

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall 2013

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Connecting WITH THE non-connected THROUGH School AND Church



school and church

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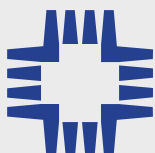
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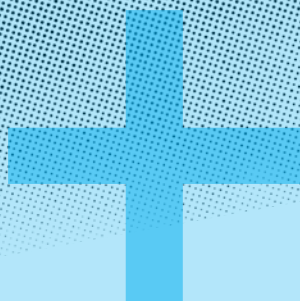
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This edition of *Issues* may be the most important edition we have published during the years of my presidency. In the following pages, the authors and illustrator seek to address the characteristics of families involved in Lutheran congregations, schools and child-care centers who are not connected to a faith community, and to articulate ways in which pastors, principals, teachers, lay persons and school and child-care ministries, including VBS and Sunday schools, can develop ministries involving the non-connected. As I read and reflected on the contents of the edition, the Holy Spirit inspired words of St. Paul focused my thoughts:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law that I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (I Corinthians 9:19-23, ESV).

Mike Zimmer, in his article, "Building Community Bridges through the Lutheran School," paraphrases St. Paul's divinely inspired words when he writes: "Equipping disciples who make disciples is our mission. This mission is best viewed alongside the local congregation where Word and Sacraments reside." God sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to connect a world of people disconnected from Him because of their sin and brokenness. Jesus, because of His love for all people, disconnected from His heavenly home to enter our earthly homes so that He might connect the disconnected (read: each and every one of us) to God.

Except for the appropriation of God's grace to those who believe and trust in Him through the gift of faith, you and I forever would be non-connected from God. However, because we now are connected, we are called to be in the Gospel-connecting business. And God gives us the tools: His church, the gifts of the forgiveness of sins, Word and Sacraments, and the talents, ideas, abilities and energies of the people He gathers in local congregations and schools. God does so in order that we do the marvelous yet challenging task of making disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and, as we do so, teaching them to observe all He has commanded us so that they will be connected to Him for all eternity.

BRIAN L. FRIEDRICH, PRESIDENT

When They Don't Show Up

At the Lutheran grade school I attended while growing up, every Monday our teachers would take worship attendance. "Did you go to church on Sunday?" Week in and week out, the majority of my classmates would answer "Yes." If our class did something special that week, like sing a song during worship—everyone was there!

Times have changed. At my previous congregation, a church plant that met in a school, we hosted a Vacation Bible School every year. The school in which we met and two other local schools let us distribute and/or make available fliers inviting the children in our community. Kids took us up on our invitation, and we welcomed five times as many kids to VBS as we normally would on a Sunday morning!

However, the question that burned in our minds was this, "How can we attract all these new families and children to our Sunday service?" For a couple years, we decided to teach the kids a song during the week and then invite them to join us for worship on Sunday to sing the song. Surely parents would beam with pride as their children sang for the congregation! But we were quickly disappointed. Not only did kids from the community not show up—neither did many of our own kids!

Perhaps something like this has happened to you as well. You work HARD to connect with your community, yet what you envisioned does not come to pass. It can be discouraging. Or, maybe it's just looking around at the people in worship Sunday after Sunday and thinking, "How come I don't see more students and families from the school? The school is supposed to be our inroads into the community, but it seems like fewer and fewer students actually participate in worship."

You, like me, might start to have more questions than answers. "Is there something we're missing? We're doing a lot of work, but what do we have to show for it?"

These aren't bad questions. Yet, behind them is an assumption about the world that is really a half-truth. The assumption is

this: *The outcomes in my life are dependent upon what I do or don't do.* You can knock yourself out to connect with your community, do things well and have lots of new people show up. But on the other hand, you can faithfully put in lots of effort, do things well and have very few people show up. The bottom line is this: you can work hard, do what's "working" for other people, and yet at the end of the day, the results are not in your hands. But you know what? That's a good thing!

Paul once found himself in the middle of a church controversy that involved results. Some liked how Paul did ministry, others followed Apollos, and this became the source of significant arguments (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). Paul set the record straight on who was behind the "results" in the church: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth"* (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

This is wonderfully clear! Here is the logic: 1) God gives the growth. 2) God is responsible for the growth. 3) You are not!

Only one person has walked this earth with the ability to make things go the way he wanted, and his name is Jesus. Yet, Jesus humbly set his ability aside and allowed everything to go wrong. As he headed toward his death, a multitude of angels remained at his disposal, able to swoop in and miraculously save the day (Matthew 26:53). He didn't call them. Instead, he stepped into our place and endured the worst result anyone could imagine: The crushing weight of our sin and separation from God. Because he endured the results we deserve on the cross, we know that God's love for us isn't determined by our performance. God's love for you is constant because of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus.

Does that mean we shouldn't work hard? No. Does that mean our work doesn't matter? Not at all. What it means is this: God is at work through us, in spite of us and without us. When people *don't* show up, you're still loved by God, and God is still at work ... but not the way you hoped. When people *do* show up and even become believers in Jesus,

God worked through you but the results are his doing. What does this mean? Whether you're seeing lots of people come to faith or not—keep planting the seed of God's grace in people's lives!

At my former congregation, when something would happen where we didn't see the results we desired, a good friend of mine would say, "That's something to pray about." Honestly, that used to frustrate me. If we weren't getting the results we wanted, I thought that meant we needed to work harder or do something different!

However, experience has taught me otherwise. If I'm already working hard and decide that more people will believe in Jesus if I work harder, I'll burn out. If what I'm doing isn't working so I keep switching gears to the latest ministry trend, pretty soon the congregation's collective head will spin. Finally I realized that my friend was right. When things don't happen the way you hoped, or when you simply don't know what to do—that's a great sign of your need for prayer.

In ministry and in life it's freeing to put the results in God's hands rather than your own. If things "work," that's grace. If they don't, that doesn't define you. Jesus grace and love for you are not tied to results—they are tied to his cross and empty tomb.

Jesus work for you doesn't make reaching new people easier, but it does give you the grace you need to keep working hard even when things aren't going well. His love releases you from the vicious cycle of despair when people don't show up, and pride when they do. The important thing is to keep planting the seed of God's grace that the world so desperately needs. You plant, someone else waters, and as the message of Jesus grace and truth goes forth—God will bring the growth!

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Connecting With Non-Connected Families

In 1983 when I received my undergraduate degree in Social Work from Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska, I never imagined that I would be serving in Lutheran education. It was the furthest thing from the plan I had negotiated with God. Obviously, I had a very naïve and clearly immature operating definition of divine negotiation. And, less than two years after graduating, I found myself sitting in the middle of the most delightful puddle of sixteen two-year-olds as their teacher in a Lutheran preschool in Southern California. Looking back over 30 years of service which included the birth of three sons, three leadership positions in parish preschools, and now preparing pre-service teachers for professional service in the field of early childhood education, the negotiations have ceased, and I've conceded that God has a pretty good plan in mind for me.

The joys and challenges of three specific experiences have inspired and continue to shape the work I do to connect families with their responsibility as their child's most influential teacher:

I have enjoyed the benefit of having my children with me while serving in the parish early childhood setting.

I have witnessed tears as other parents, usually mothers, gave goodbye hugs and kisses to their children as they placed them in my arms and made their way to work in the morning.

I have had the not-so-pleasant experience of being unwelcome in church mothers' groups and receiving letters characterizing church preschools as contributors to the demise of family.

The church's early childhood educators have a passionate desire to share the Gospel message, and their passion is contagious. Parish early childhood programs are connecting on a daily basis with families who appear to be disconnected from the church, and they are in an exceptional position to welcome and provide support for families. Teachers know their families and can identify the family strengths to better equip and empower them as faith shapers in the home.

The most important strategy is to be a church, school, and classroom environment where children and families feel welcomed. We must recognize that families are diverse. Early childhood centers must be culturally and linguistically compatible with the families they serve. Families are mobile, homeless, and many do not have the resources of extended family that live nearby. Single parent families may be led by a single father or mother or unwed teenage parent. Some families are financed by one or two incomes, while others may have no employment, yet all may live at the poverty level. Developing effective parent partnerships collides with challenges for creating meaningful involvement across multiple family structures and perspectives which may at times begin by first meeting very basic human needs.

Community is built around the unique abilities that are shared in the classroom which reflects the students' homes and communities. A parent's sense of welcome in the school and in their child's classroom is as important as the child's, and each has influence on the other. Early childhood programs which provide learning experiences for both children and families promote community and belonging. Parents respond best to personal invitations that clearly describe what is needed or expected from them to support their child's learning experience, both at home and at school. From placing notes in children's folders or backpacks, managing Internet classroom blogs, to being a classroom tutor, there should be something for everyone. It is important for schools and classroom teachers to be intentional about putting out the "welcome mat" in a variety of ways.

Curriculum should reflect attributes such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, family structure, ability, gender, and economic status so that teachers can develop strategies to connect within the context of family strengths. Before parents even enter their child's classroom, teachers can promote a sense of welcome and belonging by making home visits. During the home visit teachers have a chance to get to know each student as

a member of his or her own family. Parents can identify their hopes and dreams for their child. In this way the teacher can develop ways to support those dreams in their classrooms through class displays and coordinating special family events that connect with learning. Teachers also can discover parents' strengths and interests in order to support learning from home and affirm many of the things they may already be doing. If home visits are not an option, teachers need to provide and obtain information from parents in the parents' preferred method of communication in order to stay connected.

Parents have the capacity to support their child's learning and contribute to classroom learning experiences. Many parents are experts, and they must be treated as such. Effective teachers understand parents' strengths and contributions to developmentally appropriate practice, understand barriers that may impede parent involvement and look for ways to accommodate for them. Teachers can help build parent confidence by providing opportunities for a variety of skill sets to be incorporated into the classroom. Parents begin to see how they too shape learning in their own child's life, and what they do in school and at home makes a difference.

If we are to connect with families and develop strong partnerships, it is essential to believe that parents truly want the best for their child. While parents have always had a strong influence on their child's learning, there has been a recent increase in developing more intentional partnerships between parents and schools. Most families believe that it is their responsibility to teach faith development, yet they do not feel equipped or effective and therefore spend little time engaged in instruction at home. The church's early childhood programs partner with parents in their role as first teacher by providing them with the confidence and resources they need to nurture their child's faith development. The earlier we provide ways for parents to connect with school and church, the more powerful the effects.

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Reaching the Unchurched

Shortly after the birth of my congregation, Living Water, a new member convinced me to start “Team Living Water,” a cycling team that would train for the 300 mile, 3-day “Make-a-Wish” ride across Michigan that takes place each July. “Make-a-Wish” raises funds to grant wishes to seriously ill children. That member’s young daughter, Mackenzie, is a poster child for the organization, and her dad is passionate about supporting it.

Little did my fellow team members or I realize the challenge we had before us. None of us had experience with pace lines, endurance rides, or spandex shorts. In fact, most of us had to purchase road bikes. On the last Thursday of July, we took a long bus ride to northern Michigan with 700 other riders, camped overnight, and started our first century (100 mile ride). Seventeen miles into the ride, I was in the front of the pace line and heard a crash behind me. A bike flew into the ditch next to me, and two others spilled onto the ground. We lost Greg (first bike) to a broken collar bone. Now apprehensive of bodily harm, we got back on our bikes and rode down the big hills of Michigan (30+ mph, a true adrenalin rush). I still remember riding into a school parking lot at the end of that day, finishing my first century. I, the semi-fat man in my late 40s, did it. I actually got tears in my eyes. Of course, we had another two days of centuries to go, but for the moment the first century was achieved.

In the fall of 2004, we launched our new church plant, Living Water, a site of St. Luke Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Our launch team of 49 with me as pastor had no idea what was ahead of us. We knew we were called into a ministry to reach the lost. We wanted to be kingdom builders, not kingdom sustainers. This group of

highly entrepreneurial people was willing to step out and let me, a former teacher going through DELTO (Distant Education Leading to Ordination), be their pastor. As with the bike ride, building a church is an endurance ride—a marathon, not a sprint. Marathons take time, training, commitment, and fortitude to reach the goal. We did not fully grasp the marathon of peaks and valleys we would experience.

Our goal is to reach the unchurched, the lost. As a nine-year-old portable church that meets in a public high school, we have a deep desire to extend care to the people of our community and draw them into a transformational relationship in Christ Jesus. Starting out, we knew that 63 percent of our community was unchurched. This number still holds true today. Initially that was exciting because we knew we could make an impact. We had a reason to be in the community and still do.

It is an endurance ride. Our journey has been filled with hard climbs up the big hills and the adrenalin rush down the hill. When we started, we had hopes of becoming one of those churches that planted and grew to 1,000 in worship after a couple of years. We believed that we would be one of those stories—but we are not.

Reality is that we are a small congregation of about 130 people in Sunday worship, but we have a passionate desire to give hope and peace to a fractured world. We want to share the message that Jesus gave to his disciples in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” We are deeply committed to bringing this godly shalom to our neighbors. God has called us to this community to be a place that offers peace

and speaks to Christ’s intervention into our world. Again, doing this is the long century ride on the bike and not the quick sprint.

What have we learned about the unchurched?

- They are suspicious of the church, particularly denominational connections. Our Lutheran heritage means nothing to them. The impression I hear in conversation is that we [Lutherans] are bureaucratic and ineffective and definitely not fun. “Non-denoms,” in their eyes, are simply more fun.
- They don’t seek the church for answers to life’s questions. The church has been marginalized. One of my members who tutors in a public school mentioned to a student that she was going to church on Christmas Eve. His response: “People still do that?”
- But they are spiritually hungry. It is the wiring God has placed within all of us. We work to provide places where they can have the freedom to ask questions.

All of this means that I have to get out of my Christian ghetto, where as a pastor I spend well over 90 percent of my time, to connect with people in the community. I can wish to be the big church, but BIG doesn’t transform people; individual relationships do. Living in an unchurched community means I always must be looking for ways to get beyond the church walls and into the wider community.

Here are some things we have done over the years. For nine years, Living Water has had a presence at the Whitmore Lake July 4th parade, handing out free hot dogs and bottles of water. We have collected school

supplies each fall to give kids through Northfield Human Services. We give gifts to the poor in the community at Christmas. Members have mentored middle and high school students. We have held community-wide service events and concerts with free food and games for the kids. We started a MOPS program (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) and provided an educational speaker for the school district. We have hosted the Baccalaureate service at the high school for several years. I serve on the local Kiwanis board of directors. We build relationships where we can and pray for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of people.

I met Pam and Bob through the Kiwanis club at weekly meetings. I didn't know them well. When they stopped attending Kiwanis meetings, we learned that Pam had been diagnosed with breast cancer. I decided to make a phone call and maybe visit their home. Ultimately, I made many visits over the year. Pam's cancer spread. It became apparent that she was going to die and leave her husband of 43 years, their four adult children, and their grandchildren. By God's grace I served as the voice of godly hope in their home, actualizing John 16:33 as a pastor speaking into their lives. I came sharing scripture and Psalms of hope. I prayed with them on each visit. Shortly before Pam died, I shared the hymn, "My hope is built on nothing less ..." I sang it while Pam lay quietly on her bed, now under hospice care, with her husband next to her. This moment became something extraordinary, a Holy Spirit moment. A week later she was gone. Through these visits Pam did make a testimony of faith. She had drifted from her Baptist heritage and now embraced the salvation that Christ Jesus had given her.

Pam asked me to do her funeral. I shared her hope in Christ Jesus, calling on the community to explore their own faith. It has been two years since that funeral. Bob doesn't attend Living Water or any other church, yet he and I still continue a very warm relationship. I do trust the Holy Spirit is working in his life. In this and other ways Living Water has become the community congregation that also sponsors me as their pastor in that larger community. At the end of 300 miles Team Living Water rides into the Michigan International Speedway with hundreds of people cheering. After 300 miles of strong winds, weariness, and spandex, we hear people shouting and clapping. The ride is coming to an end. Exhausted, we get off our bikes and walk onto a stage where our Living Water "Make-a-Wish" child, Mackenzie, puts a medal around our necks. That is worth our "suffering." I now have eight medals on my wall constantly reminding me of the difficult journey with a celebration at the end.

In the midst of all our suffering there is a bigger story. It is the story of granting sick children a wish and a moment of peace from their illness—and many other ways that Living Water reaches into the community with signals of Christ's love. This is the story of Living Water. There are celebrations of Pam but also of Manny and Connie and Sam and Annie and Sammy and Spencer and Paul and others. The journey is difficult and—I don't say this lightly—I love the celebrations.

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Key Connectors: Missional Leaders of Lutheran Schools

The 2,444 Lutheran schools operated by 3,527 (59 percent) LCMS congregations serve 255,175 students and their families.¹ In these schools, the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is taught, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in His name, children are led in worship and discipleship, and many are brought into the family of Christ through the waters of Holy Baptism. Lutheran schools are potentially the greatest and most effective mission outreach avenues and mission training centers for connecting non-connected children and their families with a congregation, or faith community.

Challenges and Trends

In these early years of the 21st century, however, Lutheran schools appear to be in varying degrees of crisis as they face changing demographics, economic challenges, and a variety of congregational circumstances. A complicating factor is a general decline in denominational loyalty. While some congregations investigate aspirations to start a new Lutheran school, others investigate the sad

and seemingly inevitable closure of once vibrant Lutheran schools.

A number of trends currently affecting Lutheran schools can be identified. Trends are those forces which impact an institution and which are able to be reasonably predicted. While trends indicate change over a period of time, by definition trends cannot be changed by the action of individual leaders, schools, and congregations. Trends affecting Lutheran schools include demographic changes in the community and in Lutheran churches, socio-cultural changes, generational attitude changes as well as economic factors which affect family income and congregation financial support. Our post-church context finds the church's significance in many communities to be waning. Added to these factors are increased choices and competition from public schools, charter schools, home schools and other Christian schools.

Leadership and Trends

Trends are often blamed for the crises and failures experienced by Lutheran schools, yet trends themselves cannot be changed by leaders. It would be more accurate to say that successes and failures of Lutheran schools are caused by how effectively and creatively church and school leaders and their followers address these trends. Particularly in challenging times, leadership is the key variable. Unfortunately, a lack of clarity and unified focus on their mission purpose has often prevented Lutheran school leaders and

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their followers from effectively and creatively addressing these challenges and changes.

The role of leadership is to determine which challenges and changes can be addressed and influenced, and then to do just that by strategic thinking, planning and acting. While the course of trends cannot be altered by individual church and school leaders, missional leaders *are* able to address a variety of “uncertainties” which cannot be considered trends. These uncertainties include attitudes and actions concerning governance and personnel issues, potential for partnerships, support of the school by the pastor and congregation, and the missional attitude and action of church and school leaders. Add to this list of uncertainties the leadership abilities of the pastor, school administrator, and other key leaders to think creatively, to be open to change, to see and share a compelling vision for Lutheran schools, to deal with conflict, and more.

While the trends mentioned earlier cannot be changed, the attitudes and actions of the leaders, schools and congregations can be influenced and changed. The attitudes and actions of leaders have a profound effect on how congregations and schools respond to trends. This article attempts to share research which documents how missional leaders identify and address the uncertainties which affect their Lutheran schools.

Creative leadership focused on God’s mission is a key factor in Lutheran schools that make a difference in their communities. Schools that connect with non-connected families have a clear understanding of their partnership in God’s mission. Schools that struggle often strain to make the connection between God’s mission and the purpose of their institution. While they may see their purpose to share Jesus’ love in the classroom and to inculcate Christian doctrine, they may not clearly see or embrace their role in reaching the community with the Good News of God’s reconciliation in Christ. Mission opportunity has always been one of the reasons for supporting parochial schools, yet historically, mission has not been the driving force or “operating principle” of Lutheran schools. In addition, church and school leaders often simply do not function as a mission team

with a unified mission purpose. A key factor in missional Lutheran schools is how missional leaders work as a missionary team to address the uncertainties which affect their schools in their local contexts.

Missional Leadership and the Mission of God

Mission begins with the Triune God, who created all things “good” (Genesis 1:31). After Adam and Eve’s sin, God promised a Savior to crush the head of Satan and thus reconcile all sinful humankind to Himself. The Scriptures are the story of how God went about fulfilling His promise, and how He continues to carry out His mission ultimately bringing it to conclusion on the last day.

God has chosen to use His own creation as partners in His mission. From Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Moses and the Children of Israel, and their kings and prophets, God has invited His people to declare His mighty deeds, His love and salvation to the nations. Following Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, this invitation continues to His people until the end of time (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). God’s mission is to reconcile all people from every nation, tribe, people and language to Himself through the blood of Christ, so that they would all know the Lord and confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

Missional Leaders understand that “mission” and “life” are not two unrelated words which connect only within one church program or committee. Missional leaders understand that all of God’s people are sent on God’s mission to engage their communities or contexts with the Gospel in their everyday lives, rather than just a few who are sent outside the church to do something called “mission.” Missional leaders, therefore, are intentional about their own personal engagement in God’s mission, and also look for ways to involve and apprentice others in the missionary work of God’s kingdom. They realize that every member of the church, by virtue of his or her baptism, is called and sent, and thus, missional leaders intentionally

seek to equip their members or followers to be the “sent ones” God intends them to be. To be “missional” is to see one’s life as that of a “gospel-seed-sower” in one’s every-day mission field, not as a task done *in addition to* daily life, but as *an integral part of* daily life. “Missional” is seeing oneself as a missionary and acting intentionally as such.

Missional leaders emphasize the calling of each Christian person to live out this missionary calling in his or her own daily life and context, so that as “elect exiles of the dispersion” (1 Peter 1:1), Christians will see their strategic role and urgency in partnering with God in His mission. Lutheran schools provide wonderful “missionary training centers” where missional leaders (educators) train apprentice missionaries (students) to live out their missionary calling in real life. Missional leaders (pastors and administrators) recognize this unique opportunity and work together as a missionary team to learn and strategize together to accomplish this mission end.

Leadership and Change

Much of what leadership is about has to do with change.² Leadership is about setting a course for the future and enlisting others to work toward that vision. Michael Hyatt writes,

Leaders exist to create a shift in reality. Without leaders, things drift along. They go where they want to go, following the path of least resistance. However, when this is not desirable—or acceptable—you hire, elect, appoint, or *become* a leader. The leader’s job is to overcome resistance and make things flow in a different direction. His or her job is to create a different reality.³

As the leader goes through the process of developing outcomes, strategies, and action plans with specific milestones and due dates, Hyatt notes that the leader must also enroll his team as part of that process. “This is the mark of great leaders. If you don’t do this, you can expect resistance. And, it’s not because your people are rebellious, lazy, or stupid. It’s because you didn’t do your job as a leader.

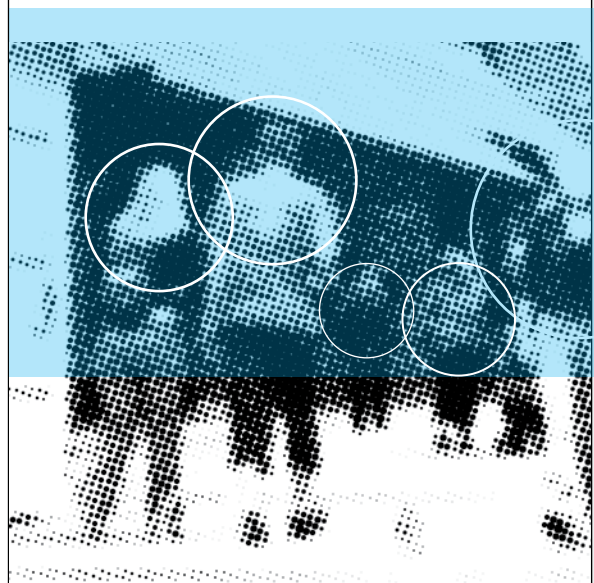
With a clear plan and an aligned team, you can move mountains.”⁴

Leadership and Teams

Thus, leadership is always a team effort. Leaders enlist the support and assistance of those who must make the project work. Leaders know that it takes partners to get the job done; they know they must work to build trust and a cohesive team. They promote the sense that “we’re all in this together.”

Leaders assemble teams of committed and motivated members, and then make certain the outcomes (ends) are clear to everyone. Leaders then give everyone the trust and freedom to contribute toward those ends. Leaders give their power away, using their power to serve others, not to serve themselves. Collaboration trumps competition, resulting in friendliness, cohesion, and high morale, as opposed to frustration, hostility, and low productivity, especially in joint tasks.⁵

In Lutheran schools, the staff, the pastor-administrator-teacher team, is vital to accomplishing the mission. When the team is focused on God’s mission as its inspirational vision, and when team members realize that they are not limited by their own power and potential, but are enlisted in service of God’s mission, and that God is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine, they can begin to tap into the greatest power source for their work together. While the pastor articulates the vision, he must recognize the value and



engage the team which God has assembled in that place. This team will be more than mere “team ministry.” It will be developed as a “missionary team,” organized to intentionally carry out God’s vision articulated in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Missionary Teams in Lutheran Schools

Missional leaders must not only know how to lead, they must also have a personal understanding of and commitment to God’s mission and their intentional partnership in it. This understanding and commitment will affect the planning and decision making of their organization. Applied to Lutheran schools, school leaders, both pastors and administrators, are not only leaders in education. They must be committed to an even more powerful concept than “team ministry.” Missional leaders see themselves as a “missionary team” whose purpose (end) is to multiply more disciple-missionaries in their community through their Lutheran schools.

Missional leadership invites conversation and action around three questions. The first, “What does God desire for our church/school?” is a spiritual question, relating to the mission of God. Secondly, leaders will discuss a strategic question, “What would God have us do as individuals and as a body?” The third question is a structural question, “How shall we organize/structure our ministry to best accomplish these strategies?”⁶ Missional leaders continually

ask and seek to answer these questions within the context of their mission work as a Lutheran school.

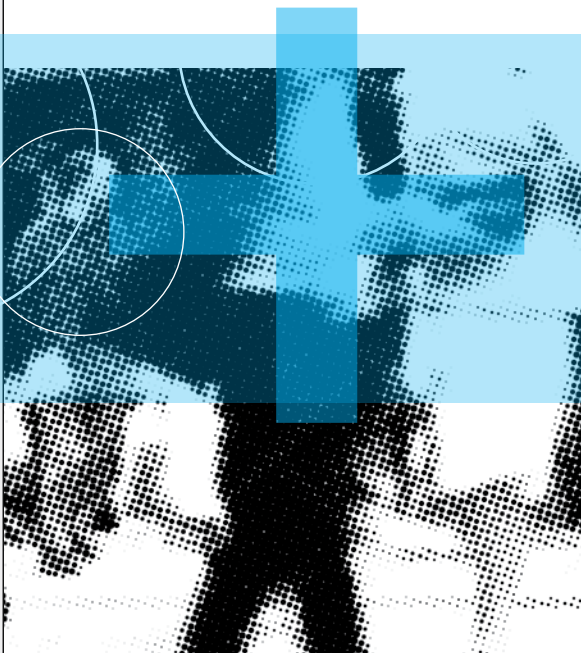
A word of caution is in order. Often, when churches talk about using their schools as an outreach into their community, they are looking for people to join the church, and so schools become the “bait” for catching more members. If our school communities are truly mission fields, then we must learn to think, plan and act like missionaries. Missionaries see and make their schools places where the unconnected gather and where spiritual conversations are safe for them. Schools become places where relationships can develop which present opportunities to share the Gospel message. Missionaries think, plan, and act in ways to bring this vision to reality.

Missional Behaviors of Missional Leaders in Lutheran Schools

Missional leaders are the “faces” of Lutheran schools in the community. These missional leaders include administrators, pastors, teachers, and also school parents and children. They are the “front-line” missionaries in their community or school context, and are key connectors to the faith family, the church. Their behaviors, beginning with how they think about their role as missionaries, continuing through strategic planning and action, are key components in connecting people to Christ and His church.

Research identifies certain behaviors practiced by the leaders of “missional Lutheran schools” which can be identified as best practices for Lutheran schools who strive to become mission outposts in their communities.⁷ There is a living, breathing connection between missional leadership and the activities and behaviors promoted by missional leaders and school climate and vitality. Where pastors, teachers, students and families are intentionally missional, we may expect to find strong and healthy schools.

The following twenty-five missional leadership behaviors were identified by a survey of Lutheran schools, done as research for a doctoral dissertation entitled, “Missional Leadership In Lutheran Schools: A Key



	<p>Component to Lutheran Schools as Mission Outposts” (Meier). The intent of the survey was not to single out behavior or characteristics of a particular school or leader, but rather to identify certain behaviors practiced by the leaders of those schools identified as “missional Lutheran schools.”⁸ Leadership behaviors are the critical pieces to identify and to promote as</p>	<p>best practices for Lutheran schools who strive to become mission outposts in their communities. The behaviors and attitudes below are listed in order of their actual practice in missional Lutheran schools, according to responses from administrators, pastors, and others who completed the survey.</p>	
	Table 1. Ranking of Missional Leadership Behaviors based on all survey responses.		
Overall Ranking	25 Missional Leadership Attitudes, Behaviors, and Best Practices of Missional Leaders in Lutheran Schools	Average, 5 point scale	
1	Pastor(s) and principal see themselves as "missionary partners" in order to accomplish God's mission.	4.7	
2	Pastor(s) and principal speak positively about the school and those who serve there.	4.7	
3	Pastor(s) and principal feel that what they are doing is important, and create a climate where that feeling is shared among the staff.	4.7	
4	Pastor(s) and principal have a "can-do" positive attitude which invites and encourages others to follow their leadership.	4.6	
5	Pastor(s) and principal seek innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.	4.6	
6	Pastor(s) and principal demonstrate that they are committed to the success of their staff.	4.6	
7	Pastor(s) and principal have clear, high expectations for themselves and their staff.	4.6	
8	Pastor(s) and principal demonstrate openness to change for the sake of mission.	4.5	
9	Pastor(s) and principal seek means of promoting and celebrating the school's mission by sharing "success stories."	4.5	
10	Pastor(s) and principal set an example by aligning their personal actions with shared values of the church/school ("walk the talk").	4.5	
11	Pastor(s) and principal search for mission opportunities and are willing to take risks and make personal sacrifices in meeting the opportunities.	4.5	
12	Pastor(s) and principal foster collaboration among their missionary team, promoting the sense that "we're all in this together."	4.5	
13	Pastor(s) and principal both see the school as a "mission outpost" (definition: "a mission outpost school is a school that intentionally and effectively engages its community and the world with the Gospel").	4.5	
14	The Principal is active in the life of the church (contact with non-school families, has a leadership role, knows children on the cradle roll, etc).	4.5	
15	Pastor(s) and principal allow others to take risks and learn from mistakes; they promote a learning climate.	4.5	
16	Pastor(s) and principal serve the needs of others over their own ego/needs.	4.4	
17	Pastor(s) and principal enlist the staff, lay leaders, parents and students in a common vision of "what God is doing here."	4.3	
18	Pastors are visibly and enthusiastically active in the life of the school (chapel, staff/classroom devotions, know school families, have contact with students outside of a formal classroom/church setting, etc); he practices a "ministry of presence."	4.2	
19	Pastor(s) and principal intentionally and frequently meet together to plan/discuss mission strategy.	4.1	
20	Pastor(s) and principal "give power away" rather than reserve it for themselves.	4.1	
21	Pastor(s) and principal regularly and intentionally are in the Word together and pray together.	3.9	
22	Pastor(s) and principal both have unified, written goals, and are willing to be held accountable to them.	3.8	
23	Staff meetings have a designated time of sharing faith conversations, stories of personal witnessing, and witness methodologies.	3.8	
24	Pastor(s), principal, and staff intentionally engage in a program of missional growth/education (eg: reading and discussing missional books, involvement in local mission efforts, training in evangelism methodologies, etc).	3.7	
25	There is a plan to identify and develop new missional leaders (from students, parents, and staff).	3.4	

This research highlighted the major issue concerning missional leadership in Lutheran schools, namely that pastor of the church and principal of the school must see themselves as a “missionary team” who intentionally partner to accomplish God’s mission. Missionary partnership necessitates working together as a team, rather than merely co-existing as workers on the same staff. To be missionary partners requires that each partner clearly understands his or her role and responsibilities, yet are committed to not operate in silos. Missionary partners share in the planning, strategizing, and carrying out of the church and school mission. They meet regularly to pray, share, grow, and hold one another accountable to goals which have been identified as critical to meeting their mission strategy.

A powerful energy, or synergy, is created as pastor and administrator are aligned as a missionary team. They learn to depend on each other for support and encouragement, for sharing ideas and strategies, for gaining momentum toward missional goals. Because they share values and goals, they find that they are working as a missionary team even when they are acting independently.

The school is most likely one of the most costly, visible, and potentially productive mission endeavors undertaken by the congregation. In such a context, the pastor as leader of the overall mission, and the principal as leader of the school mission must see themselves as missionary partners working together toward a common goal—to accomplish the Great Commission. Apparently this characteristic is practiced in missional Lutheran schools and is obvious to others, as evidenced by the number one ranking in the survey (average 4.7 of 5). Most other missional leadership behaviors are dependent on this one key behavior.

Somewhat surprising however, are the items ranked #19 and #21 in the table above. It would seem that these behaviors are very closely related to pastor and principal seeing themselves as missionary partners, yet these two items are ranked lower by respondents. The missionary partnership of missional leaders would be strengthened by a more intentional effort to meet together for the purpose of being

in the Word and prayer, and to plan and discuss strategy for their mission outpost. The item ranked #22 above also would significantly strengthen the missional leadership of these mission partners. Missional leaders who develop goals together, share written goals, and agree to hold each other accountable to them, have potential for greater impact.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment of the research was the item ranked last on the list. Creating a plan to identify and develop new missional leaders (multiplication of leadership) is a key factor in sustaining and multiplying the missional attitudes and behaviors within an organization. Raising new missional leaders is part of missional leadership that cannot be overlooked or assumed to be the responsibility of another.

In the post-church culture, Lutheran schools have the potential to make a powerful impact for the sake of the Gospel. Missional leaders of Lutheran schools will recognize the importance of these missional leadership attitudes and behaviors and work to include them in their thinking, planning, and acting as mission outposts in order to disciple children and families with the goal of making more disciples. Imagine the multiplication possibilities if each of the 255,175 students in Lutheran schools were trained and equipped as missionaries by their “mission training centers” also known



as Lutheran Schools! Lutheran schools are in so many ways, poised to be the best missionary agencies of the Lutheran church today. These “missional behaviors” are a key factor in bringing Lutheran schools from a “parochial” state to function as true mission outposts, connectors in their communities. This is the distinctive function and primary reason for Lutheran schools today, separating them from quality education found in many other schools.

Questions for Consideration

A review of leadership and missional literature, together with the survey results, raises significant questions for missional leaders in Lutheran circles, if Lutheran schools are to have a key role in efforts to connect with non-connected families.

If missional leadership is truly a key component in connecting non-connected parents and children with a faith community, what changes need to take place in the training of Lutheran leaders such as pastors, teachers, and other professionals? How do thinking, acting, and planning as a missionary fit into the preparation of all church workers on the university and seminary levels? If we live in a post-church culture, shouldn't all professional church workers be trained as missionaries to reach non-connected parents and children? Such missionary training might include some basic contextual and demographic study as well as understanding how to connect cross-culturally in their communities. At a minimum, should we not train leaders to be comfortable in speaking of the Savior and engaging in spiritual conversations with other Christians as well as the non-connected?

Shouldn't our seminaries be more intentional about training pastors to think and act in terms of missionary teaming with other professional workers? How might the attitudes and behaviors listed above be taught and intentionally developed prior to a pastor's first call? Is this left to seminarians to pick up on vicarage, or after receiving his first call? The unique aspects of missionary teaming as compared to “team ministry” must be taught and practiced in our post-churched world where churches and schools increasingly find themselves in

the cultural and spiritual minority, facing the relentless attacks of the Evil One.

If, as some have suggested, the LCMS has the finest educational system for training teachers and pastors, why not use that system intentionally to train missional leaders who understand the dynamics and potential of working as missional teams to fulfill the Great Commission? We need church and school leaders who are both confessional and missional. If there is a problem in seeing our churches and schools as mission outposts, or in knowing how to think, plan and act to accomplish God's mission, or in understanding how to work together as a missionary team to accomplish mission-ends, might the problem be systemic? Who are those willing to provide the missional leadership to take on such a task?

Locally, how could leaders who want to start thinking, planning and acting as “missionary teams” begin to intentionally incorporate the missional behaviors identified in the research? Which are already in place? Which need to become more intentional? What role might coaching have in helping a staff think, plan and act as missional leaders who intentionally seek to engage in God's mission?⁹

What effect does focus on God's mission as the organizing principle for a Lutheran school have on gathering needed financial support from the congregation, community, and other constituents?¹⁰ How does the existence of a missionary team of workers affect Biblical stewardship in the congregation and school?

Concluding Thoughts

Lutheran schools require missional leadership to focus constituents on the mission of God and to carry out that mission in their community, and to do it as a missionary team. For Lutheran schools to have the missional impact which makes them unique and valuable among all the schools in our nation today, missional leaders must focus on confessing Christ by their missional lifestyle within their community, especially with their non-connected neighbors and friends. Lutheran leaders and Lutheran schools that “get” this will have a clear missional purpose, and be recognized as valued contributors in their communities.

Notes

- 1 *Lutheran School Statistics, 2009-10 School Year*, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, District and Congregational Services, School Ministry.
- 2 See, for example, John Kotter's *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).
- 3 Michael Hyatt, "Why Leaders Exist," Michael Hyatt Intentional Leadership (blog), November 29, 2010, <http://michaelhyatt.com/why-leaders-exist.html>.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 153.
- 6 These three questions are identified as critical systemic questions by Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped By God's Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xviii.
- 7 Peter A. Meier, "Missional Leadership In Lutheran Schools: A Key Component to Lutheran Schools as Mission Outposts" (unpublished DMin dissertation, Concordia Theological Seminary, 2011). To request a copy, contact the author at peter.meier@cui.edu.
- 8 For this research, "missional Lutheran schools" were identified as those which (1) have a clear sense of God's mission, (2) display a distinctively Lutheran identity, and (3) are intentionally engaged in the life of their community. Using this definition, a list of 30 schools was identified and invited to complete the survey.
- 9 For a set of process questions on each of the 25 Missional Behaviors, contact the author, peter.meier@cui.edu.
- 10 See Jim Collins' *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (San Francisco: Elements Design Group, 2005), page 18ff, for a discussion on the social sector and fundraising. The critical question for organizations in the social sector is not "How much money do we make (profit)?" but "How can we develop a sustainable resource engine to deliver superior performance relative to our mission?" Lutheran schools' resource engine depends heavily on personal relationships and excellent fundraising, the success of which depends directly to communication of the school's mission vision and its ability to carry it out in the community. This task is an important function of leadership.





Characteristics of Non-Connected Families: Lost Lamb Logistics

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4).

My pastor, Rev. Dan Czaplewski, observed recently in a sermon that a one percent loss in the shepherding business is an acceptable risk factor; 99 out of 100 is still an excellent return—unless you are the Good Shepherd who desires all to be saved. Then you leave the ninety-nine and go after the one that is lost.

There are precious lambs in our Lutheran pre-schools, grade schools, and high schools. Long gone are the days when these lambs were all members of the congregation.¹ How many believe in Jesus Christ? How many are lost—far from the safety of the sheepfold—caught in a thicket of cultural ambiguities, mixed messages and unbelief? What is an acceptable risk factor? What if there were ten lost sheep out of a hundred? Or twenty? Or fifty?

We can’t look into the heart to know where saving faith resides, but we can look at statistics that tell us something of the religious background of the students in our schools. What we discover is that in the 2012-13 school year 47 percent of the students are from Lutheran homes (44 percent LCMS, 3 percent Other Lutheran), 36 percent are from families affiliated with another denomination, and 17 percent are “un-churched.” With a total

enrollment of 230,815 in Early Childhood through Twelfth Grade, the 17 percent translates to 43,332 children.²

We would assume too much to think that all the churched families are doing well spiritually and all the un-churched aren’t. Nevertheless we do know the percentage of families in our schools that are in a sheepfold of some kind compared with those who are not. It gives us a place to begin. Moreover we know with certainty the safest place for the family is in the sheepfold of Jesus Christ.

So we must ask: how successful are our efforts to connect with the non-connected families? The study cited above reports 2,480 children baptized and 1,607 adults baptized or confirmed through the outreach of our Lutheran schools in 2012-13. Lost lambs are being found through the ministry of Lutheran schools! For this we are grateful. We are privileged that the Holy Spirit uses us in our vocations to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to these children and their parents. At the same time, we realize that this accounts for only 6 percent of the un-churched in our schools.

Lost Lamb Logistics

Logistics is the task of overcoming obstacles in order to get a product from Point A to Point B. The term is a helpful way for us to frame the question. Of course, we are not dealing with a product but with the life-giving message of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, what are the logistical—if I may use the term—challenges for us? What are the un-churched families like? What are their beliefs and predispositions? Are there obstacles in the way of those who do not respond to our invitations of which we are unaware? Can we assist in moving them from Point A to saving faith in Jesus Christ?

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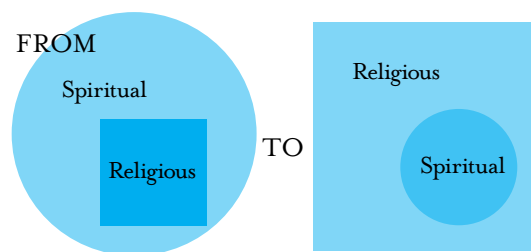
In some respects we are already halfway to the goal. These families are sending their children to our schools even though they are not connected to the church. We provide the learning environment and bring the children into daily contact with the Word where Jesus is found. Yet we also know that the greater formation takes place in the home. In a recent article I shared an analysis of potential family types based on Luther's observations concerning parents and their gifts for bringing their children up in the faith. Family patterns can be discerned based on the parents' knowledge and ability to model and teach the faith, their time available for teaching the faith, and their desire to do so.³

However, that model assumes families are connected to the church in a spiritually meaningful way. The families we are discussing here are not. Detailed research giving descriptions of various family types of non-connected families isn't available. What can we do to be informed?

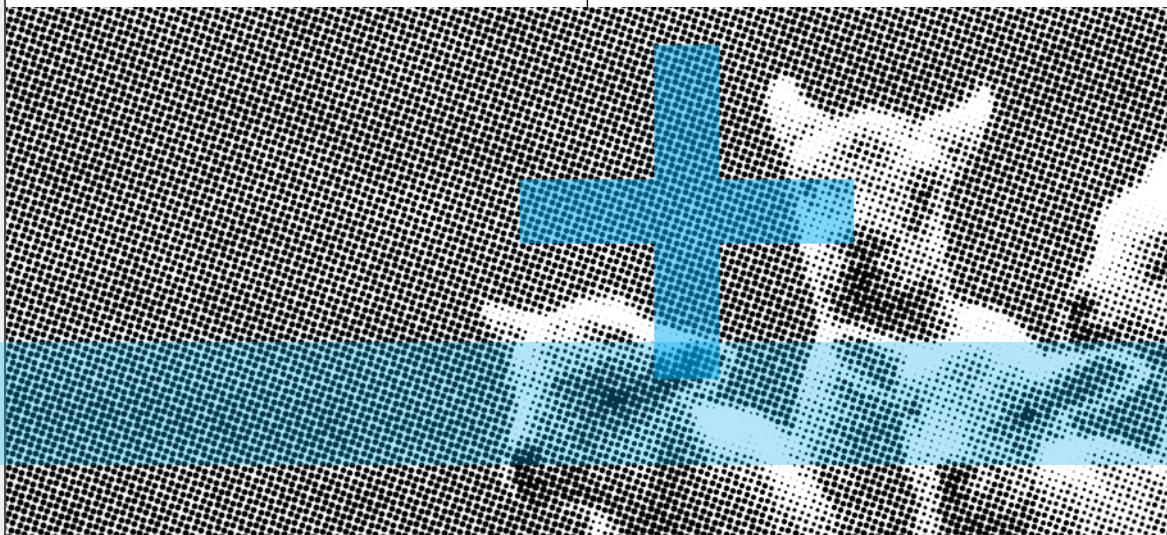
We can observe the culture in which the non-connected families live and the attitudes and assumptions prevalent within the culture. We can examine the various thickets into which these sheep may have gotten caught; though they do not realize their entrapment. From these sources we can draw relevant and appropriate conclusions about the logistical challenges we face.

Spirituality and Religion. "I'm very spiritual, I'm just not religious," is a comment frequently heard today. From a Christian point of view this is paradoxical. How can people be very interested in things spiritual but not interested in things religious? They can because the meaning of these terms has morphed into something new. A generation

or two ago spirituality was a subset of religion. We could look at certain spiritual practices and label them as aspects of a certain religion. For example, a rosary was an artifact of spirituality within the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian religion. Religion was the big thing, and one could find a variety of spiritual practices within any given religion.



Over time the position of these two terms has been reversed. In the minds of many, spirituality is the broad category and religion is a subset found within it. The reversal explains how individuals can consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." They are open to the mysterious, the numinous, and the sacred; but are not to the specific, the exclusive, and the creedal. "Religion" is seen as narrow-minded, repressive, and bigoted; while "spirituality" is perceived as open-minded, expressive, and accepting. In its most extreme form spirituality doesn't even need to be connected to a deity, but can be a free floating oneness with the universe, as illustrated by non-theistic environmentalism. We are now at the point where religion and spirituality have become two separate and distinct categories. And so we encounter another paradox. Openness to spirituality has become an obstacle to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Could our non-connected families be caught in the thicket of deep spirituality without desiring meaningful connections to religion?



Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. The culture in North America in which the non-connected family lives and moves and has its being is also a culture whose spirituality reflects a set of common theological beliefs. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton narrowed these common beliefs down to five in their research, and named them “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD).

- A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.⁴

Smith and Denton make it quite clear that the adolescents they are studying (two more follow-up longitudinal studies are now available) did not create MTD on their own, but absorbed it from the adults around them. As the authors put it, MTD makes God into a “divine butler and cosmic therapist,” not a God who saves.

MTD, as you notice, bears little resemblance to the historic Christian faith. It is self-centered, not God-centered. It has no need for a savior and thus no place for Jesus Christ. Its universalism is obvious, since only the most heinous of individuals would be denied a place at the great banquet of eternity—Hitler, Stalin and the usual cast of characters would be excluded but certainly not you, me or the neighbor across the street. MTD sees the church within society as an institution whose sole function is to help us be nice. Nevertheless, many whose religious

world view is colored by these generic religious beliefs would identify MTD as the Christian faith. Could our non-connected families be comfortably ensconced in the thicket of an MTD world, very willing to allow our schools to help make their children nice, but desiring nothing more?

The Tyranny of the “ISMS” –Individualism, Relativism, Utilitarianism, and Consumerism. As we continue to explore potential logistical obstacles for the lost lambs of non-connected families—obstacles frequently framed by mainstream cultural beliefs—we run into a range of “isms.” I’m surprised as I write this that my spell-checker doesn’t even register *ism* as a misspelling! The *isms* are actually a single thicket of obstruction that manifests itself in multiple formations—little connecting tunnels from one to the other. Each is philosophically and practically connected to the next.

Individualism places the self in first position. Lutheran theology correctly warns of the danger of trusting self because due to our fallen sinful natures the self is curved in on itself. We are inherently selfish creatures looking after number one. Individualism taken to its logical end brings an end to community, because the community must always be brought under the thumb of personal desires.

From this thicket we can easily tunnel to relativism: the increasingly common belief that all beliefs are of equal worth. Since no beliefs can speak for ultimate truth, each is as good as the other. How does this follow from individualism you ask? For my individualism to flourish there must be curbs on any claims to absolute truth. The last thing I would want is your truth to inhibit my freedom to choose.

Like individualism, relativism brings an end to community as my truth competes with your truth.

From the thicket of relativism it's just a short jaunt through another tunnel to utilitarianism. If each of us has our own truth as individuals and no truth is more or less valid than any other, by what criterion can we make any decisions? Well, we do by asking the big question: "Does it work?" If it—whatever the "it" is—works, then it must be okay. Completely overlooked and bypassed are other significant questions containing words like "should" or "ought." Just because we *can* do something doesn't mean we *should* do it. The possibility of genetic engineering creating new species is one case in point. But in a culture without a moral grounding in a Biblical worldview, populated by individuals for whom all is relative, the deciding factor is utility.

And this is how we arrive at the thicket of consumerism, because purpose and meaning within my private world can be found only by having as many things that work as possible. My identity, who I am, in my culture is determined by what I have and what I can afford to do. My job, or what Lutherans would call my vocation, is practiced only for the purpose of feeding my consumption of stuff. Taken together these isms present a rather dark worldview, but it is the only one available in a world conceived of through another ism—materialism. If there is no creator and matter is all there is, meaninglessness can be overwhelming.

To what extent, then, are non-connected families caught in a thicket of a materialistic worldview? How will we account for materialism in our lost lamb logistics? If indeed non-connected families have no spiritual background to speak of, is it possible that they have chosen the Lutheran school because they are wise consumers looking for the best product at the best price, willing to subject their children to the religious instruction of our schools because we are free to have our beliefs just as they are free to undo those beliefs back home? Have they noticed that Lutheran education "works"—which is to say that Lutheran school graduates tend to do better than average on the next level than students of other institutions?

Misperceptions of Ourselves and Others.

Sometimes the logistical obstacles to reaching lost lambs trapped in spiritual thickets could be of our own making through our misunderstanding the attitudes of others and our misunderstanding of their perceptions of us. A study on the millennial generation conducted by Thom and Jess Rainer came to a surprising conclusion. They found that church members tend to view the un-churched from two very different vantage points. On the one hand, church members believe that the non-connected really want to be connected and what they lack is information. Therefore all that is really needed is to provide the un-churched with effective marketing, and they will come. On the other hand, there is a negative viewpoint that says the younger generation is antagonistic and argumentative. They don't want anything to do with the church, so we might just as well ignore them.

Neither of these perceptions is all that surprising. What is unexpected is the reality. "... we are noticing a significant attitudinal shift ... Their attitude toward Christians and churches is largely one of indifference."⁵ According to the Rainers the millennials—and this would be the youngest of the parents of early childhood and elementary school children—are neither uninformed nor antagonistic. Church is simply not on their radar screen. Church does not have a significant role in their lives, and they simply don't care.

The Rainers' findings differ from those of Daniel Kimball⁶ and David Kinnaman.⁷ Kimball did his research by frequenting coffee shops, while Kinnaman used more traditional research techniques. Yet both came to similar conclusions about how the un-churched perceive the church. Here is a list of descriptors identified by Kimball and Kinnaman. The Church and Christians are ... too involved in politics, judgmental, oppressive of women, homophobic, not accepting of other faiths, out of touch, insensitive, boring, hypocritical, confusing, and Bible thumping fundamentalists.

The difference between the Rainers on the one hand and Kimball and Kinnaman on the other may not be as sharp as first appears.

Kimball and Kinnaman may be tapping into a slightly older population. Another view would be that Kimball and Kinnaman's work explains the indifference among the millennials that the Rainers report. Be that as it may, it leaves Lutheran schools with some perplexing questions. First, what are our perceptions of the non-connected families? Second, are those perceptions accurate? Third, what are the perceptions of the non-connected families regarding us? And fourth, if their perceptions match the report of Kimball and Kinnaman, are their perceptions accurate? Ultimately this leads us to ask of ourselves—to what degree are we responsible for the thicket into which these lost lambs have fallen?

Another Starting Point. By this time we may have become frustrated by the approach taken in this article. We have been looking at the broad spectrum of society's currents as they ebb and flow, and from that attempted to gain insight into what the non-connected families attending our schools are like. We ought not to discount the varied descriptions this procedure gives us. They are helpful. There is another approach, however. We could ask them! We

could initiate an open conversation to learn what led them to entrust the education of their children to this group of Christians who call themselves Lutheran.

The congregation my wife and I belong to in Milwaukee, Mt. Calvary, is an urban congregation that operates a Lutheran school. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program—a voucher program—is the major revenue source that allows over 90 percent of the nearly 200 students to attend, and 48 percent of the students are from families not connected to any church, according to our Principal, Carrie Miller. I asked her, "Why do families send their children to Mt. Calvary?" "A structured environment and safety," was her answer. She went on to add that parents also appreciated the family focus and the high expectations offered by the school.

Do you remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs? Could it be that for many non-connected families the choice of a Lutheran school is made on the foundational level of finding a structured environment and a safe place to bring their children, and our schools provide that environment? When families

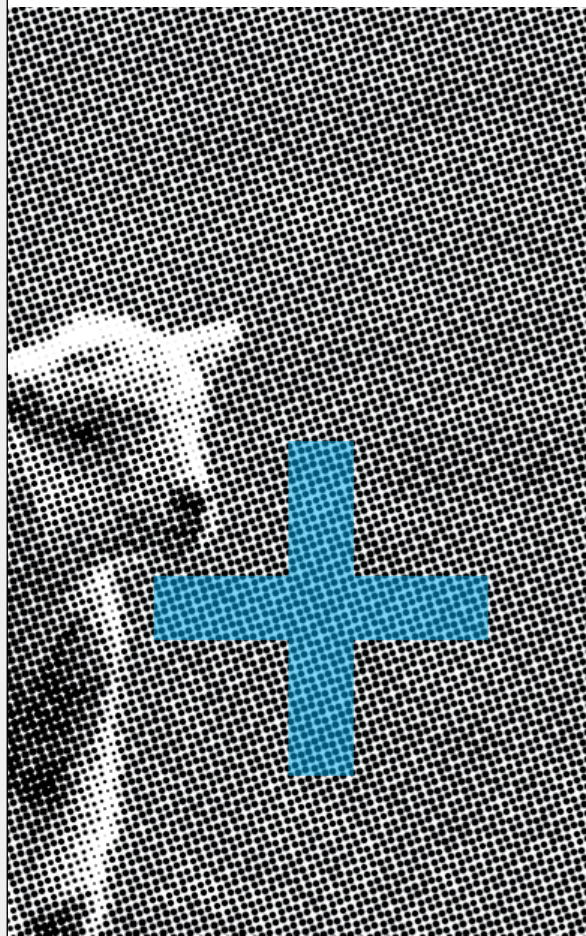


are under so many pressures in today's world, finding a place where families are supported and celebrated becomes precious. Many non-connected families—and connected families for that matter—are in situations where economic and safety needs trump all others. They don't see themselves in philosophical or cultural thickets, but in a daily thicket of real problems and challenges for which the Lutheran school is one of the answers for one of their challenges.

Out of the Thicket. Our prayer for non-connected families is not that they would through their association with our Lutheran school become more religious, less subject to MTD or the isms, or understand what Christians are really like, but that they become Christians themselves. Our opportunity by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word is to bring the non-connected family into an encounter with Jesus Christ, who alone is the Good Shepherd who will extricate them, as he has us, from the thicket of sin and death, and give them the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. For after all, being connected lasts for eternity.

Notes

- 1 I won't be including the Concordia University System; not because there are no "precious lambs" that need to be found in the CUS but because the emphasis of this issue is on family religious and spiritual needs coupled with the capacity of congregations and schools to interact with parents—a relationship less cogent at university level. An edition of *Issues* about campus ministry would be an excellent follow-up.
- 2 *Lutheran School Statistics: 2012-13 School Year*. Available through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod School Ministry Office.
- 3 Oberdeck, John W. "The Critical Role of Education in a Congregation's Mission: Congregation and Family Together." *Issues in Christian Education*. 45:2 (Spring 2012), 13-18.
- 4 Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 162-163.
- 5 Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 270-271.
- 6 Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).
- 7 David Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).





Building Community Bridges through the Lutheran School

In 1994, Dr. Carl Moser (then Director of Schools-Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, LCMS) and I were having dinner after a day of meetings on the future of Lutheran schools. We eventually got around to the topic of a growing trend: tuition. Carl spoke in somber tones, “Mike, tuition will forever change Lutheran education. It’s going to be a real challenge for the mission of Lutheran schools.”

Growing up in a Lutheran teachers’ home, I knew the financial strains for parents and church workers alike in Lutheran schools largely dependent on congregational donations. I embraced tuition. Tuition brought additional resources which could help school quality. Why would Carl be opposed to such progress? Carl was wrong! Tuition was an “opportunity”... but I thought I had better listen before telling him so! So I asked, “What’s wrong with tuition?”

Carl smiled and cringed at the same time. “Oh, there’s nothing wrong with tuition; it’s just that when parents are paying for their child’s schooling, it will be easier to lose the mission.” Tuition has the potential to shift Lutheran education into a “product” that could become more “consumer” driven than “mission”

driven. “But,” he added, “the truth is, it’s here to stay. Now, what shall we do so we don’t lose the mission?” Carl’s question was simple but got to the heart of why Lutheran schools exist. We spent the rest of the night talking about the mission of the Lutheran school in the congregation and community.

What the Mission Is Not

The mission for Lutheran schools is NOT to provide quality education and religious training for children. Our mission is NOT to be the best school in our community. Nor is our mission simply to get them ready for Confirmation. These are *strategies* in the mission of equipping disciples for Jesus Christ. Lutheran schools can build bridges with people who are increasingly reluctant to walk into a church on their own. Lutheran schools have tremendous opportunities to build bridges with those families who are not-yet-connected to Him.

Tuition and decreased member participation have led some Lutheran school leaders to focus on “quality school strategies.” Competition with public and non-public schools and other institutional survival can consume our attention. As a result, many Lutheran educators have raised the bar in their professionalism and quality issues. This is good! Curriculum mapping, school safety, professional development, marketing, technology and special education services have increased the effectiveness of

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many schools. While “quality” IS essential, it is only a starting place when we look into our communities and see the real mission potential in Lutheran education.

The Mission of Lutheran Schools

Strategies that please the School Board or “the bottom line” can easily become the “urgent” that turns our focus to numbers over mission. Equipping disciples who make disciples is our mission. This mission is best viewed alongside the local congregation where Word and Sacraments reside. When a school views its mission as a subset of the greater mission of the congregation, it sends a clear message about the importance of the Gospel for all nations (Revelation 22). If the school’s mission is to raise test scores, pass along a family heritage or simply provide childcare for the community, we miss opportunities to share the hope we possess in Christ.

This article is intended to help the reader consider the mission for which God has called you. To help you consider how grace can be shared especially with those in your community who are hurt, distant, wounded, cynical, naive, or have maybe never heard what Christ did for them on Calvary and at the empty tomb. Instead of adding another task to your busy plate, consider a mission shift in thinking which can change conversations already occurring in Lutheran schools. How can you help students identify and engage in their own mission fields? For the purpose of this article I will refer to those in your school’s community who are not connected to Christ or to a local church as “not-yet-connected.” The use of the word “missional” is simply an abbreviation of being “intentional about God’s mission.”

The history of Lutheran schools is rooted in a parochial school system largely based on its church membership. In many cases, it has well fulfilled the congregation’s promises at baptism to help raise the child in the admonition and love of Christ. The Lutheran classroom is a Christian laboratory where students receive both Law and Gospel. As Lutherans we properly understand that moral training and righteous living are only underneath the glorious Gospel and righteousness that Christ has already earned

for us. This is a mystery to the world. They are dying to hear about it and don’t even know it. While tens of thousands of not-yet-connected children have been blessed in Lutheran schools, we continue to have opportunities to more intentionally reach out to the countless people in our community who need grace (Colossians 4:2-6).

People not-yet-connected come to Lutheran schools for a myriad of reasons, but seeking the proper understanding of Law/Gospel is usually not one of their motivating factors! Shall we cash their checks and keep them happy, or shall we take the relationships that Lutheran education provides to share the hope we have in Christ? We are called to do this in an authentic manner, and to share this hope when given the opportunity. The Holy Spirit does the work.

Depending on which pollster you read, some 70 percent of Americans do not worship Jesus Christ on a Sunday. A growing number of people not-yet-connected are enrolling in Lutheran schools that include child care centers, pre-schools, elementary schools, high schools and universities. Some enroll for educational excellence, or it is conveniently on the way to their workplace. Others think moral training might be good for their children and others because they know someone who is already enrolled in your school. Take time to ask newcomers why they chose your school. If someone already in your school has connected with them, call those people and thank them. Encourage them to befriend the “newcomer” and reinforce the mission behind your school. Create an assimilation “befriender” for each new family. Don’t have time? Have someone from your school board take up this task.

Every day, people bring their children into Lutheran schools along with their parenting challenges, overly busy schedules, divorces, family tragedies and life stories. In most cases they pay Lutheran schools to engage in a relationship with their children that *can* be life changing. If we are not intentional about God’s mission, we may simply provide a “transactional” service with the child and parent that teaches moralism or is beneficial only for the institution. Other private schools can provide that service as well. Romans 12 calls us to be transformed

by the renewing of the mind by God's Word. Lutheran schools have great opportunity in the community to develop relationships which can open doors for transforming the lives of children and parents through God's Word.

Factors in Intentional Outreach

Several key factors contribute to an intentional outreach to those who are not-yet-connected. First and foremost is a staff that is spiritually rooted and mature. They are in God's Word together and individually. They regularly partake in Holy Communion to receive God's grace in their own lives. Prayer is also an important part of this "missional staff." These spiritual practices are the starting place for a staff which equips disciples of those who already know Christ and of those not-yet-connected.

The second factor is excellence in education. Today's parents are searching for excellence in their educational choice. Schools that take test scores seriously, constantly strive to keep technology current, diligently maintain their National Lutheran School Accreditation status and keep a clean, safe and pleasant looking facility are "starters." The staff must be highly professional and love to be lifelong-learners themselves. While we strive to be the best school in the community, that is NOT our mission!

Third, the staff has a genuine desire to build authentic faith conversations with children and parents. The not-yet-connected matter greatly to this staff. When parents trust teachers, they engage in conversations about the child's personality, attitudes, and values. These are rooted in the heart of the family system and provide opportunities to share the values of a Christ centered life with the parent. A staff with a passion for students and parents to be connected to Christ and a faith community separates them from one simply focused on cognitive and behavioral goals. Lutheran educators have doorways into the families they serve. When a staff looks for ways to walk through those doorways to share Christian compassion, a Word of God, a prayer for peace, a hand of mercy, it can be a powerful witness.

Fred Limmel, principal at Our Saviors Lutheran School in Excelsior, Minnesota, took ten minutes at faculty meetings to allow time for

teachers to share their "mission moments" with children and families. At first, the faculty was quiet and Fred told most of the "stories." Before long the faculty realized they were constantly in the middle of lives that were broken, hurting, but also celebrating. Some "stories" were from members of the church. The faculty ensured that those folks were connected to the church's support system. But some did not have a church home. The faculty members used the relationship with that person to connect them to the pastor or walk alongside them because they had built an authentic relationship of trust. The principal's simple exercise in that faculty meeting increased the intentionality of witness eyes for the faculty and enhanced a culture of faith conversations with children, parents and staff.*

A fourth factor that builds authentic relationships with not-yet-connected families is to be clear on what we stand for in our Lutheran school. In a world of no absolute truth, we have one: the Word of God. The Millennial Generation is often cautious of "closed minded, judgmental Christians." For example, a common belief among some people today is that Christians "hate gay people." Not true. Infant baptism can be puzzling for a person who has based a value system on "what one can understand." But a great topic to discuss is God's role in salvation, with our human reasoning playing no part in God's saving grace! Creation is a challenge for many non-believers in a world that has accepted evolution. As much as possible, frame these conversations with "what we are for" rather than "what we are against." We do not have to apologize or minimize the Word of God, the Lutheran Confessions or Luther's Catechism. However, "how we do this" is an important part of our witness. 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us to be prepared to share the hope we have in Christ, but to do this with gentleness and respect.**

While staff play a key role in promoting a missional attitude in Lutheran schools, it is important for the congregational leadership to understand and embrace the mission as well. School Boards tend to spend their time on budgets, recruitment numbers and serving the needs of their current students. While

understandable, it reflects an internal focus on the school providing a service for “their kids.” School Boards would do well to intentionally focus on children not-yet-connected by coordinating their mission statement with the church and through policies such as: enrollment, tuition and tuition assistance.

A “Misional School survey” can be given to numerous stakeholder groups (faculty, board, parents with children in the school, parents without children in the school) which can generate much discussion about the role of the school as it supports the mission of the church. In *Structure Your Church for Mission* (Strobickan.com), Stroh and Bickel provide an excellent resource to help congregational leadership better understand their role in the “being” vs. “doing” process. Another great tool is the 1991 CTCR “Statement of Mission” which provides guidelines for LCMS institutions when reviewing mission statements (www.lcms.org). If you would like a copy of the “Misional School survey” or a board discussion guide for the *Structure* book, simply e-mail me at the address at the beginning of this article. A list of “Building Bridges into Your Community” is also available upon request.

Community Outreach

A staff focused on God’s mission to those not-yet-connected seeks to understand the ministry needs of the entire community, not just those enrolled in the school. Attending public school board meetings, interviewing emergency room personnel or the local police chief, talking with neighbors about their hopes and dreams all can give a perspective about the community which students enter every time they leave your building. Have intentional conversations with students about what they see and hear as they go to soccer practice, dance lessons, and play with friends in the neighborhood. The Lutheran Church Extension Fund has great demographic breakdowns of the families and children in a community. An hour or two sifting through these demographics at a faculty or board meeting could help open mission eyes.

Community events that can build these relationships go beyond choral performances at the nursing home, art work at the local mall and community service. Relationship building can be included in these events like: connect students with someone in the nursing home over a long period of time; have students interview the director at the local food shelf; sponsor a family in need that is not connected to the

school; practice witness skills in the classroom. Possible follow-through activities include: have students report how they used those skills with their friends; create a preschool parent focus group which asks about the needs of the families; host an Internet safety course for the entire community; integrate your students into a summer sports program with community children ... the list is endless.

Eastern Heights Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, held a summer fireworks event for their community to raise awareness for their Church and Early Childcare Center. After the event, they gathered to discuss the missional success of the event. They realized that their volunteers were too busy serving hot dogs and managing booths to actually get to know anyone at the event. The next year, they recruited volunteers who specifically roamed the grounds to start conversations and build relationships with their neighbors. Many Lutheran schools are already "doing community events." Prior to events, add time in the planning process to discuss how meaningful relationships with those not-yet-connected can be intentionally built. After the event, take time to evaluate the missional impact and steps to improve future events.

At a meeting in June, the faculty at Trinity Lone Oak Lutheran School, Eagan, Minnesota, decided that in their August home visits, they would ask students whom they shared Christ with that summer. By the first day of school, the school's entryway was plastered with stories and pictures of people whom students had shared the hope of Christ with that summer. This reinforced the mission of God with students and faculty but also created greater support for the school's mission in and with the church.

In the past decade, growth has occurred in the number of early childhood centers offering child care for the community. While these can often be self-funding and provide a needed service to the community, early childhood centers are also ripe mission fields for people not-yet-connected. These centers are often heavily populated with "de-churched," "under-churched," and the "never churched." Often they are single parents (or both parents work) whose lives are about managing the next day. One staff member at an early childhood center got into a discussion one day with parents about their children who were not yet baptized. She asked their permission to talk with the pastor. He organized an information meeting about what Lutherans teach about baptism. In the

next six months, eleven children from their center were baptized, and the church began to organize more activities geared to the needs of families with young children.

In another center, Melissa Smith, Assistant Principal/Early Childhood Director at St. Andrew's Lutheran, Park Ridge, Illinois (msmithparkridge@gmail.com), took traditional parent involvement events and extended them into deeper relationship activities. Mom's Day Out events grew into a Mom's In Touch group, Dad's Day Out events spawned a Men's prayer and fellowship group, a Thanksgiving Dinner gave congregational volunteers a chance to serve and connect with preschool families. Facebook, blogs and Tweet postings gave parenting tips AND opportunities to share the faith as parents trusted their Lutheran preschool family for spiritual connections. From Art Auctions to Zumba classes, events have intentional opportunities for not-yet-connected parents to make prayer requests, hear Scripture and have open doors for spiritual conversations.

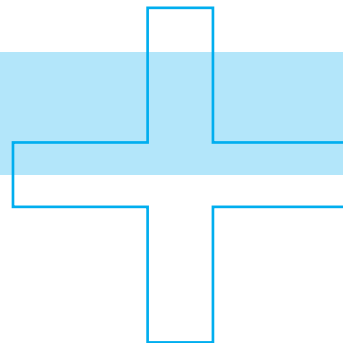
When students, staff, parents and leaders invest in building relationships to reach those not-yet-connected both in *and* out of the school, people in the community take notice. "Word of mouth" is not just a good recruitment strategy;

it flows out of an attitude of gratitude for the transformational change in the lives of people who live in the Gospel.

Carl Moser's question gets to the heart of the mission for Lutheran Schools. "Now, what are we going to do to keep the mission of God in the forefront of the school ministry?" During National Lutheran Schools Week in early 2013, the Lutheran Education Association Administrators list-serve was flooded with stories of hundreds of baptisms of children enrolled in all types of Lutheran schools. I was greatly heartened for the future of Lutheran schools. May God continue to strengthen you for His Mission: to equip disciples for Jesus Christ.

* Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) is in production of a ten-part video series with vignettes of opportunities and tips to help Lutheran educators further faith conversations. Distribution is scheduled for late Fall 2013. It can be used as a ten-to-fifteen minute "training tool" at faculty meetings over the course of a year. Or consider one of the witness training sessions that LHM has in their Mission U program which may help teachers gain greater confidence in sharing Christ in authentic opportunities.

**The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has produced excellent documents on the LCMS position on relevant societal topics that prepare Lutheran educators for faith conversations. Rather than abdicating these conversations to the pastor, why not build on the trust relationship that a parent has with the Lutheran educator already?





Opportunities for Congregations to Connect with the Non-Connected

The living, triune God has always been the God who seeks to connect with the non-connected (John 1:14-18; 2 Timothy 2:4). The Scriptures are filled with stories of God sending His people to live in the midst of their neighbors so that they might hear the Gospel, and by the Holy Spirit's presence and activity through the proclamation of this Gospel, put their faith in Jesus (Augsburg Confession V).¹

Beginning at the very beginning of the human story, God Himself comes to Adam and Eve, who had become disconnected from Him by their sinful rebellion and actions, and promised them a Savior who provided the only way for them (and their offspring) to become connected to Him, that by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ they might experience His salvation and be connected to Him for eternity.

Many years later, God calls Abram to leave his country, his people and his father's household and go to live among a people whom God would show him. Even though Abram himself had been disconnected from God, because he was an idolater (Joshua 24:2), God called him by His grace and placed him into the service of those whom he did not yet know and to live in places where Abram had never yet been, so that "the disconnected might be connected to Him" by grace through faith.

Later, Moses is sent to Pharaoh so that His people might experience their deliverance from their bondage in Egypt and "that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 14:4b, 18). Consequently Israel saw this great work that the Lord did in Egypt, and they placed their faith in Him (Exodus 14:31). Others, like Rahab, also came to know of His work of deliverance and salvation by placing her fear and faith in Him (Joshua 2:9-12; Romans 11:17, 24-25).

Much later, Jonah is sent to the Ninevites so that they, like Rahab, might have the opportunity to be connected to Him. Jonah initially refused to engage in the mission that God had designed for his life and attempted to get as far away from Nineveh as he could by going to Tarshish. In His mercy to both Jonah and the Ninevites, God's Word came to Jonah a second time, calling Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach His message so that they might repent of their evil ways and find their life and salvation in Him.

Throughout His ministry as the friend of sinners, Jesus connected with the non-connected as "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matthew 9:35). As a result, we see Him speaking to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4) and entering into the homes of Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10; 15:11-32).

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That is why Jesus, in His words to His first disciples, gives them a clear directive regarding the ministry that would be theirs as His followers. He would make them to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). Like their Master, they would be sowers of the Gospel message in the lives of others (Matthew 13:1-9), with the hope that those who were not His disciples would become His disciples, and that those who would become disciples through their Gospel witness would join them in being fishers of men, making disciples through their life of witness and Gospel proclamation.

The Purpose

The purpose of this article is to lift up examples of congregations and individuals who are active in connecting with the non-connected. It is my intention that, as you reflect upon these ministry endeavors and orientations, you will be encouraged to make the most of your opportunities to connect with the non-connected. An assumption is that the focus of this discussion is outreach, and that the means through which God connects with the non-connected are Word and Sacraments.

LakePointe, Hot Springs, Arkansas (Rev. Greg Bearss)

Since its inception in 2006, LakePointe has been a consistent leader within Synod in the number of adult baptisms each year. I asked Rev. Greg Bearss to share this congregation's understanding of His mission of "connecting with the disconnected" and some of the

opportunities that they have realized by His grace and leading.

LakePointe is a church of the once disconnected. Starting with ten families in 2006, the intentional ministry strategy was to reach those who are skeptical because of a bad experience with the Christian church or who had no church experience at all. God has grown LakePointe to a worshipping community of more than 800 every Sunday, with 90 percent of those attending being formerly disconnected from a life with God. Pastor Greg identified the following priorities and principles.

- Starting a church from scratch offered the opportunity for visioning and planning from the start to reach people through the Word and Sacraments who are not connected to Jesus. Pastor Greg and the leadership did not have to help a congregation re-commit and re-focus its ministry priorities on reaching those who are non-connected/disconnected.
- The congregation established, as a core value and driving passion, the intentional resolve to reach those who do not know Jesus (and to resist the communal pressure to care only for those of the household of the faith). From its inception, "LakePointe is for those who are yet to come." This short mission/vision statement has helped the congregation to focus on "why we do what we do" and "why we are here," "to love God, to love people" (Matthew 22:36-39).
- Guiding ministry principle number one is that they do "anything short of sin to reach people for Jesus," so the litmus test for every congregational activity deals with "How

will it affect and reach those disconnected from Jesus?”

- Guiding ministry principle number two is to “practice what you promise,” since most disconnected people are looking for integrity in the things that you say and promise. When people take a chance on your church because you tell them they are welcomed, that they will fit in, and that you want them to be there, they will take you up on that invitation and look/expect those things to be true.
- Guiding ministry principle number three is that “LakePointe is a place to be real.” They seek to be a church where people can take the mask off and quit pretending as they foster an air of openness and transparency that allows everyone, including first timers, the opportunity to talk openly about their junk and struggles instead of pretending that these things don’t exist. The only way that this can really work is if your ministry is a safe place in which everyone, from the top down, is willing to be transparent and journey together under the cross as a follower of Jesus.
- The congregation has, as one of its metrics, the weekly tracking of how many people on that Sunday are first and second-time visitors. This metric enables the congregation to gauge how well they are doing in connecting with the disconnected (first timers) and welcoming them into its congregational life (second timers).

- Every church has a culture, and the question that begs to be asked is: “How is your church culture inviting the disconnected?” LakePointe has, from its very beginning, consistently and frequently asked questions such as: “How do the message series, décor, volunteers, children’s ministry and other facets of the congregation’s mission impact those who are unconnected/disconnected?” and “How are these areas conducive to welcoming guests and the disconnected?”
- The fundamental guiding principle for the leadership team, along with His people who gather around Word and Sacraments at LakePointe, is “to look at things, and think like people, who are disconnected,” so that the things we do and say make sense in reaching people who are far away from God, both within the doors of our ministry space as well as those outside in the community we serve.

Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA) (Rev. Dr. Allan Buckman, Chair)

In early 2002, about a dozen concerned LCMS members met at Concordia Seminary to reflect upon the mission implications of the growing number of immigrants and refugees residing in the greater St. Louis area. The group chose the name “Christian Friends of New Americans” and focused their early initiatives on recently arrived Bosnian refugees (who number more than 30,000).

In May of 2002, contact with the Bosnian community was initiated by Rev. Tony Boos primarily through the organization of various sporting events as well as by Joyce and Jerry Birk through English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship classes offered at Peace Lutheran Church. Soon, several other LCMS congregations began to offer ESL and citizenship classes in ministry to the emerging immigrant populations as well. During the past decade, these early CFNA initiatives have expanded in three dimensions:

1. **The establishment of various ministries at the Peace Center** (4019 South Grand Boulevard, St. Louis) which is located in a high density area of immigrants and refugees.

Bible based ESL for women who are mostly from Nepal and various parts of Africa (the weekly attendance averages ten).

After school tutoring. Immigrant and refugee children meet for two-and-a-half hours on Monday and Tuesday afternoons/evenings. Key features include ninety minutes of tutoring provided by ten to twelve volunteer teachers, twenty minutes of spiritual nurture through devotions, and forty minutes of snack, recreation and clean-up time.

Recent immigrants gather weekly for fellowship and spiritual nurture.

Health and wellness screening. This monthly effort is staffed by three or more qualified nurses and a cross-culturally experienced medical doctor serving as a consultant, as well as other volunteers. Payment for required medical treatment is often, but not always, covered by Medicaid.

Leadership formation. A group of eighteen new Americans meets weekly in order to understand basic Scripture passages as well as to develop both teaching and leadership skills necessary to guide home Bible studies and/or ethnic community fellowship events.

2. **The establishment of a sponsored Scholarship Assistance Ministry.** This ministry has provided scholarships for twenty-five to thirty immigrant and refugee children during each of the past five academic years. The purpose of the ministry is to connect LCMS congregations with immigrant and refugee ethnic communities in the St. Louis area and Lutheran schools. Of the twenty-nine students currently enrolled, twenty-five (together with their families) now claim membership in five LCMS urban congregations. When these people arrived in St. Louis, few had any connection with the Lutheran Church.

3. **The establishment of ministries in partnership with LCMS congregations.** ELS and citizenship classes are now conducted in eight LCMS congregations and are examples of how CFNA seeks to live out its mission statement: "Partnering with LCMS congregations for purposes of cross-cultural ministry among immigrants and refugees in the greater St. Louis area."

One of the most significant fruits of this ministry has been the establishment of eight home Bible studies involving new American families during the past two years. These home Bible studies take place in direct partnership with four LCMS congregations in the South St. Louis area.

National Disaster Response (Rev. Chris Schonberg and Rev. Mark Stillman)

Difficult life events can be opportunities for the disconnected to become connected as His people enter into their struggles and trials and reveal to them the Father's heart which is filled with mercy, love and compassion.

In late October, 2012, Superstorm Sandy impacted the Eastern seaboard. In New Jersey, 350,000 homes were damaged or destroyed which resulted in 41,000 families receiving assistance from FEMA because they had no place to go. Towns between Point Pleasant (Rev. Chris Schonberg) and Lanoka Harbor (Rev. Mark Stillman), a distance of only 20-30 miles, were considered "Ground Zero" of the hurricane where the storm came in at high tide, under a full moon, with wave heights and storm surges causing a wall of thirty-one feet above sea level to hit that area. Experts estimate that it will take five to seven years to recover from the Storm.



Many stories can be told of His people reaching out to the “connected” within their congregations who responded to the “disconnected” who had suffered losses. Here are a few ways in which lives were impacted:

- Assisting the Orphan Grain Train in the distribution of fans, lamps, microwaves and clothing along with cleaning supplies and food.
- Mother’s Day outreach distribution of over 250 gift-card sets along with gift baskets, 103 Easter Gift baskets distributed to local families, and 96 gift bags and supplies delivered to displaced families in local hotels.
- Packing and donating 3,600 meals to local food banks (Kids Against Hunger).
- “Muck outs” and mold-remedy work for local families, along with the assembly and distribution of over 600 flood buckets.
- “The Gift of Christmas” provided presents for children, gift cards for families (\$80,000) and the book *The Very First Christmas* by Dr. Paul Maier.
- Teams from Illinois, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida and New York assisted Rev. Ed Brashier (Shepherd’s Heart Ministry) in removing hundreds of downed trees, especially for the elderly and financially strapped.

As people were impacted by Superstorm Sandy, and as His people responded to their needs through acts of mercy and compassion, they also were able to pray for others and their specific needs, bringing them words of comfort as

agents and messengers of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The priesthood of believers is at work as they turn to the throne of grace in prayer on behalf of their neighbors and then bring, from that same throne of grace, a message of comfort, consolation and hope.

Rev. Jim Buckman is a network-supported missionary who has been called by the New Jersey District to engage in several outreach-oriented ministries. Foremost is cultivating and establishing vibrant prayer ministries at the congregational and community levels. Pastor Jim’s strategy is simple but effective: If we are going to pray for our neighbor, we need to know our neighbors and we need to know their needs. The best way to accomplish this is to ask them: “How can I pray for you?”

Lutheran Hour Ministries **(Rev. Dr. Mark Larson,** **Rev. Dr. Douglas Rutt)**

For nearly one hundred years, Lutheran Hour Ministries has been connecting with the disconnected by “bringing Christ to the nations and the nations to the Church” through its radio and television ministries. These ministries support and equip local congregations in their efforts to connect with the disconnected so that others might, by God’s grace and activity, be connected to Him.

A study conducted by the Barna Group in 2012 identified three key behaviors and attitudes in congregations who connect with new believers:

- Consistent follow-up. Congregations that added many new members tended to speak of a robust system to maintain connection with those not yet connected to Christ and His church;
- A connection with a community. Congregational members were organized not to simply serve themselves and other members; rather, they saw themselves in service and in mission to the communities in which they live and work, reflecting a Christ-like love and concern for the community;
- A culture of outreach. When lay members were asked what helped them to be effective in outreach, the preaching of their pastor was often mentioned as he proclaimed

the Word of God and equipped them for their opportunities of witness and Gospel proclamation. Significant in this culture is both corporate and individual prayer that the lost would hear the message of the Gospel as it is being proclaimed.

In response to this study, Lutheran Hour Ministries has developed a process that seeks to restore evangelistic effectiveness within the LCMS and to inspire and equip congregations to reach out to those who are disconnected from Him.

Pastoral Leadership Institute (Rev. Dr. Jock Ficken)

The Pastoral Leadership Institute was launched in 1998 in response to the need for missional leadership training for pastors as well as a concern for the steady decline in church membership in the LCMS. From its beginning, PLI focused on equipping pastors and their spouses to share the Gospel and connect people to Jesus.

With a culture that is becoming genuinely neopagan, there is a need for a radical rethink about the MODE of the church's engagement with its world, since our "traditional" ways of being His people are impacting fewer and fewer lives. We are now on genuinely MISSIONARY GROUND, and to reach beyond significant cultural barriers, we need to:

- adopt a missionary stance in relation to the culture;
- adopt best practices in cross-cultural mission situations.

Such a missionary posture attempts to communicate the Gospel in WORD and DEED and to establish the Church in such a way that it makes sense to the non-connected within their local cultural context. In order to accomplish this at the pastoral and congregational levels, Pastoral Leadership Institute has developed a two-year mission leadership formation process.

The Newtown Tragedy² (Rev. Rob Morris)

On Friday, December 14, 2012, a heavily armed gunman breached the security system of the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and began firing. Within five minutes, six educators and twenty children had lost their lives in the second-worst school shooting in U. S. history.

When Pastor Rob Morris became aware of the shooting, he hurried to the church where his administrative assistant was already assembling a list of church members with links to the school. "I started calling all the families on the list. Fortunately, I was able to reach most of them and find out that their children or the adults at the school were safe."

But Pastor Morris also learned that the parents of one child had gone to the school and could not find their daughter, a six-year-old who was a Sunday school classmate of Pastor Rob Morris' oldest son Elijah. Pastor Morris then went to the firehouse staging area and began a vigil with an anguished father and mother that lasted until 1:00 a.m. What does a pastor do and say in such times? "You pray, you sit with



them, you share Scripture and offer comfort and support in any way you can.”

During that long vigil, he also shared his own experience of waiting and grieving when his youngest son, Isaiah, experienced his first epileptic seizure and was transported in an ambulance (with Christy his wife) while Rob stayed at home with Elijah. “I didn’t know whether I would ever see Isaiah alive again.”

“I explained to the parents that while my circumstance wasn’t the same as the one they faced, here was how God had comforted me: that our children are always in God’s hands. They are a trust from Him; they don’t belong to us. A situation like this, when there is literally nothing you can do, is a very strong and difficult reminder that He is in control, that whatever the circumstances, their daughter was in God’s hands.”

That evening, while Pastor Rob waited with the parents for final confirmation from the police that their child had died, his church held a prayer service. Joining them were all the pastors of the LCMS circuit along with District President Tim Yeadon.



On Sunday, Pastor Morris testified to the living hope that we have in Christ Jesus, for “our hope lies not in our own behavior or emotions, but in the certainty of what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross and delivered to us through His means of grace. Through His Word and Sacraments, He has joined us to Him in that resurrection life. This becomes the solid point, the anchor. In our society, an anchor is usually a negative image. But it certainly isn’t to anyone who has been on a ship during a storm. In that circumstance, you need a fixed point outside the boat, outside of yourself, that can anchor you. The reality of what was accomplished on the cross was just as true on December 15 in Newtown as it was on December 13 in Newtown. While our confidence may be shaken, our hope has not, because of our certainty that the historical fact of Christ’s death and resurrection, the historical fact of our baptism into that resurrection life, haven’t changed one bit by what happened on that day.”

A Concluding Thought

Everyone has a mission, that is, everyone is being sent by God to do something, somewhere, at sometime to carry out His mission. As Christians, our primary mission, the foremost reason that we exist according to God’s plan, purposing and sending, is to “go and make disciples of all nations.” This mission is to permeate all of our life (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Forrest Gump, in the movie *Forrest Gump*, would periodically ask his mother, “Momma, what’s my destiny?” Your destiny, as a Christian, is to be and live as His disciple and to make disciples of the nations as you connect with the non-connected.

As we seek to connect with the non-connected, we would be wise to commit ourselves to three things: a lifetime of studying God’s Word; a lifetime of studying and listening to the people whom we are seeking to evangelize; a lifetime of being His incarnational bridges as we communicate His Word and message of life and of hope in words and ways that the hearer can understand (Romans 10:11-17).

Notes

- 1 One example from Acts 8:1-5; 11:19-21: “and on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (thus, the saints are the ones being scattered) ... now those who were scattered went about preaching. Philip went down (an evangelist and deacon) to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ.”... “now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. **And the hand of the Lord was with them**, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord.”
In these verses we see three different ways of God’s people engaging in mission: preaching, proclaiming and speaking the Gospel. As Luke notes in Acts 11:21, “the hand of the Lord was with them,” with a great number turning to the Lord. In this instance, we clearly see “the priesthood of all believers” at work—preaching, proclaiming and speaking the Gospel, with the Holy Spirit working faith “when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel,” as Article V of the Augsburg Confession declares.
- 2 This account was taken from an article written by Anne Doll, *Contact Magazine*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.



book reviews

Wide Welcome:
How the Unsettling Presence of
Newcomers Can Save the Church.
Jessicah Krey Duckworth.
Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

Jessicah Krey Duckworth grew up building sandcastles with her family on the East Coast. Her mom gave her two keys to excellent sandcastles. (1) Build them close enough to the water so that there is enough moist sand to hold the structure together. (2) Build them far enough away from the water so that the water is neither overly moist nor will the castle be washed away while it is being built. And yet, “Sand is a temporary medium. No matter how much work it took or whether we liked it or not,” the rising tide of the sea will eventually take the sandcastle down (2). The joy must be found in building the sandcastle, not in its completion.

Professor Duckworth is assistant professor of congregation and community care at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, and building sandcastles is her analogy for a church of the cross, repeatedly called the *ecclesia crucis* in *Wide Welcome*. Because the *ecclesia crucis* is normed by dying and rising, sin and forgiveness, brokenness and hope, the *ecclesia crucis* enjoys a fluid process of creating and becoming and does not dread the inevitable fall, always expecting life to trump death and rise again. As her subtitle alludes, Duckworth advocates that the unsettling presence of newcomers settles the church into this cruciform form.

Oldcomers in the church need newcomers. Just as sandcastles need to be built close enough to the water so that there is enough moist sand to hold the structure together, so the church needs newcomers to call the church to its identity and task of “making disciples.” Making disciples, Duckworth challenges us not to be “established congregations,” rushing to establish newcomers as established members, but “disestablished” ones, welcoming the questions of newcomers and allowing newcomers to shape the church’s identity. Too often, Duckworth argues, the church

attempts to create and retain a haven safe from the chaotic world. But the movement of the *ecclesia crucis* is not away from the world; it engages it.

Newcomers in the church need oldcomers, too. Just as sandcastles need to be built far enough away from the water so that the water is neither overly moist nor will the castle be washed away while it is still being built, so newcomers need oldcomers to mentor them in Christian discipleship practices. Discipleship does not happen by itself, but with experienced disciples.

Steering a middle path between the poles of withdrawal from the world and indistinguishability from the world, Duckworth recommends a patient catechesis patterned after the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This catechesis does not rush newcomers through three new member classes, but patiently allows life transition to evolve through four periods: inquiry, affirmation, candidacy, and baptismal living. Within this catechesis, Duckworth outlines three priorities that will provide the newcomer with a wide welcome. (1) Listen patiently to the newcomer’s questions. Their sometimes unsettling questions help oldcomers disarticulate and rearticulate what they believe, teach, and confess. (2) Facilitate the newcomer’s participation in discipleship practices alongside oldcomers. Identify oldcomers who will sponsor and mentor the newcomer in the discipleship practices central to the life of the local congregation. (3) Take time for the newcomer to learn the concrete resources and repertoire of your very particular congregation. Put newcomers together with oldcomers who know how practices originated and developed in your congregation. Through this interactive catechesis, both newcomers and oldcomers shape the *ecclesia crucis*.

As a young pastor, I especially benefited from Duckworth’s call to identify the discipleship practices apart from Sunday-morning worship that are central to the life of my congregation. All of Duckworth’s examples come from real congregations rich in ritual and earnest about discipleship. Her call helps me evaluate our values and articulate what disciple-making resources our church would be excited to model and share with newcomers.

Like building sandcastles on the shore, Professor Duckworth’s *Wide Welcome* welcomes us to find more joy in making disciples than in maintaining disciples. Like the shore that both threatens and makes sandcastles possible, thank God for the unsettling presence of newcomers that makes the church’s identity and task possible, saving the church.

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**The Other 80 Percent:
Turning Your
Church's Spectators
into Active Participants.**

**Scott Thumma and Warren Bird.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.**

The church I serve has conducted two strategic planning processes in the past five years. Topping the list of priorities both times has been "member engagement," so you can appreciate my interest in reading a book that offers hope for "turning your church's spectators into active participants."

Here are questions posed by the authors that draw in a reader like me (and probably you):

- What will motivate the more disconnected attenders to move farther along into discipleship and living out the faith in community?
- How can you shift more of your church members from sitting to serving, from being spectators to engaging more deeply?
- Would doing so help more people to grow and develop spiritually?

Those are some of the most significant recurrent questions in the church. Answers to those questions are what congregational researcher Scott Thumma and author Warren Bird set out to offer in their 218 pages. I know many pastors and church leaders who would be delighted just to see some additional so-called "sitters" and "spectators" in worship. These authors have their work cut out for them when they assert that churches can experience a resurgence of member engagement in a time when many churches are hanging on for dear life. The authors rise to the occasion, having engaged in a share of the heavy lifting with their own research project

that they place alongside other significant studies that inform their conclusions and recommendations.

The premise and title of the book reflect the often-cited 80/20 rule, or *Pareto Principle*, which, in the church, goes like this: 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work (and in my experience the 80 percent are glad to see the 20 percent do the work, but wish they would do a better job). The authors are quite convinced that if church leaders pay attention to the less-involved people, they will become more involved.

The book is divided into three main parts, which becomes the ordered process church leaders are advised to follow to begin involving "the other 80 percent." Those parts are: *Listening, Learning and Leading*. There is no tiptoeing through these tulips. This process requires bold leadership and diligent effort. It truly appears to be more about the journey than it is about the destination. I appreciate that for the authors it is not a numbers game, but ultimately about personal spiritual growth and kingdom growth.

First, the forming of *Listening Teams* is recommended, which involves much more than just putting an ear to the ground, but actively soliciting a broad base of input from members of the congregation, especially the card-carrying 80 percenters. The authors include a great set of sample survey questions to use in this listening process. Next, the authors recommend forming a *Learning Team*, the goal of which is "to uncover the external social and cultural dynamics in

your community that may indirectly hamper church involvement." In the final section a church leadership team is shown how to put the previous chapters into practice. The first suggestion, which can be easy for churches to miss, is to start with what your church does well.

If you like charts that tell a story, numerous pertinent and pithy call-outs (e.g., "The goal is spirited participation, service, and involvement that feed members' faith in ways that are intrinsically and externally rewarding"), lists of helpful resources (online and otherwise), entrée to key studies on this topic, and a helpful bibliography, you will find this book well worth the not-priced-for-quick-sale cost.

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book reviews

Sunday School That Really Works.

Steve Parr. Grand Rapids:

Kregel Publications, 2010.

If you are like me, you have heard many questions and debates in our Christian education ministries on the validity of Sunday school. Many people are wrestling with the question of what to do with Sunday mornings and whether or not Sunday school is a thing of the past. *Sunday School That Really Works* is a book that addresses the origin, challenges, myths, and future of Sunday school. It has many great insights and practical suggestions on how to make your Sunday school program more effective and an essential part of your future. If you are one with doubts about Sunday school, or are looking for ways to improve your program, this is a book that is worth the read.

The book contains many practical strategies and program implementations that could be applied to organization, volunteers, teaching, reaching new people, and program leadership. There are useful ideas and steps you can follow to restructure your Sunday school.

However, the highlight of the book for me is the conceptual strategies that are outlined on becoming a missional Sunday school program. The author explains that your Sunday school program should be focused on “the lost are being reached, lives are being changed, and leaders are being sent.” If this is the focus of your Sunday school, you will see growth and relevance in your Sunday program as well as your congregation. Often, the focus in many Sunday schools is on inward comfort, sound doctrine, faithfulness to the Word, and not

much about going and reaching others. The Great Commission may be taught but not practiced in many classrooms. At best, programs may offer a special-day event to invite friends, or perhaps a few times a year cards are sent for outreach. The approach to actively seek others is often missing in Sunday school programs. This is the major issue that the author is addressing and which is pivotal to creating a healthy program.

According to the author, “Sunday school leaders sincerely believe that the priority of their ministry is to dive deep into God’s Word and to disciple believers to love God intimately. I certainly cannot disagree with the significance of devoted Bible study and loving God, but I have noticed that many go deep and somehow fail to see the lost community around them.” As Lutherans, we certainly celebrate sound doctrine and teaching. It goes without saying that this is an essential part of our teaching and all our programs.

But if we are to be faithful to the Word and the Great Commission that were given to the church, then we need to be serious about training our Sunday school students and teachers in reaching and making disciples of others. A key part of this is serving others. Although we are careful about how good works are interpreted in the Book of James, the author refers to the James 1:22 passage that encourages us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” This is great encouragement for our lives as disciples as well as our Sunday

school programs. We need not be afraid of teaching our students to bear fruit in the world and to live God’s mission for us, to reach and teach others.

The author references data and examples that make a great case for his statement that “a growing Sunday school will almost always result in a growing worship attendance, membership, and expansion of almost every ministry in the church.” This is a practical resource for any Sunday school program. You will, however, note a few subtle references in the book to decision-based theology. Since the focus is on conceptual strategies and practical ideas for the classroom, the author’s perspective does not detract from the value of this book as a good resource for your Sunday school program. I would encourage you to read this book and work on becoming a missional Sunday school!

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