

What Practical Experience Teaches Us about Lutheran Schools

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I will start by telling you a little about my own education. During my formative years I did not attend any Lutheran Elementary School (LES) or Lutheran High School (LHS). I went to kindergarten at an Episcopal school and then attended public school from first to twelfth grade. After getting a degree in education from a secular university (East Texas State University) I went to Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, and finally, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

I grew up in a Lutheran congregation with a strong Sunday school program but every day in public school my faith was challenged by teachers and students alike. It was a spiritual jungle. I'll never forget the intense inner struggles to maintain my faith through every level of public education. God works all things for good and here I am a committed Christian with a quia subscription to the Lutheran confessions. As God would have it I was assigned from seminary to a WELS church with an LES in Austin, Texas. Graduating with a five and a three year old son at the time, I cried for joy on call day because I knew my children would get the Christian education I never had. I am still serving that church and school 19 years later. All four of our sons have attended our LES from kindergarten through eighth grade. The last one is an eighth grader. I believe in LES and LHS. I offer a perspective from both the outside and inside of our system.

My assignment is to lead a discussion on ***what practical experience teaches us about Lutheran schools***. What a broad subject! How does one cover it in such a short time? I've narrowed down my research to a manageable size. I will discuss only a few pertinent ways we can **improve** and **sustain** what we offer through our LES and LHS.

I'll start by telling you what my assumptions are while presenting this paper. If we know each other's assumptions we can start on the same page and avoid needless distractions by debating things on which we agree.

First of all, the very first thing practical experience has taught us in Lutheran education is that we can never afford to lose our message. It sounds simple but so did the command **not** to eat from the wrong tree in the Garden of Eden. The devil knows how to attack God's plain and simple messages. Our message is unconditional grace in Christ for all lost sinners. This is the first and most important reason we organize any ministry at all, school or no school. If from a leadership standpoint the main reason we have a Lutheran school is anything other than to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ then we are wasting our time. The gospel is what makes our schools, Christian schools. The gospel is the very reason for their existence. It's what makes them special to us. It's what makes them worth having. Without the gospel there is no reason for any of us to be here.

Second, while Jesus has charged us to make disciples with his message, he did not establish any prescribed way we were to evangelize, educate and nurture the faith of people. For all of Christian church history, the way in which the bride of Christ has carried out her great commission has been in constant transition. In our 161 year history as a synod, we too have experienced a gradual shift in how we do ministry for Jesus. Presently, we have churches in many different settings. Each church must consider the context in which they serve and do their best to make disciples from the people in that context. 25 % of our churches have schools. 75% do not. Whether or not we have schools in our congregations, districts and synod is entirely up to us. There is no right or wrong. We must defend this freedom at all costs.

Third, the mission of our schools is to use the Word of God to create and sustain a growing relationship with Jesus Christ in the lives of their students. Sometimes we forget that we are not just imparting academic knowledge about the things of God. We want every student to have a vital relationship with Jesus through his gospel, not just indoctrinate them. There is a big difference. The word works all by itself. But as educators we must make it our aim to teach our students how it connects them to Jesus and changes their lives.

Fourth, I personally believe that our WELS schools are a wonderful blessing and great tools to help us make disciples for Christ. So, when I offer suggestions for improving the way we use them to reach this world for Christ, I do it as one who believes in them and wants them to thrive. I am the pastor of a church with a school and believe it is a valuable tool for disciple making.

Fifth, the gospel covers all our mistakes. We do not have to justify ourselves regarding any chosen path we have taken. If we could have done it better or should have done it differently in the past, we are forgiven. The gospel is our freedom and comfort. The gospel also empowers us to make honest assessments of what we do and why. We do not need to fear discovering any area for improvement. Gospel freedom always breeds honest assessment.

These are my assumptions.

The Necessity for Change

We find ourselves in a very critical time in WELS history regarding our educational system. We cannot deny the facts. We must look at them, admit them and do positive things together to reverse the trends. In regard to enrollment, our private school system is in rapid decline. The statistics speak for themselves.¹ We can argue about **why** it is rapidly shrinking but we cannot argue about **whether** it is shrinking. It is shrinking at a frightening pace! I want to talk about what we can do to reverse the trend. Doing nothing differently or better is not an option. We have to improve the way we do things. Our schools are too important to neglect them. So, the purpose of my paper is to explore what practical experience has taught us so we might leave here with a plan to do school better than ever before.

We must admit that by far and large our schools have existed mainly to nurture our own children in the faith. By definition a school is nurture, so it makes sense. To believe that our school exists only to nurture our own is incomplete, however. There is nothing wrong with having a school for our own. That's disciple making! But it has already been established that the WELS birth rate is 1.76 per couple. Like the rest of America we aren't making many babies. As the birthrate has declined so have our schools. Our schools simply must accept the challenge to reach their communities for Christ. This necessitates an honest assessment of our present practices to see **how** we can reach our communities with the gospel through the school more effectively. We cannot afford to sit by the road and long for the good old days. It is time to roll up our sleeves, **marry nurture with outreach** and get to work! **"Reach the Lost and Keep the Found!"** That is our clarion call! Christ's mission demands it and our schools' survival necessitates it. Therefore, for some of us, the first thing that must change is our attitude that the school is just for us. It is not. It is for everyone within our reach, just like all of our congregational ministries. We want to use our schools to penetrate the world with the gospel while we use them to nurture our own. It is and always must be a "both/and" NOT an "either/or" proposition! I'll come back to this later.

We also have to come to grips with the fact that even among our 328 churches with schools many of our own members don't use them. Couple this with the low birthrate and you can see we have work to do. I wholeheartedly agree with what Mark Zarling said about rallying each other to give our children a Christ-centered and not just private

¹ At present we have 1289 WELS congregations, 328 of those have Lutheran Elementary Schools (LES). Our current total enrollment in LES is 24,300. In our synod we have 25 Lutheran High Schools (LHS) with a total enrollment of 5,577. Our two synodical preparatory schools' total enrollment is 628. Our Martin Luther College (MLC) has 695 students and our Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) has 1000 students. Our seminary has 128 students. Adding all the numbers together in the WELS we have 31,328 people in educational institutions. (Omitting Early Childhood Ministry numbers) This makes us the 4th largest private educational system in the United States. While the numbers give us reason to be thankful, there is reason for pause, because these numbers represent a declining system. We are not in our "glory days" anymore. In the last ten years we have lost 4,600 LES students (16%). Our preparatory schools have lost 288 in enrollment (33 %).

education. I believe we are in a battle for souls. I accept the challenge! I am not going to re-say everything he said. The fact is that while we have Jesus Christ in our schools, less and less people are using them. What are we going to do about that? I want to address what we can change in the way we “do school” that keeps even some of our own people who love Jesus and their children from using our schools. I want us to address the “school” part more than the “Christ” part although they are never really separable. In our schools we offer God’s top notch gift, Jesus Christ. Frankly, that is enough for me to send my child to any of our schools. I do not care how big or small the school is. I don’t care if the education is above or below average. I want a school with a top notch Jesus. But most of the people we serve in and out of our congregations are looking for Jesus and an above average education too. If their educational expectations aren’t met, they will take their kids elsewhere for school even if they bring them to our churches on Sundays. I have a letter here that I received last week that I want to read to you. I did not print it for obvious reasons.

For me, that’s what makes this symposium important. We are focusing on growth, improvement, collaboration and mission. We are in a critical time but the future is as big as God wants to make it. Our job is to follow him, uncover his blessings and refuse to fall behind out of stubbornness to change or because of our lack of wisdom, effort or faith. We have each other for collaboration. So, I see this symposium as a large collaborative effort. Let’s use this time to share ideas with each other for the good of all. My paper is organized around three areas of concentration. I hope we all go home with a few action items in these areas to make how we “do school” better for the glory of God and the good of his lambs. The three areas are: **1) Personnel 2) Educational Program 3) School Advancement**. In my experience when our schools work hard at making these three areas the very best they can be, the school receives God’s blessing, sells itself, flourishes and blesses many people. Let’s get started!

Personnel

To gather new students and their families and keep the ones we have, we simply must have the very best personnel possible. God calls the people he wants through a “mediate” divine call to work in his church. We cannot pick and choose, as the world does, to assemble a staff. In the words of an old sage, *“You have to dance with the one that brung you.”* But the divine call does not exclude us from working hard at staff relations, staff development and improvement. It is incumbent upon everyone in leadership (Pastor, Principal and Boards) to constantly execute a plan for healthy staff development. If you as a parent are going to put your precious little child in a room with another adult and umpteen other kids for 7 to 8 hours a day, you want to trust the teacher loves your child, is well educated, self controlled and a positive influence. If our teachers are not growing in their professional life then our parents won’t let them teach their kids. It’s that simple. So, in the interest of discussion I offer the following theses about personnel.

1. The pastor and principal need to have a strong Christian relationship.

I have had the privilege of working with 5 different principals, each one a very uniquely gifted individual. Since in a parish setting our ministries are interdependent, we must have an open, honest, relationship between pastor the principal. The church members and school parents need to see them flourishing in a healthy friendship. What does this look like?

First of all, we talk to each other often. We are forever “popping in” on each other, texting each other, emailing each other and sharing some of our free time together. Good relationships don’t just happen. You have to work at them. We clue each other in on pertinent events happening in the lives of church and school families. We share ministry visions and hopes with one another. We socialize outside of work. We do what we can to cover each other’s back. We help each other with our respective ministries even when it does not directly affect our own field of service. Finally, devotional time together and praying over things together forges our relationship into a solid frame!

When we work closely with someone else we are going to make mistakes and hurt one another. We cannot avoid it all the time. So, the principal and pastor must be able to humbly apologize and verbally forgive from the heart so they can continue growing together and maintaining a united front for the good of the school and church. Every now and then my principal and I “take each other to the woodshed” on something but we do it as friends and we know that Jesus will keep us together. I have added some helpful hints in the footnote below² but will end this section by saying; there is **no room for disunity** between a pastor and principal if they are mature men of God. They **must** get along with each other in order to get along with the work. God wants them to work hard at it. **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace”** (Ephesians 4:3). If unity of purpose and vision seem impossible to achieve and they need to part ways like Barnabas and Paul (Acts 15:36-41) their district president and *Commission on Lutheran Schools* (CLS) men can possibly help make it happen. Otherwise, they have to deal with it!

Write down one new thing you will do when you leave here to improve your relationship with your principal or pastor.

2. The pastor and principal need to have a strong Christian relationship with the teaching staff.

Everything I said about pastor and principal applies to the principal and his teachers, but with some additions. The teachers must feel that the principal is there for them. Proactively the principal will have regular “one on one” meetings with each teacher to find out where he can help him or her with any challenges. If the teacher knows this “one on one” time is coming it will help him or her stay balanced and confident in a more challenging moment. She knows that the principal will actively listen and honestly address the problems when they get time to talk through it privately. “One on one” time also allows the principal and teacher to forge a strong bond as they encourage each other and tackle problems together. Follow up and follow through to track growth and the effectiveness of strategies is also important. You have to finish what you start.

The pastor needs to have a strong relationship with the teachers too, but more as an advisor/shepherd and not a driver. It is a delicate balance and hard to maintain perfectly. We have to work at it. Maybe this is a way to look at it: In the school the pastor does not have a “Hands In” role where he tries to micromanage the principal and teachers. Nor does he have a “Hands Off” role where he leaves them completely alone and does his own thing over in the church side of things. But he has a “Hands On” approach. That is, he is there to help in appropriate ways. He shepherds the principal and teachers. He and the principal talk often, almost daily, about everything. He passes through the school often, making sure he is seen by teachers, students and parents. He leads chapel talks, teaches confirmation classes, leads some staff devotions and reaches out to the un-churched families using the school. He

² Some tips in building healthy relations between pastor and principal: **1)** Disagree in private all you want, but outside of the privacy of your office, speak the same things after one another. **2)** Refuse to evaluate each other’s ministry to other staff, church members or school parents. Leave that for the times you talk frankly between yourselves. If we talk **about** one another and not **to** one another it erodes trust and destroys our ability to advance our cause together. In a parish setting the parents see the school and church as one unit. The relationship that the pastor and principal have is a guiding symbol of that oneness. **3)** Learn to appreciate each other’s education and experience. Every now and then a pastor feels and acts superior to a principal because of his position or seminary education. There is no place for feelings of superiority because of knowledge or education “Knowledge puffs up while love builds up.” (1 Corinthians 8:1) Jesus and Paul made this perfectly clear (Mark 10:41-45, 1 Corinthians 8:1, Philippians 2:1-5). On the other hand, sometimes the principal views the pastor as “out of touch” because he has not kept up with current educational theory or practices. The “puffiness” can go both ways. We just have to work at appreciating and valuing each other as a gift without comparing ourselves to each other. One book suggestion, “The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork” by John Maxwell.

goes to games, recitals, plays and programs as much as he can. He probes gently and often as to how things are going for everyone. If the teachers seem to be getting overwhelmed by their daily grind, the pastor, who has his finger on the pulse, can rally parents to react with appreciation. He can get the Called Worker Care Committee or elders to reach out to the teachers to bolster them. It's "Hands On", not "Hands in" or "Hands off."

Teachers are just as responsible to foster a good relationship with the pastor as he is with them. They will take a genuine interest in the pastor and his family just as he does for them. They need to join in congregational ministries other than the school just as the members of the congregation who have jobs still participate in congregational activities. Teaching at the LES is not their entire Christian ministry, only part of it. Ministry is a faith driven way of life not just a teaching job.

Some simple activities that enhance staff relationships are: faculty retreats, Christmas parties, end of the year parties, movie nights, picnics, etc. One axiom I try to live by applies here. **"Whoever gives the time gets the heart."** In every facet of ministry including staff relations there is no substitute for doing life together. I know of no better way to win each other's heart or to learn to work together than to just plain be together a lot.

Write down one new thing that you as pastor or principal will do when you get back home in order to improve your relationship with the teachers of your school.

3. The principal and teachers need to remain life-long learners.

If we believe that learning and growing are God's will for our lives, then we will naturally model it for our parents and students. Every teacher will want to have their own plan for professional and personal growth. Students are better served and parents are more encouraged to use our schools if they see a growing staff. Our CLS, together with Martin Luther College, is currently developing the Continuing Education for Called Workers teacher program. This program will help principals and teachers develop and maintain their own Ministry Development Plan (MDP) that includes a plan for spiritual and professional growth through formal and informal activities. A sample MDP is available from the CLS office at lutheranschools@wels.net.

We don't have to go far to find good, continuing education for our principals and teachers. Like never before, our two colleges, MLC and WLC, and our seminary, WLS, are offering advanced degrees and continuing educational programs. If their programs don't fit what one needs, a colleague in ministry can give advice and direction for programs of study that are doctrinally safe and helpful for our teachers to pursue. In addition, there are many informal ways to grow professionally as a teacher and principal.

To help our teachers remain lifelong learners, congregations need to encourage their teachers to continue their own education. Called workers don't make enough money to take on large school loans for their own post graduate work. Most of them have young families too. Paying for their post graduate classes seems in order and consistent with other professions in our culture. Our principal just finished his master's degree in Education Administration in School Leadership and the congregation paid for all of it. Could you possibly do that for your principal and staff?

What will you do when you get back home to make sure that every person on the staff has a personal and professional growth plan?

4. The teachers need to have a positive, growing relationship with the student and their parents.

First of all, a teacher can be the academically superior, but if the child is not confident that the teacher loves him or her, most of what the teacher tries to accomplish will be lost. Christian teaching is not just imparting information. It is transforming lives through the gospel in the fabric of everyday life together. The child will learn some amazing things from a Christian teacher that makes a good Christ-centered relationship a priority. This is even more important in this day and age when so many homes are dysfunctional or led by single parents. Find some helpful hints below.³ Remember, ***whoever gives the time gets the heart***. If the teacher will make it his or her aim to minister to the heart of the child, then that child will flourish in every area of study, especially in matters of faith. On another note, a teacher's ministry to the student does not end when they leave your grade level. You will forever and always be their teacher. Use that for their lifelong benefit by maintaining influence in their lives over a lifetime.

Secondly, invest time and energy in the parents too. Home visits are a must to learn their environment and to show acceptance. Teachers can leverage their strong relationship with parents for family ministry by sending emails with ideas for home devotions that are linked to that day's Bible lesson in school. Another trick would be to mail or email a well done assignment to the parent impromptu to show them their child's success. Text a picture from recess of their child having fun at school. Make life fun for the parent and the child. Sit by the parents at a game and ask them about their jobs. Have career days where parents tell the students about their jobs in the community. It forges relationships in many different directions. Our principal stands in the parking lot every morning and greets each parent and child as they arrive for school.

Thirdly, when a parent has a concern to share with the teacher there are some definite "do's and don'ts." Too often a teacher, principal or pastor loses the whole family because they are quick to speak, slow to listen and are quick to pass judgment. When things happen at school that upset the parents, it is always a wonderful opportunity to show Christ-like love. Love them through it and remember your mantra; ***whoever gives the time, gets the heart!*** In the footnote below find an example.⁴ I recommend that our school staffs do some kind of conflict resolution training every year.

³ Here are some tips: **1)** At the beginning of the day do a casual survey of each student to see if they came to school with plenty of sleep, plenty of breakfast and plenty of positive emotions. If they had a bad night or morning at home and/or on the way to school, the teacher must in some way fill up what is lacking to get the child going. A deflated child is not hard to detect. You can fill up a child with a smile, a hug, a game, a compliment and many other ways. **2)** Always follow up correction with "I care about you." talk. The child needs to know that your love is unconditional while you try to help him or her grow and learn in a conditional environment. Paul put it this way, "*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*" (Colossians 4:6) **3)** Watch for negative trends between you and a child and trend the other direction. If the child tends to have a chip about things all the time, try to create some fun things to do together in the classroom and outside at recess that trend the other direction. Again listen to Paul, "*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*" (Ephesians 4:2, 3) **4)** Give every child the opportunity to shine with his or her unique strengths. Even if the other students do not appreciate it, that child will know you loved him enough to help him shine anyway. **5)** Stay in touch with students as their mentor and friend after they leave our schools either by graduation or by transfer out. We have too many students who fall away from Christ after they leave our schools. To have a teacher give you time and attention without limit after you leave his or her school shows that Christ's love is not bound to the classroom that we occupy. Peter put it this way, "*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*" (1 Peter 1:22) When you love your students as a brother or sister, you do not stop sharing life with them just because they leave your classroom.

⁴ I suggest every teacher learn this simple acrostic L-E-A-D. They stand for Listen, Empathize, Affirm and Direct. Let me give you an example of how using L-E-A-D helps guide a discussion with an angry parent. Let's say little Johnny is irritating other kids and since kids are very conditional in their love, they start to ostracize him. Johnny goes home and tells his mom that everyone hates him at school. Mom asks for examples and Johnny is happy to share several while being careful to leave out his own mistakes that were a catalyst for his problem. Sound familiar? Mom gets very upset and leaves work early the next day to go speak to the teacher. She approaches the teacher in the parking lot without an appointment and there are other parents and kids around. The first don't? Don't frown. Smile and ask if you can talk in a few minutes when others are gone. Then show concern by asking if you can sit down in the quiet of the classroom and discuss it. Here is the key: everyone needs to be listened to. So, the

A calming anecdote: My mother always loved telling the story about our grade school principal who said at the “beginning of the year” parents’ meeting, “If you believe half of what they come home and tell you, we will believe half of what they come to school and tell us.”

What will you do when you get back home to improve your relationship with students and their parents?

5. Pastors, principals and teachers need to strive for physical, emotional and spiritual health.

Physical: It is enough to say that God wants us to take care of the temple he gave us for his glory (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). But we also have to admit that personal health and hygiene are necessary to lead others. Otherwise no one will really want to follow you anyway.⁵ The rigors of teaching are not easily accomplished if we are physically unfit. We need to watch our diet, sleep and exercise so we can handle stress and the challenges that come with ministry. Research shows that good physical health changes how we deal with problems. We simply cannot afford to eat poorly, live a sedentary life during and after school and do nothing to strengthen our bodies for longevity. There are lots of helpful tools out there regarding physical health. The book, “*Body for Life*” by Bill Phillips is a good start. Could we make this fun and have a faculty “biggest Loser” contest? Find a few more tips below.⁶ Our bodies are God’s temple where he displays his name. Do whatever you can to keep the temple strong, healthy and durable to spread his name as long as possible.

Emotional: Everyone needs to be able to unpack their baggage. Each teacher should have someone to whom they can talk who will give them love, support, positive feedback and an objective opinion. For married teachers their spouses can help with this, if they have a good marriage. Single teachers often struggle in this area. Too many are lonely and don’t have healthy, objective relationships. There is no one at home to whom they can vent and with whom

teacher must first of all hear the parent out before answering. We know Johnny took home a skewed story that made him look like an angel. But put on your poker face and listen to the parent like the child is an angel. Hear the parent out. You may even be delighted by her growing objectivity as she vents her anger. Solomon tells us, “To answer before listening— that is folly and shame.” – (Proverbs 18:13). Once you have heard her out, the first thing that should come out of your mouth is empathy, not judgment. *Example*, “*I feel so badly that you and Johnny have had this pain caused in your lives at our school.*” This soft answer will bring you closer to the parent rather distance you. “A soft answer turns away wrath.” – (Proverbs 15:1) you haven’t conceded anything. You are just admitting that your school is not a “no fault state”. You are sad that she and Johnny are hurting and it happened in the shadow of your desk. Once you have empathized, then you need to affirm her. “*Thank you for taking the time to talk it out with me. I have a better understanding now.*” Now that you have listened, empathized, affirmed, you can direct her. Make it a collaborative effort while validating her concern. *Example*, “*I think I can help by giving you a little perspective. You see, Johnny has a hard time controlling himself and so he has agitated the other kids to the point that they are impatient with him. I think you can help me if we talk to him together and explain that some of their behavior has been self-inflicted on his part. I think we can empower him to change how he acts and that way he will learn how to make friends better. That way, rather than fighting his battles for him, we can teach him how to get along better. Could we try that?*” I know that I sound so smart in this “test tube” case. Real life is always a little more complicated. But you get what I am saying.

⁵ I’ve heard more than one report about students and their parents being put off by the sights, sounds and smells of their teacher. You fill in the blanks. We cannot afford to be so dumb!

⁶ Let me offer a few more tips. **1)** Just start doing something more for your personal health than you did in the past. Rome wasn’t built in a day. You eat an elephant one bite at a time. You will become discouraged and quit if you try to fix it all too quickly. **2)** Mix up your exercise between cardio training and resistance (weights) training. I made the mistake of only doing cardio for a few years and it was not nearly as effective. **3)** Find a partner in crime. Get a workout buddy, someone to hold you accountable and to meet you for exercise. Solomon again, “Two are better than one ...” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). **4)** Educate yourself with good reading on nutrition and exercise. Find someone in your parish who is very health conscious. They will have resources and will offer support and advice. I have a member who is a certified trainer. She has been an invaluable resource for life changing physical health.

they can recreate. So, they need to be held accountable to cultivate transparent, healthy, spiritual peer relationships. Of course, more importantly, the rest of us should help provide what we can for them.

Also, each member of the staff needs some kind of mental diversion where they can do something they enjoy that allows them to decompress and escape the grind of teaching. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!” A plan for emotional health should be included in each teacher’s **Ministry Development Plan**. Some teachers might even need help finding a mental diversion that suits them. Some will need help giving themselves permission to take time for themselves.

Spiritual – It is amazing how many pastors, principals and teachers do not take time to soak in God’s word for the benefit of personal spiritual sustenance. Everyone needs a time each day when they let God’s devoted word feed their soul. Personally, the bookends of the day work well for me. A quiet time in the morning when no one else is up or late at night when others have retired for the day are great times to read Scriptures and meditate on their meaning for one’s heart. Today’s computer age allows for free or affordable, soft relaxing Christian hymns and music in the background to soothe the soul. A lot of people don’t know this, but there is an example of music accompanying the revelation of God’s word to his people in the Old Testament (2 Kings 3:14-16). It is also very helpful to have a buddy who will encourage you and ask frequently how your devotional life is going. School staffs can have brief devotions together two or three days a week for only five minutes before their school day and can pray together about their concerns. If we do not fill our own cup we will get dry and thirsty. It will affect how we handle all the challenges we face in ministry every day. The word of God is food for the soul. It has to be eaten regularly.

Write down one thing you will do once you get home to provide for yourself better physical, emotional and spiritual health. (At least one for each category)

6. Our school boards need to have a positive relationship with the staff, parents and congregational members.

Do we spend enough time recruiting, training and encouraging lay people to unlock their potential for the good of the church in our parishes? It affects our LES and LHS. Too often the school board is made up of untrained men whose criteria for serving is that they have kids in the school. Often the board is too reactionary. That is; they give little thought to the school between meetings. Instead, they come to listen to the principal and react to what he brings them. They need to be trained and held accountable for more proactive work. Could we take the ideas we teach in leadership classes at MLC and package them for Board of Education workshops? They will also enjoy their involvement when this happens. Here are a few ideas about board duties: **1)** the teachers need to know their board members well and should hear their words of encouragement. We want the principals and teachers to know that their school board has their back **2)** the parents should have board members encouraging them as partners in education. **3)** The board member that serves on the council should be visible, vocal and give substantive reports. **4)** The school board should take time for setting a vision for the school each year in the area of curriculum and mission advancement. **5)** They need to scheme about school promotion (internally and externally), for staff development, continuing education, teacher appreciation and the parent/teacher relations.

7. We need proactive school boards that function effectively.

This means that the school board and principal need to be able to understand how to run effective meetings. Can we show them how to limit discussion to the topic at hand, translate ideas into action items, keep each other accountable and chart progress and regress? The board should annually set the vision for the school. They should schedule time to look at the big picture. That way they can proactively plan for big changes for the better and not just react to problems for the month. They should annually evaluate the climate and culture in the school and see what they can do to proactively improve morale, and attitudes about the school in the congregation. The school boards need to have a “policy based governance.” That is, they focus on setting policies and then empowering the principal and staff to carry out those policies. We get more from our boards if they set the mission and vision while the principal and staff carry it out. Our CLS has free Board of Education Manual CDs that our boards can use to clarify and carry out their role. They also contain a template for a school policy manual. You should be able to pick one up today at this symposium.

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to enhance the ministry or your lay board that governs your school.

8. We need to provide the principal with the tools and time to carry out his mission.

Tools - I know that MLC and the CLS is working hard to train the young men among us to be principals of our schools. I praise every effort they are making to improve things. Often our principals are young and feel ill prepared for the challenges of leading a staff, the parents, students, and the school board in a congregational school. The CLS is offering the “*Leadership Institute Modules*” with 10 modules to equip principals in the field with a variety of leadership skills that they need to lead a school ministry. We are at such a critical place in history that I believe every principal in our system should be required to go through these ten modules as part of his *Ministry Development Plan*.⁷ Also, MLC offers online classes in leadership. If a congregation wants its school to thrive it simply must provide the funds and time for their principal to develop and maintain his leadership and administrative skills.

Time - A glance across the country at other thriving private schools will show that every one of them has a principal that has minimal class time and maximal administrative time. In the WELS the percentages are inverted. It is understandable since we have small schools and limited budgets. However, it is seriously affecting our ability to improve our schools. I received a breakdown of hours from one of our WELS LES principals who has 1.5 hours release time each school day for administrative duties.

Classroom Teaching – -----	25 hours
Classroom Preparations and Correcting Assignments –	10 hours
Coaching -----	5 hours
Worship -----	5 hours
Reactionary Principal Time – -----	7.5 hours
Total – 52.5 hours	

This does not include school board meetings, Parent Teacher Organization, athletic director duties, Sunday music ministry and unplanned incidentals. He has a wife and four children to serve too. When a principal keeps this

⁷ Contact your District Schools Coordinator or CLS Director Greg Schmill.

kind of schedule he has very little time to work through the “big picture” issues that will improve the school. He also risks being burnt out. Our principals need time to supervise instruction, plan new initiatives, execute a promotional plan, address systemic problems, set mission and vision and work with supporters. Lots of our principals love to teach and do not want to give up classroom time. Many others are willing to give it up but just can’t. We have to address this! What can we do? Basically it boils down to staff and money. We have to provide the staff to release the principal’s time to expand ministry. Are there any competent teachers in the congregation who can volunteer for a year at a time to teach a subject each day in the principal’s classroom? Can we call one or two part time teachers to handle two or three subjects each in the upper grades? Maybe you have some better ideas. If so, please share them. It’s time to address this critical issue in our current LES climate.

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to provide the principal **better tools** and **more time** to carry out his leadership of the school.

Educational Program

9. Our schools need to work hard at preparing students for life not just imparting information.

Making disciples is not just transferring information and testing to see if they understand the material intellectually. It is helping them apply truth to their lives. Jesus taught his disciples in an eastern way. They walked around and mixed with the community as he taught them heaven’s perspective on every situation. He helped his disciples view the world through his redemptive lens. He shaped their worldview and modeled their mission while they did life together. Our western style is to stuff people into rooms, set them in rows and impart information to them for handling things on the outside. It isn’t wrong, just different and has some disadvantages for equipping people for life. So, we must persistently and consistently do what we can to help the students experience what they are learning in real life. The other night I was hosting leaders of our newly formed **Connect Groups** at our home. I had been demonstrating for them how to host a home Bible study and social gathering in their homes. As we were socializing in the kitchen afterward, my 13 year old hopped up on the counter to listen in. We adults were casually talking about how to use our **Connect Groups** to reach out to neighbors and friends and not just host them for church members, when my son chimed in without solicitation, “Yeah, that’s what Mr. Raymond was saying today when we were studying Romans in class.” I was excited that at our school and in my home he was experiencing the faith he was being taught, not just taking notes and regurgitating information.

We learn the Word of God to know him, live with him and serve him in righteousness and blessedness. It’s a healthy balance between informational and experiential learning. Kids can learn how to prepare devotions and share them with their families and at the nursing home. Students can go on age appropriate mission trips. The younger they are the shorter and closer to home. If we don’t keep forcing our students to practice their faith in life we could create pharisaical spiritual sofa sleepers, who sit on our pews priding themselves in being well taught but who have very little earthly impact with the Word in their homes or communities.

The theme “**Help them experience that in real life.**” can be the mantra we follow in every subject matter we teach. We read for comprehension and learning. We learn mathematics and algebra to learn critical and analytical reasoning. We learn social studies to understand our world. We can bring in members from our churches that use

applied science and math in their jobs and have them do “in class fieldtrips” to demonstrate how education equips our kids for their life of service. In our congregation we have a woman who has a PHD in statistics. We brought her into the upper grades to teach the applied statistical analysis. After she told the class how her degree in statistics is used at work, she led them to do their own projects. We have a geologist who helps locate oil deep in the earth. He held the class spellbound in his presentation. We have had financial counselors show how to balance a checkbook. Our principal took our upper grades on a weeklong camping trip and studied the stars at night, the cliffs and waterways in the daytime. We had devotions and played games together. Remember, **whoever gives the time, gets the heart**. Some of our inner city schools have taken their 8th graders on a “Civil Rights Tour”. They visited all the important cities in the fight for freedom and for civil rights in America. They saw museums and presentations and stood where great moments in history came down. That’s awesome! Those kids received a three dimensional learning experience. They hear, feel and see what others surrendered in order to provide them their opportunities. They learned it all through our WELS schools. Think of how that links them and their parents to our churches when the church school helped them understand their world!

This current generation of parents is keenly interested in how learning works in real life and they will be very supportive of efforts to connect classroom learning to real life experiences. We’ll get unpaid advertising too!

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to help your educational program be better connected to real life at all grade levels.

10. Our schools need to offer for the best education possible.

First of all, we are educating God’s children for him. How could we try to get by doing anything less than our very best? He is our God and Savior. We want only the best for God and his children. Our schools are like Mary’s nard rolling down the head of Jesus (John 12:3). He deserves the best. When we do our best for God then we do our best for our parents as well.

Today, parents have many choices in education. They are highly educated about those choices too. When I was a child there were two, the public school and the Christian Day School. Now we have home schools, online schools, charter schools, magnet schools, virtual academies and “classical” schools. In our little congregation alone we have had members pull their kids out of our school to send them to all of the above at one time or another. We simply **must** have an excellent educational product for our own parents, not to mention the prospective parents from the world. At the top of the list has to be accreditation. Currently 2/3 of our LES and 2 of our LHS are **not** accredited. Accreditation insures that our schools meet standards acceptable to most parents. It also communicates due diligence on the part of our staff. Contact Jeff Inniger at CLS or your District Schools Coordinator for information on the school accreditation process.⁸ National test scores help prove we have a good product too. In the “instant information” age we need to test often enough to give parents a good look at the school’s current educational strength. Today, objective measures trump anecdotes.

⁸ Our WELS accreditation includes accreditation in one or more nationally accepted programs as well.

We must also constantly review and update curriculum and instruction. Although the basics do not change, teaching methods and presentation styles can improve and be kept current with the times. With the dawn of “brain based” research there is a plethora of ideas handy for today’s teacher to update teaching styles and match current lifestyles among their students. Today we are more collaborative, more facilitating and more cross pollinating than we were before.⁹ Teachers need support and training to incorporate more active learning in their classrooms.

Do we see the value in keeping as current as possible in technology? Maybe it’s time to get your teachers an **I-Pad**. We know that public schools will soon have children using them as they interact with students. We want our schools to prepare the kids for life in a tech savvy world, don’t we? We cannot provide everything that heavily funded public schools can. But we can always stretch ourselves to do something new in technological advancement every year.

We don’t want to get too caught up in all the bells and whistles as if to say that we have to have the latest of everything to properly educate our children. We don’t. But we do need to stay as current as possible in educational style and technology. If we don’t, we will be left behind. It’s that simple. We don’t have to like it but if we want thriving schools, we must accept it.

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to help improve educational practices and update technology in your school.

11. We need to maintain updated facilities to meet modern cultural expectations.

First of all, it honors God when we keep our instructional space in good order. Our school is his school for his lambs. We want to glorify him in how we maintain it.

An updated facility honors our constituents as well. At present, in Austin we have a school with a well educated, experienced staff. We have a Christ-centered education and a very supportive congregation. Our facilities are a small (70’ by 80’) 40 year old metal building and an additional (18’ by 24’) portable building on small acreage located in a hidden neighborhood filled with retired folks and couples too poor to help us pay for the school and needed improvements. Frankly, it’s killing us. As a congregation we have grown 310 % in 20 years but our school has shrunk 10 %. We know we need to improve facilities and location to reach more people for Jesus. So, we’ve started Sunday worship in a targeted growth area 12 miles away and are launching a capital fund drive to purchase 15-20 acres for a new church and school site. It’s not rocket science. But it is challenging.

Before anyone gets too pious about their one room school growing up, remember we are not asking what worked back then. We are asking what works now! There is a big difference. I distinctly remember discussing recruitment with a prep school leader a few years ago. I asked him if he thought the trips to MLC by the junior class were causing more of them to matriculate to MLC. He said, “The kids come back less than enthusiastic sometimes because of how dated the facilities are there.” Then he said, “We have to find the money to update that place.” Thankfully, since that conversation MLC has experienced significant updates. I hope they never stop updating. All I am saying is that even in the center of our church culture (the prep and college system) we recognize that the American culture produces parents and children who view facility improvement as progress in education.

⁹ In the appendices is a list of teaching ideas for more active learning from one of our WELS teachers who formulated them from her recent master’s program classes. There is also a one page summary of education “Then and Now”

Maybe you don't want us to focus so much on the tangibles. Our intangible Christ is enough for you. It is enough for me too. But for some, the tangibles tell them what we think of the intangible gospel. I am reminded of the lady who visited our church the first time because she figured that since we kept the lawn and landscaping so nice, we must "love the Lord" too. We taught her basic Christian doctrine and she joined the church with a solid understanding of how much God loves her in Christ.

My practical advice? Embrace the concept of facility improvement and do what you can every year; a new coat of paint, replace desks, install a smart board, replace ceiling tiles, carpet, floors and windows. De-clutter offices and classrooms. Update bathrooms. Become handicap accessible. Update, update, update! Show that you love your facility and do the best with what you have in whatever way you can.

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to update and improve your facility for education.

12: We need to provide the best possible extra-curricular activities.

I know I am pushing the envelope for some of you. But again, hear me out. Today's parent is looking for Christian education and blank. They want more than just Christ-centered curriculum. We don't have to agree with them but if they choose not to use our school because we don't have piano and guitar lessons, girls volleyball, boys flag football and basketball for both genders, then we cannot point our finger at them and curse them for not choosing us. We made our choice and paid the consequences. Let me tell you a secret. The examples I just used are all extracurricular activities we offer at our school which has only 51 students, 4.5 teachers and no gym. I'm not boasting. I'm telling you that offering some extra-curricular activities is possible no matter how small you are. Offer the best you can and lots of parents will give you an "A" for effort.

We have members of our church who help provide those extra-curricular activities for free and some of them do not have children in the school. Theirs are grown but they still support the mission of the school with their time and talents. One man's wife home schools his children but he coaches our boy's basketball team and teaches golf to our upper grades at **Golfsmith** one day a week.¹⁰ A church member in his 50's provides free guitar lessons every Monday at our school. His mission is to prepare more church musicians. This year a neighbor living close by our church offered to demonstrate welding for the kids and he doesn't have a church home. We must embrace the need for extracurricular activities and then prayerfully create an atmosphere of permission for people to help us, especially in a small school setting. "**Dance with the one that brung you.**" Look around and see what consecrated saints or friendly neighbors might provide. What about voice lessons, bowling, skating, hiking, biking and camping?

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to increase and/or improve your extracurricular offerings at your school.

School Advancement

13. We need to constantly show our own members why we have a Christian School.

¹⁰ The original headquarters for this national chain is ½ mile from us and he works there.

Look at God's people in Scripture from Cain to the children of Israel to Jesus' generation. People are always prone to forget why we actually do anything for God and his people. That's why congregational leadership has to constantly and consistently set and reset the mission of the church in regard to every aspect of its ministry. Our own members have to be reminded constantly that we have a school to win the life or death struggle for souls. Sermons, Bible classes, special appeals, home visits, you name the venue – we can never assume our people are staying on mission. We have to help. It takes solid, persistent leadership to cast the vision for our parish schools and high schools to all our own members. This galvanizes financial support and helps with recruitment.

I recommend that principals and school boards form visitation teams and go to the homes of all their members who have children 0 to 4 years old and pitch the Christ-centered school message. Get them while they're young and haven't become engrossed in another school. In those same home visits the leadership can address questions that are bound to come up regarding academics, athletics, extra-curriculars and technology.

Write down one thing you will do when you get home to improve the promotion of the school in your own congregation.

14. We need an ongoing, well executed plan, to reach our communities through our schools for Christ.

Our schools do not primarily exist to provide a safe environment for children as they are educated, although we know that some parents chose them for this very reason. Our schools do not exist for good character training although we know some parents chose them for this very reason. Our schools do not exist to provide good teacher/student ratios although some parents chose them for this very reason. Our schools do not exist to provide good extracurricular activities although we know that some parents chose us for this very reason. Our schools exist to raise up disciples for Jesus who know him and his gospel and who trust him implicitly for their salvation. That's why our congregations exist. That's why our schools exist too. There is no difference in our mission, only the type of ministry we do. But if we can't get people to use our schools we have to do something different.

God is still blessing humanity to be fruitful and multiply although family birthrates are down. There are kids everywhere. In our Austin community the public schools are overflowing. Each one of those kids has an eternal soul. We want to touch as many as possible with the gospel. If we are going to truly fulfill our mission, we had better get off our backsides and get out and reach those kids and their parents. Lots of parishes wait way too long to target the community. They see their own school shrinking. They watch and pray but do very little to get their message, or even their existence, out there in the community. I'm preaching to myself too. Almost, every year we get at least one new student whose parents and live fairly close by, who tell us they didn't even know we were there. We need to intentionally and intelligently reach out to our communities.

Look at our own circles, the schools that are thriving in enrollment are intentionally reaching out to the community.¹¹ You cannot just give this lip service. You have to do the work! Promotional ideas include mailings, advertisements on websites, positive word of mouth from parents, school fairs, big signs out front welcoming enrollment, door hangers, canvassing and neighborhood surveys; they all help. Why not have the school families show

¹¹ Give Pastor Phil Huebner, Palm Coast, Florida, a call. They have an aggressive and well thought out plan for reaching their community through their school and have experienced marked success.

love for the community by doing some community service project?¹² Having people in the community boast about your charity is extremely valuable.

Perhaps before you start reaching out to your community methodically, you had better answer the question, “Do we want our school to be for the community or just for us?” Your answer will dictate what you do or don’t do. I suggest this mission statement for our LES, **“Our school exists to raise up future generations of Christians in our community who have been taught the pure Word of God by us.”** Notice that this statement makes us look to the community and how we are affecting it for generations. Too often our default mission statement is, “Our school exists to teach our own children the pure Word of God and to protect them from the ills of society.” Or sometimes it sounds like this, “Our school exists to raise up a new generation of called workers for the WELS.” I’m just saying.

Some people balk at having an outreach model for their school because they are not sure if they should have heterodox children in school with their own WELS kids. Really? First of all, children are wet cement. You would be hard pressed to classify any child as a “persistent errorists” to be marked and avoided. As long as they listen respectfully to our teaching and do not cause problems, let them stay among us and participate in our all of our gatherings. They are wet cement! While we’ve got the kids in school we can educate their parents in the Word of God. We require that the parents take our New Comers Class during the first year that we have their children in our school.

Incidentally, we have consistently landed parents and grandparents in our congregation whom we met through the school. But don’t think it always happened overnight or according to our desired timetable. However, in the last two years we have had baptisms at school during Friday chapel. What a living example of the school benefitting the community!

Our kids are soon going to confront everything this ugly world has to offer. Why not let them confront some of it in our midst in a controlled environment? I’m not talking about inviting drug culture and open immorality into your school. I’m not talking about letting every little Arminian teach the class his semi-pelagianism either. I’m talking about letting children who know little about Jesus Christ (but who can follow the rules of our school) live among us at our schools as we model to our own kids how the powerful gospel changes lives. The Pharisees sanitized everything including their living spaces. Jesus mixed it up in the world. I’m just saying.

To be totally honest with ourselves we have to admit that all of our children are heterodox too. That’s why we have them in school. They were born blind, dead, enemies of God. Do you think that between birth and kindergarten they became orthodox theologians? Do you think that when they are confirmed there are no heretical ideas floating around in their heads unnoticed?¹³ Think again. The demand for orthodoxy as a prerequisite to be at our schools is for our teachers, not our students. LES and LHS should have the same outreach mission emphasis that all of our 163 non LES Early Childhood Programs have. They exist to introduce little children to Jesus Christ, ours or somebody else’s.

Write down three things you will do when you get home to increase your school’s impact in the community.

¹² Project Ideas: Make blankets for the poor through the local Community Service Center. Adopt a highway. Visit a nursing facility. Have a food or winter coat drive. Help with disaster relief to fire, flood, tornado and hurricane victims. Support pregnancy centers. etc.

¹³ If you don’t think our confirmands have some heterodox ideas floating around in their heads along with their confession of faith in our scriptural doctrine, just consider our retention rate or ask religion teachers at our LHS.

15. We need to constantly evaluate the context of the school's ministry.

The contexts in which we do ministry are forever changing. One pastor quipped to me years ago, "If you don't like the landscape of your congregation today, don't worry. It changes every four years." The communities around our churches change rapidly too. We live in a mobile society, moving every three to four years. How many of us have had solid parents pull their kids from the school because they moved too far away from the school in order to upgrade their home or neighborhood? My experience is that we are too slow to react to changing contexts in and around our congregations and schools. Sometimes we don't even realize that our context has changed at all.

Nehemiah is a good example of leadership ascertaining context before doing ministry. He arrived in Jerusalem alone and rode around the walls in the dead of night so he could understand the context in which he would be working. Similarly, school leadership must constantly study the congregation and the neighborhood around the school. How big you think your neighborhood is a context thing too.

Here are some ideas on how to study context: congregational surveys, a good congregational data base that can be queried from different angles, a community demographic study every year,¹⁴ and ethnographic interviews in the community around the church. Every family that pulls their kids from the school should be given an exit interview a few weeks after the dust settles. Families in the congregation that do not use the school should be asked why not? Time spent actively listening to the people you serve is much better spent than time sitting in meetings guessing what is going on out there. It takes more work but you will find very helpful insights regarding your context of ministry if you will talk to the people themselves. Staying current on the context in which we serve is a constant struggle. CLS continues to offer (on a limited basis) the on-site consulting service of **Forward with Lutheran Schools and Second Wind**. Contact Greg Schmill.¹⁵

Another context for ministry is the generational differences in the people we serve. Sociologists have researched and collated four living generations today. Builders, Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. All have a set of core values established in their formative years that give them a culture of their own. We do well to study the generation our prospective parents occupy in order to become all things to all men in serving them (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

16. We need to have a viable plan for funding sustainability.

One pastor told me, "Funding the school is the elephant in the room!" I agree. If a church leadership cannot maintain the school's funding, it will die a slow agonizing death. Death by starvation is never pretty. As a congregation we currently heavily subsidize our LES. We believe in our school ministry and so we do not argue about that much. At the same time we are introducing partial tuition. A comprehensive communication campaign is essential for a smooth transition from free education to more tuition based funding. Open forums, educational mailings and personal home visits would help. Ministry is labor intensive. Executing strategies for funding changes is no exception.

About the partial tuition model of funding; it seems to me that when a congregation has a school we want it to feel that way and not as if the school happens to have a congregation. The difference can be hard to quantify but you sort of know it when you see it. Schools cost so much that when you have a good one it seems to be where most of the energy and dollars go. Jesus' mission mandates a disciple making ministry that far outstretches kindergarten to eighth grade. We must have robust ministry from cradle to grave. The battle to save souls is not fought for nine years and

¹⁴ The website "zipskinny" will give you a current free snapshot of your zip code. For \$219 you can go to a website called "Percept" and get a comprehensive study of your Ministry Area Profile.

¹⁵ See Jeff Inniger and Greg Schmill.

then it's over. We want to reach every lost soul in the community, every marriage problem, every distraught college student, every soul teetering on the edge of despair, every person at death's door, every middle aged Boomer tempted by the avarice so prevalent in our society, and many other people for whom Christ died. For the congregation to fund the school for people in a nine year window of life at the expense of all the other age groups is not right! Call it what you want; kingdom balance, nurture and outreach, well rounded ministry, I don't care. Just realize that having a 2/500+ ratio in adult ministry in the post "Cleaver Family" era¹⁶ and then to have a 1/17 ratio in school ministry without expecting parents to help balance the scales creates a perilous choice for many souls suffering in silence.¹⁷ On the other hand if we are going to expect today's parent to pony up for a significant part of the educational costs we had better give them an excellent educational product. They won't "spend" the money on cheaply made education.

In the ebb and flow of ministry funding there has to be a persistent, confident voice for every facet of ministry. I cannot stand up here and tell you how you ought to fund your school and church when I don't even know your context of ministry. We each need a strategy for getting at funding in a balanced way. We need a way to look at our context accurately and honestly. We need a way to communicate with our congregations and our parents that it is good and right that we share the costs of education. We need to help each other pay more for school and less for cars and homes. We need to help parents who cannot afford our schools but want to use them nevertheless.¹⁸ We need to use whatever public funding is available if it does not breach fellowship or invite restrictions on our instruction or overall mission.¹⁹ We need to teach the mission of the church and good stewardship practices too.

The **Task Force for Lutheran Schools** recently empowered by our synod convention will be working on several funding models to help congregations create funding plans that are appropriate for their particular contexts. I think the best way I can help you is to encourage you to keep your eyes open for materials coming from the task force and in the meantime to contact CLS for some information and materials about funding Christian schools.²⁰

Pastorally, I would like to offer this bit of advice; if you are going to argue about the school every year, it will close. You need to close the argument about the school, not the school itself. Funding fights will kill your school, so work hard behind the scenes of public debate and come up with a funding strategy that fits your context, spreads responsibility over the parents and the congregation and allows for other robust congregational ministry to occur.

One perspective: When we do spend a lot of time, energy and money training a disciple for Jesus in our school and then later that child treks across the globe to carry Jesus to others, we are doing world missions through our schools. Don't forget that. Children are seed corn for future harvests. It's never good to sell or give away your seed corn. Funding schools takes faith in things not seen that the Lord will do tomorrow with today's investment.

Write down what you will do when you get home to strategize the funding program for your school.

¹⁶ I am referring to the greater demands put on pastoral staff in these days when the traditional family is not as prevalent as before.

¹⁷ In the old non tuition models we expected parents to offset educational costs with life-long stewardship of treasurers long after their children graduated from the school. It can still work if you have plenty of families giving consistently to the general offerings over their entire lifetimes and you have an effective long term stewardship training ministry in the congregation. But this model does not always teach parents the value of the education they are receiving for their children.

¹⁸ In the appendices you will find a 12 point program for tuition assistance offered at one of our LHS for parents who need the help.

¹⁹ I am talking about grants from foundations, government school choice programs, etc. I have noticed some in leadership use old reasons to reject public funding outright without realizing that many grants and public funding models do not impede what we do. We have to stay current on the "funding contexts" today.

²⁰ You can get a very helpful 16 page document called, "**The Future, Funding, and Faith**" from our CLS office. It lays out rational and process for an LES leadership team to lead their congregation from "free" to tuition based education.

Concluding Remarks:

You may have other thesis to enhance our school ministries. That's great! Let's discuss them any way we can. We all need each other to get this done. There is no time to waste either. It's possible that working together and with God's blessing we could have more and bigger schools in the future. To do so we might have to change our attitudes, strategies and perspectives to meet current challenges.

What about starting a school where there is none? The task seems so large, so overwhelming! I remember watching a young pastor's eyes glaze over when I asked him if they were going use their new educational wing to start a preschool or afterschool care center. He just said, "I don't know where to start. That's not my gift." He was paralyzed by the size of the task.

Zerubbabel and Joshua had that problem in Zechariah 4. Rebuilding the temple was such a monumental task in the face of opposition from enemies and misplaced priorities among God's people that they mothballed it for 16 years. They had cleared and leveled the temple mount and then abandoned the project. What did God tell them? "***Who despises the day of small things?***" (Zechariah 4:10 – 1984 NIV) God loves our small starts and promises to use them to do great things. Be encouraged by his Spirit's promise to take the small things we do and make them grow into large things for him. Just this week a woman in my ***New Comers Class*** told us that a ***Mother's Day Out*** program at another Lutheran church was what kept her connected to Jesus for several years. I think that might a good way to start a school. Seems I remember something about a mustard seed resulting in a large plant somewhere in the words of Jesus (Matthew 13:31-32 - 1984 NIV). Why not start with a ***Mother's Day Out*** or ***After School Care*** program? Keep it small at first and, "***Dance with the one that brung you***". Prayerfully expand from there. Enjoy the journey and be glad you get to do anything at all, sinner that you are. Do you remember how to eat an elephant? One bite at a time! But for Jesus kingdom's sake, don't just sit there wringing your hands about small things!²¹

Also, we must bear in mind that our schools are not the "end all/be all" for ministry. Whether we have a school or not we still need to make disciples, recruit people for ministry, equip the saints to do ministry, and reach the lost. Saving schools is not our mission. Saving souls is. Nothing can change our mission or our power in Christ to accomplish it. We don't need our schools to do God's work. We have his Word. Let that be your strength and your hope.

Could we take our blinders off for a moment and talk about how to utilize teacher trained people for congregations without schools? If you have never had a school or you have lost yours, couldn't you deploy teacher trained WELS called workers to lead children's ministries throughout the weekday afternoons, evenings and weekends? If the form of ministry we have is not as important to us as the mission we serve then we can adapt ourselves to many different situations can't we? Night comes when no one can work! One of the congregations in our district that closed its school in recent history immediately made the principle, the staff minister for family ministry at the same time the school closed. It has worked out well. Now, several years later they are rebuilding the whole school ministry starting with preschool and kindergarten. Churchill was right, "Never, never, never, give up!"

²¹ I have to tell you about Bob and Marlene Hill. They are in retirement from a lifetime of WELS homeland and world teaching ministry. They dearly love Jesus, and people. They also believe the great commission. Last year they got some small grants, vowed to teach for free, (They don't need the money.) and then started a school with 7 students just three weeks ago. They have a nice rented space in the downtown area of their small Texas town, Marble Falls. "***Who despises the day of small things?***" God bless it! One of Bob's sons told him, "Dad, I thought when you retired you were supposed to start doing those things you loved." To which Bob replied, "I am." I rest my case.

Finally, let's work hard at this school thing but not be discouraged by our failures or overly encouraged by our successes. Making disciples is our calling and so by God's grace that is what we will do. I hope it is with more and better schools in the future but if not, well, I will be right here making disciples either way. So will you.

Sometimes in ministry we might feel like Jesus who said in the second song of the Servant (Isaiah 49:4), "***But I said, 'I have labored for no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.'***" But don't forget what he said next, "***Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God.***" (1984 NIV) Often God is doing his best and greatest work when it looks like he is doing nothing good at all!

Trusting God with the future,

Rev. Donald W. Patterson

Appendices

Total Participation Techniques to Make Every Student an Active Learner

The Two Fold Goal

- > To engage each and every student in the learning
- > To challenge students with higher-order thinking: analysis, evaluation, and synthesis

1. Think-Pair-Share

- > A. Ask students to reflect on a question or prompt, giving a brief amount of time to formulate an answer
- > B. Students pair off or use an elbow partner
- > C. They discuss their responses
- > D. Require them to defend, explain, or extend answers

2. Quick-Writes

- > A. Select a prompt for students to address
- > B. Give students specified time to collect thoughts, jot down a response (3-5 min)
- > C. Follow up with a Pair-Share, Networking, or Splash to require student explanation in order to deepen thinking. (Splash is no.4)

3. Quick Draw

- > A. Select a big idea or major concept of the lesson
- > B. Ask students to think about the meaning of the concept in order to create a visual representation
- > C. Have students explain their image with a partner. This could be done on PostIt notes in a Splash. Students can use words to compliment their pictures

4. Splash

- > A. Select a sentence starter, prompt, question for which you want all students to see the responses of their peers.

(Quick Draws, Quick Writes)

- > B. Answers are written or drawn on Post-IT Notes and placed on a wall, white board, or chart paper.
- > C. Students walk around, analyze, discuss, or jot down similarities, differences, common threads, categories, surprises.
- > D. Small groups share what they notice or noted before volunteers share or, groups can report their observations.

5. Thumbs-Up

- > A. Ask students to reflect on a prompt.
- > B. When they are ready with their reflection or have a thought, their thumbs up indicates they are ready to move on.
- > C. Add a Pair-Share to allow students to share thoughts.
- > Note: cards can be used to indicate readiness--READY to Share/Still THINKING. You may need to give an in-between activity to give some students enough time or to require deeper thinking and explanation.

6. Similes

- > A. Create similes about a topic you are discussing.
- > B. Ask students to formulate an explanation of how this simile might be true or understood.
- > C. Pair-Share, Numbered Heads, or Splash for a whole group discussion/analysis.

- > D. After modeling several similes, have students think of their own similes
- > about topics they are learning.
- > (Topic) was like _____ in that _____>

7. Ranking

- > A. Select items, events, descriptive paragraphs and other things that can be analyzed and ranked within your unit or lesson.
- > B. List criterion on which the ranking should be made.
- > C. Ask students to rank and justify their choice using individuals or group discussion.
- > D. Students should share and declare their ranking to other individuals and groups

8. Numbered Heads Together

- > A. Groups by counting off, each person remembers their number
- > B. Confirm that students know their numbers
- > C. Inform students all members must be able to report for the group
- > D. Call out one number to report. Another number could continue reporting to give more students responsibility.

9. Thumbs Up or Down Voting

- > A. Ask Y/N question or Agree/Disagree response statement
- > B. Students may give an in-between signal
- > C. Follow through with defense, explanation, looking at two rationales, and looking for justification and supports for choices.

10. Walk and Talk

- > A. Ask a question in which every student would offer options (brainstorming)
- > B. Give students to walk, find a partner, share and listen. Students move on after sharing and listening to share and listen again.
- > C. Report to whole group something heard or shared.

11. Bounce Cards--to teach discussion skills

- > A. Select a student with whom to model how to use the BC
- > B. Model a poor discussion first--short with no building on each other's ideas. Point out the need for conversational skills, bouncing ideas from partner to partner.
- > C. Teach 3 kinds of responses--bounce: adding new ideas from partner to partner which build to connected ideas; sum-up: rephrase what your partner says and comment on certain parts; and inquire: ask a question about something that was said by the partner.
- > D. Model a healthy discussion
- > E. Allow student to practice on an assigned/chosen topic

Place the following on a BOUNCE CARD

- > Bounce: take what your classmate said and bounce an idea off of it. You may start your response with--
- > "That reminds me of..."
- > "I agree, because..."
- > "True. Another great example is when..."

- > "That's a great point, and..."
- > Sum It Up: rephrase what was said another way. You can start your response with--
- > "I hear you saying that..."
- > "So if I understand you correctly..."
- > "I agree with your statement..."
- > Inquire: understand what your classmates mean by asking them questions. ou can start your response with--
- > "Can you tell me more about that?"
- > "I'm not sure I understand..."
- > "I see your point, but what about...?"
- > "Have you thought about...?"

NOTE TAKING Techniques

> 1. Confer, Compare, Clarify

- > A. Students pair up to confer, sharing a one sentence summary of what was most important in the presentation, lesson, reading.
- > B. They compare the notes they took, borrowing ideas from each other.
- > C. They clarify by asking questions about anything they do not understand. They ask each other the questions, seeking answers.
- > D. Unanswered questions are recorded on the board. The teacher can address the questions before moving on.

> **2. When using graphic organizers**, prepared packets or outlines, pause for the students to reflect about notes, share them, and ask questions to check for understanding. Checking assures that more students understand content more completely.

> 3. Anticipatory Guides

- > A. Create T/F statements related to the content you are GOING TO present.
- > B. Ask students to read and predict responses according to their prior knowledge in a "before" column.
- > C. Elicit rationale from students and ask them to develop questions about upcoming content.
- > D. After covering the content, revisit, and revise responses for T/F questions in and "after" column.

> 4. Picture Notes

- > A. During a teaching pause, give a 4 minute drawing time about content. Use symbols to capture ideas.
- > B. Share and explain pictures.
- > C. Answer any questions.

> 5. Lecture notes

- > A. Students take notes for a section
- > B. Teacher periodically pauses for students to read their notes, writing a summary for the section
- > C. Pair share and collect questions on Post-Its for a wall Splash.
- > D. At the end answer all questions from the Splash

> 6. Key Word Dance

- > A. After teacher led discussion, students review their notes and collect key words from the content
- > B. Students as individuals, pairs, or groups create a key word poem to represent the big ideas from the content.

> C. Share word poems in a Splash. as the whole group reviews, people should be able to defend the words they choose with their rationale.



How Luther High School's Tuition Is Affordable for You

12 Sources of Tuition Assistance

1. **SCRIP Program** - Gift cards and certificates to a wide variety of businesses are available for purchase through the school office. Using Scrip for purchases you normally would make can earn income to be credited to a current or future Luther High student. Detailed about the Scrip program is available in the school office.
2. **Tuition Assistance Application from Luther High School - Part 1** (available in the office and on-line)
3. **Tuition Assistance from home congregation** (Ask your pastor if your congregation has such a program and who to contact)
4. **Student Tuition Endowment Fund (STEF)** - Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year the interest from this permanent fund provides each Luther High student a tuition grant.
5. **Grant from Luther High School** (On the registration, mailed to you in summer, simply indicate you want to receive this grant) *For the 2010-11 school year each student is eligible to receive \$325*
6. **Grant from Friends of Luther** (On the registration, mailed to you in summer, simply indicate you want to receive this grant) *For the 2010-11 school year each student is eligible to receive \$50*
7. **Grant from Good Steward Store** (On the registration, mailed to you in summer, simply indicate you want to receive this grant) *For the 2010-11 school year each student is eligible to receive \$175*
8. **Good Steward Volunteer Program** (Contact Pastor Sachs for details) *79 students received grants through this program for the 2009-10 school year.*
9. **Family Support** (Perhaps a grandparent or sponsor would be able to provide financial assistance with tuition)
10. **Tuition Assistance from Luther High School – Part 2** (If the assistance awarded to your family from your initial application was not sufficient, contact Mr. Wichmann. Additional funds may be available through this program to provide further assistance)

11. **Good Steward Special Help Fund** (The Good Steward Store provides the Luther High School Administration with additional funds to help should the previously listed sources of financial assistance, fall short of meeting your needs. Contact Mr. Wichmann for details.)

12. **Friends of Christian Education** – Should the sources of tuition assistance listed above fall short of making Luther High School affordable for your family, there are individuals who have indicated a willingness to provide financial assistance in such cases. Contact Mr. Wichmann for details. February 2010

**Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium
Mequon, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
September 20, 2011**

**A Reaction to the Essay of Rev. Donald W. Patterson:
What Practical Experience Teaches Us about Lutheran Schools**

Pastor Patterson, after months of research, weeks of writing, days of editing, the final communication you sent me was “thanks for the opportunity.” Having read, re-read and dug through your essay I respond, “thank you brother in arms.” Thank you for taking the opportunity and responding with the loving, insightful and honest evaluation from a Christ-owned servant leader.

The scope of this assignment was to share what your practical experiences teach us about our Lutheran schools. You were to compose and share what our dictionaries might define as your *actual engagement in a certain kind of work or practice*. You have completed your assignment thoroughly and faithfully. Bear with me now, but in my view, your work smacks of a messy field report birthed from the heart of a soldier who battles for souls on the front lines. I’m not throwing you under the bus when I describe your work as a “messy field report.” I found your manner of symposium-speak to be transparent, risky, and challenging. Pardon the awkward word choice, i.e. the “messy field report,” I’m confident you will interpret the expression as a compliment. My intent is to offer praise and thanks to our Lord for allowing this record of your actual engagement to cross my path and challenge me as well as our brothers. Pastor Patterson, within your essay I see the beating heart of our Savior. I see the messy report of a servant who knows, above all else, he is loved by Jesus. I see the messy report of a man who returns his love to Jesus and His Word. He loves souls. He loves the battle field with all its messy challenges. In view of all that, I thank the One and only who has made this so for you.

Throughout the essay, Pastor Patterson made several references to the proverbial elephant in the room. His propositional statement swung open the door for the huge pachyderm. “The fact is that while we have Jesus Christ in our schools, less and less people are using them. What are we going to do?” (p 4). By God’s grace we all know to turn straight to His Word. There we find forgiveness for our sins of omission and commission. There we hear the voice of our Shepherd which makes us wiser and stronger. There we gain the right to pray to the One who has ascended and rules His gospel kingdom. What are we going to do when the battle for souls turns deadly or turns south? We run to our Lord. Then with iron clad assurance He arms us with His forgiveness and His Spirit’s gifts, we survey the field. We listen to the thoughts and words of one another. We even listen to the thoughts and words of those held captive. We must! Pastor Patterson’s personal recon would suggest that in so doing we especially open our eyes and ears to three major areas of concern.

Our essayist rightly targets the category of personnel as a critical concern. Relationships are the heart and soul of his discussion points, and rightly so. Proactive, healthy, personal, professional and Christian relationships are the nexus for Lutheran school pastor, principal, teachers, parents and students. Pastor Patterson leads us through many personnel issues designed to bring about our best. One of the many statements that turned me into a bobble-head was: “Ministry is a faith driven way of life not just a teaching job” (p 6). That truth invoked

one of my fondest memories of my former platoon's church and school ministry. Imagine, instead of bolting out of your worship facility on Sunday you actually sit around with your principal and his family, your entire teaching staff and several grade school families, to talk about life and ministry in Christ. Imagine sitting and talking after your worship services until three in the afternoon when someone finally suggests a food run to Hunan express and Wendy's for the kids. Imagine the afternoon turns toward evening before the first suggestion of heading home for the day. I would not have shared that fond memory if it had been an isolated experience. Truth is, that scene played itself out numerous times for us. I am not suggesting one must take this Sunday afternoon ministry team hang-out scene and force it upon their situation. However, I dare to hitch this practical experience to that of the essayist's and suggest that aiming love, responsibility, ministry talk and ministry passion at the hearts of one another can hit a sweet-spot. Ministry as a faith driven way of life can spontaneously erupt into the most informal yet productive, proactive and enjoyable moments of life, yes, especially life on the battlefield.

Permit a brief lament, the mandated length of a reaction paper forces me to offer but a passing shout-out to the essayist's fine insights regarding proactive school boards, an annual look at the big picture and providing our principals the tools and time to carry out their mission. There are critical "we have to address this!" (p 11) action items to be understood and implemented stat!

Pastor Patterson then leads us to ponder and evaluate our educational program. I appreciated the unapologetic and informed approach of our essayist. "We want only the best for our God and his children" (p 12) prompted our brother to place before us such matters as

- The healthy balance between informational and experiential learning
- Authentic learning experiences
- Team-teaching
- Accreditation
- Teaching our children to be current in technology
- Facility improvement
- Extra-curricular offerings ... the best you can

Perhaps with good intention the essayist avoided using a term like "educational best practices." There I went and said it. The snarky side of me wonders if now is the time for us to eyeball one of the great threats to our school ministries, i.e. miscommunication and misunderstanding about educational program. My brothers and I on the clergy roster must respect and listen to our brothers and sisters on the teacher roster to better understand what "educational best practices" means in the hearts and minds of our blessed fellowship. One small way I'd propose to close a perceived gap would be to accept that the bullet points above or the educational strategies and practices of which our teachers speak are not at all inherently new to us. They are not new to pedagogy nor are they new to andragogy. If "new" or "new-fangled fiddle faddle" pop into your head, dismiss either thought. As far as I can tell, the only thing new in the current educational approach would be a renewed respect or better understanding for how we fearfully and wonderfully made creatures do actively receive, retrieve and make sense of information. Or to simplify, we are welcoming, or in some cases, welcoming

back into our classrooms educational methods and practices that have always naturally occurred outside our classrooms.

Our essayist next leads us to school advancement. Again, the practical experiences of our brother has taught him and us well. Permit me to share a few highlights along with a few brief comments.

Pastor Patterson writes “we can never assume our people are staying on mission. We have to help” (p 15). I trust I’m not the only man in this room would have to admit it but I can never assume I’m “staying on mission” either. Collaboration is key. I’m just saying.

“The demand for orthodoxy as a prerequisite to be at our schools is for our teachers, not our students” (p 16). Not only could I not say this better, I never said it quite this well. Mr. essayist, thank you for this clear phrase.

“My experience is that we are too slow to react to changing context in and around our congregations and schools” coupled with “Time spent actively listening to the people you serve is much better spent than time sitting in meetings guessing what is going on out there” (p 17). I rarely allow myself to say this but “truer words have never been spoken.” Our guess work is almost always inaccurate at best, deadly wrong at worst. I cannot understand how Christian leaders can all but say, “don’t let the door hit ya as you leave ... then we’ll presume to tell you, and others?, why you did leave.” To borrow from an earlier portion of the essay, “we have to address this!”

Admittedly, as I leave the school advancement section of this practical essay I fear I leave entirely too much on the table. An ongoing, well executed plan to reach our communities through our schools, viable plans for funding sustainability, the reference to “The Future, Funding, and Faith” from our CLS office, these and many more thought provoking items have been offered by our essayist. Do grapple with these issues soon.

Finally, in the concluding remarks of this essay Pastor Patterson reminds us of the urgency of our mission no matter what form of gospel ministry we have under our prayerful consideration. Mr. / Rev. essayist, what a way to summarize this for us all: “Saving schools is not our mission. Saving souls is” (p 19). What does this mean? Practically speaking, “you know it when you see it.”

Our clarion call takes us from this beautiful gymnasium back to the messy battlefield under the banner of Christ. The love of Christ compels us to know and share His life-giving Word with all. It puts us on our scuffed up knees prayerfully considering what you so boldly state up front: “The gospel is our freedom and comfort. The gospel also empowers us to make honest assessments of what we do and why. We do not need to fear discovering any area for improvement. Gospel freedom always breeds honest assessment” (p 3).

Dear fellow soldier of the cross, thank you for your “messy field report.” Thus concludes my messy reaction. We may now return to the battle knowing this: Christ champions us, we champion Him and all the rest will be added unto us.

Michael J. Quandt