Henry H. Dick offered to release me but I felt compelled to stay. Within the hour it was time to interpret the vision for Pacific to an understanding audience. I felt as though I was doubly commissioned, first by our heavenly father and now by my earthly father. Afterwards, Board Chairman E. J. Peters comforted and reminded us that, "This is what it is all about!" We needed to focus all of the educational efforts of Pacific College on eternal values and our eternal destiny.

The college prospered. In the fall of 1960 enrollment increased by more than 40 percent to ninety-two students. Despite the emphasis we had given to strengthening and promoting the Bible institute program, enrollment in it dropped in the fall of 1960 to just eighteen students. Simultaneously, enrollment in the junior college program nearly doubled to seventy-four students.

The Bible institute option had been given a final full and fair test with discouraging results that seemed to confirm the observations made by previous presidents during the 1950s. Clearly, it was time to reexamine how the founding purposes of PBI could be incorporated into an alternate approach. We chose a two-fold approach. The 1962-1964 college catalog promoted new three-year programs in Bible, Christian education, and church music to provide training in preparation for a life of service in the church. We also sought to embody the founding purposes in an academically strong liberal arts biblical studies program staffed by full-time faculty members to supplement part-time instructors from the seminary. In 1962 John E. Toews, a graduate of the seminary and subsequent long-term dean there, became the college's first full-time Biblical studies instructor.

By the spring of 1962 we felt institutional progress was so promising that initiation of the senior college program needed serious consideration. This was five years earlier than initially projected. So, while we were busy preparing the self-study for the next scheduled re-accreditation visit in the fall, we were also discussing the steps necessary for inaugurating a senior college program. During the WASC team visit we freely expressed our opinion that their next visit would likely be to evaluate Pacific as a senior college. Pacific's junior college accreditation was extended by WASC for three years. Stimulated by the self-study discussions, our faculty and administration immediately began to plan for the upper division majors in areas where faculty strength warranted.

More and more often we expressed our enthusiasm to the West Area Committee for adding the senior college program. Its members soon became part of the process, sharing our conviction that it was
time to move toward this major and significant objective. Chairman E. J. Peters, M. S. Gaede, and P. A. Enns were key players in moving the agenda forward. By the fall of 1962 the full board began to discuss this question. Some expressed serious reservations while others were convinced it was the only alternative. Slowly, a consensus began to emerge. By summer they agreed to submit the question to the conference scheduled to convene in Mountain Lake, Minnesota in August 1963.

Meanwhile, sophomores who would be juniors in fall were facing a critical decision. Would the conference approve Pacific becoming a senior college? Should they risk enrolling in upper division courses knowing that the senior college program was not yet accredited?

The board members were aware that the recommendation for Pacific to become a senior college required a major departure from the 1954 master plan and that it would not meet with universal approval. After all, the objective of accreditation for Tabor College, a key reason for the structure of the master plan, had not yet been realized. Approval also meant that the conference would have two as-yet unaccredited senior colleges. In spite of all of this, the board moved ahead. Chairman E. J. Peters, a man of widely recognized stature among constituents promised, "I will lead this charge!" He played a key leadership role in interpreting the reasons for this move to the assembled delegates. Dr. Roy Just, President of Tabor, volunteered to make the motion to accept the board's recommendation, believing that doing so would help to rally support among Tabor alumni.

Elias Wiebe, the newly appointed dean of academic affairs, and I represented Pacific College in describing the opportunities that would result from becoming the only Christian senior liberal arts college in the San Joaquin Valley. Considerable discussion followed from the conference delegates. In the end, the conference approved the recommendation. Immediately, Elias and I located the nearest telephone to inform the faculty that we were now a senior college. Their reaction was electrifying! Our vision could now expand as a senior college.

That fall most of the juniors decided to stay, trusting that the senior college would be accredited by the time they graduated. With their enrollment, the senior college was underway. Faculty members frequently took on extra assignments to provide the needed courses and engage in institutional planning. Enrollment continued to increase making it possible to recruit additional faculty.
Senior college accreditation now became the primary objective. We launched a vigorous program to recruit additional faculty, develop and refine majors, expand library and laboratory resources, and recruit students. Growth in program and enrollment, in turn, placed continuous demand for additional facilities. As a result we broke ground for new buildings eight times in the 1960s. Each time we had to depend on God's provision and the faithful support of our constituency to solve the financial demands this placed on the institution.

Parallel to program development, the faculty and administration engaged in intensive discussions to define the nature of the college. These discussions were the seeds that sprouted into a formal statement known by the mid-1960s as the "Pacific College Idea." The story of that process is treated elsewhere in this volume.

To explore accreditation for the senior college, Elias Wiebe and I met with the secretary of WASC. He warned us that it was extremely risky to seek accreditation before our senior college graduates had validated our program by establishing a record of successful work in graduate schools. We said we couldn't wait and were prepared to accept the risks of an earlier visit. Hearing of this risk, the board nevertheless approved moving ahead immediately. The faculty were more than prepared to take the risk. We applied to WASC for a visit during 1964-1965, the first year we would have seniors. WASC scheduled its visit for early in 1965. With dedicated commitment, the faculty and administration, under the leadership of Elias Wiebe, worked feverishly to strengthen the senior college program and complete the self-study. Finally, all was ready for the WASC visit.

A major factor favoring us was the record we had established since being accredited as a junior college. We had responded positively and fully to each of the previous WASC recommendations and were developing as projected. Our self-study included an open and frank discussion of additional deficiencies. We admitted that these would need to be resolved quickly and outlined our plans for doing so. Yet we knew that these preparations did not remove the risk associated with an early attempt to secure accreditation.

At WASC's request, Elias Wiebe and I attended their meeting in Los Angeles on May 10, 1965, during which they would be reviewing the visiting team's report and making their decision. They wanted us in attendance to respond to further questions. Meanwhile the faculty had secretly made plans to celebrate in the event that Pacific received accreditation.

The plan was for Elias and me to call as soon as we knew whether we had received accreditation. If that occurred, everyone would
spring into action carrying out predetermined assignments. Since some hours would elapse before we could fly back, they would have time to invite West Coast board members, local pastors, and other interested parties to the campus for a celebration upon our return.

The faculty arranged to have the student body, the board and the faculty to greet us at the airport. They had arranged for a white convertible to carry several board members, Elias and me in leading the parade back to campus.

At the meeting, WASC officials reviewed some of their concerns and asked for our plans to respond. Our hopes began to rise as the tone of the discussion became increasingly positive. They dismissed us so they could complete their decision making. A few minutes later they informed us of their decision.

Just a scant three weeks before our first seniors were to graduate, we were informed that WASC had granted Pacific College senior college accreditation! Hearts in our throats, we bade the officials a hurried good-bye and searched for the nearest telephone. A quick call to campus informed the faculty of the good news. They immediately sprang into action, informing students of this momentous development. All classes were canceled to begin the celebration.

The thoroughness of planning became apparent as we landed at the airport. Newspaper reporters and television crews were prepared for our arrival. Headed by Chairman E. J. Peters, the board members stepped onto the tarmac to congratulate us as representatives of the college as students and faculty cheered.

After a few comments reporting on our experience with the members of WASC, all headed for the cars to begin the parade. It was a jubilant crowd that paraded back to campus. It must be remembered that the mid-1960s were characterized by many marches protesting this and that. On the evening news one television reporter commented, “Today there was another student march in Fresno. But this one was different. The students of Pacific College marched in celebration of having been accorded senior college accreditation.” The comment was doubly significant. It brought attention to Pacific's accreditation but also told the audience that there was something different about this college and its students.

We had reached another milestone! Building on this new foundation, Pacific College was poised to serve the mission of the church in an even larger way. The vision of 1960 had become the reality of 1965.

The road between will forever be marked by many acts of faith. Members of the board, members of the faculty, members of the
student body, and many members of the Mennonite Brethren Church had combined their efforts to make the seemingly impossible happen. God added His blessing by honoring these many acts of faith. Accreditation of the senior college program opened up a new era, and brought added responsibility for using this new status to better serve the mission of the church.

NOTES


2. Ibid.


5. "Outline of the president's proposal made to the West Coast Area Committee on May 12, 1958," Board of Education Records.