

Re“vision”ing at Calvary Lutheran High School

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Project description and outcomes

Building Christian Leaders has been the motto of Calvary Lutheran High school since 2009. It's on our wall, it's on our t-shirts, it's a part of our vocabulary... but what does that mean and how does it shape who we are? Sure, sacred cows make the best hamburger, but if the shoe fits, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater? (How many cliché's can fit into one analogy?)

In my first year as head of school, I was asked what our mission statement was. To be honest, I stumbled. Though it appeared on some documents such as board agendas and applications for admission, it was not a phrase that was referenced regularly and therefore rarely considered in planning.

This lack of clarity was the focus of my project for Van Lunen. We are in need of a long-range strategic plan. We have a chasm where our development program should be. Crucial conversations and necessary endings need to happen, but that can't be done well without a common frame of reference. My goal was to clarify vision and mission for Calvary to set the stage for a better tomorrow.

As I entered my second year as executive director at Calvary, I recognize there are stakeholders and founders who have much more context on the history of the school. Even a majority of the students have more experience than I do in the halls of Calvary. Context is crucial.

With the assistance of Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), I sought information from our stakeholders regarding their perspective of ministry at Calvary. A survey was developed and sent to current families and alumni families, current and former board members, pastors of our association's congregations, teachers, students and alumni.

The survey consisted of open-ended questions (See Appendix A) that asked what people's hope and dreams were for Calvary along with the most crucial need. 110 responses were received.

A focus group made of representatives from the aforementioned populations was gathered to share the results of the survey and to collect their reactions in-person. This group of 23 stakeholders met for three hours on a Saturday morning. Though there were no doughnuts offered (LESSON LEARNED!), conversation was nevertheless constructive and productive. It should not have been a surprise (but was, nevertheless) that Calvary students were the most valued contributors to the conversation. When each attendee was asked to come up with a word that best-described Calvary, over one-third chose "family." This shaped much of the conversation moving forward - asking questions to better capture what inspired such a description.

Following this day, a group of seven pre-selected individuals (who were in attendance at the larger group meeting) met to distill what was heard and to better refine the key points. (See Appendix B for agenda and discussion) Included in this group was a teacher, the principal, a board member, a former board member, a pastor and an alumnus/prospective student parent.

Afterward, I was charged with beginning the writing process. With guiding questions from our consultant, Rev. Billy Brath, I further distilled what was heard.

A month later, Rev. Brath and I sat to review and talk about the progress. Though we had incorporated numerous stakeholders to gather data, LCEF's approach assumes the Holy Spirit works through the "called" head of school to use that input to craft and consequently cast

the Vision & Mission for the school. For the next two months, I primarily worked alone on this process - with two face-to-face meetings with Rev. Brath.

We constructed a new vision statement (who we are and who we want to be), a new mission statement (how we accomplish the vision), new values (what our stakeholder community holds dear) and lastly “mission pillars” to serve as guideposts for evaluation and tools for strategic planning. (In hindsight, I wish I would have had *The Advantage* available before beginning this process.)

The new vision, mission, values and mission pillars were shared with the school board in December. The phrases were introduced to the faculty in January. From February through May, the faculty and I worked through the philosophy behind the mission pillars which would serve as indicators for mission consistency in our day-to-day operations. Finally, the school board adopted the new vision statement, mission statement and values along with strategic targets in its June board meeting.

Lessons learned from the process

The process was dutifully complex, though I wish I had known the wider scope before we went through it. I was cognizant before, but I know some lessons learned through this have underscored the value of communication and understanding. Sometimes, professionally, I work on a need-to-know basis with subordinates or even a just-in-time information model for myself. Being on the information-receiving end, the just-in-time model helps to keep one focused on the task at-hand (not getting bogged down in a the larger, comprehensive goals) however as head of school, I may have approached things differently — and this method confined the process to the LCEF version of how to do things.

In hindsight, I would have probably involved stakeholders more - communicating the goals of the process to the larger community, motivating the change. Demonstrating more need or painting a picture of a preferred future could have saved some need for explanation on the back end of “what was wrong with the previous mission statement?” After the community meetings, spending time sharing intermediate results with current faculty & administration and current board members could have created more buy-in to the process. Not having updates or conversations with these stakeholders throughout made the revelation of the new vision, mission, and values that much harder of a sell. Even though I believe the new statements are very aligned with who our ministry is and what we desire to live more fully into, the rolling out of the new statements was rockier than anticipated.

At the initial presentation to the school board, I had to balance the approach of casting a new vision while also asking for the board’s blessing. Their focus was on whether or not to move into another capital campaign. LCEF’s approach was to clarify the vision for the ministry before deciding to move forward with that decision. This caused some distraction in the initial

presentation and the results were met with muted response. Over time, with reinforcement, they have embraced the new statements.

If there was a point to be emphasized moving forward, it is the casting of the new vision and mission to our community. There has still not been a grand “revelation,” but with the beginning of a new school year and the unveiling of a new website, this might be an ideal time to identify these phrases to our larger school community.

The difference in our school today

The primary difference in our school today is the opportunity for Calvary to be mission and vision-focused, rather than motto-focused. Our school community has clarified what “Building Christian Leaders” looks like. Our vision defines who we are and who we want to become. Our mission shares how we got about reaching our vision.

Using Mission Pillars, Calvary now has a way to analyze how we are achieving our vision and correct potential mission drift. At the end of the school year, faculty evaluated how they are currently doing moving Calvary closer to its new vision of being a “relational Christian community engaging the world as servant leaders.” These statements were also highlighted for the board to consider as they set strategic targets for 2018-2021.

It will take additional work to better interweave the new statements into public-facing publications. Faculty members are working on this over the summer. We are changing documents for admissions and writing them for development purposes. In 2018-2019, our school community will be using a common language to describe who we are and what we do. These new statements will carry us forward with a clear vision for ministry at Calvary Lutheran High School.

APPENDIX A

1. What is the one thing Calvary Lutheran High School (CLHS) does best?
2. If someone were to ask you why they should go to CLHS, what would you say?
3. What societal needs is CLHS best positioned to meet?
4. What is the greatest opportunity facing CLHS?
5. If resources were not an issue, what should CLHS add to its ministry?
6. In five years, what will be the most beneficial changes to have happened at CLHS since today?
7. What is your biggest dream for CLHS?
8. What is the one thing that should never change about CLHS?
9. What should be the funding model for CLHS?

APPENDIX B

The agenda for this Vision Team meeting and the ensuing data included:

1. Combine what was heard

a. General thoughts

- Positive
- Christian Community (High quality education is assumed, but is a continual pursuit)
- Faith Family (Relational valued over(?) Transactional)
- Calvary doesn't talk about the Transactional aspects of education enough.
- The relational aspects are a stumbling block for attracting public school families (who are
- conditioned to look for academics.)
- with Christ as the foundation... excellence follows

b. Key words & phrases

- Family (Community)
- Faith/Christ/Christian/Ministry
- Leaders

c. Action Ideas

- Market Calvary (balance messages to external audiences)

2. Vision of future (Take time to write ideas of an ideal future – think 5 years ahead.)

a. Ministry Vision Statements

- Keep Calvary's culture consistent and distinct
- Focus on the body of Christ: preparing students to be salt and light in all vocations; actively witnessing
- That Calvary would be a recognized brand in the mid-MO region

b. Facility Vision statements

- Full seats; enrollment at 200+

- Debt free facility, prepared to expand as needed
- That our facility would be a tool for community outreach

c. People Vision

- More full-time, called teachers (impacts what programs the school can offer)
- Adding a chaplain, counselor
- That 90% of Lutheran grade school students would enroll at Calvary
- That Calvary would engage its alumni, inviting them back to campus
- Track our graduates' impact on the world (which industries are they employed? Are they actively involved in a church?)

d. Miscellaneous Vision

- A funded endowment, managed by a foundation who solicits regular gifts

3. Write a Mission Statement (in 10 min) – based on what we have heard and distilled, what is Calvary's purpose?

a. Group A: Calvary Lutheran High School is a Christian academic community that is dedicated to shaping students for their lifelong impact on their communities.

b. Group B: developed phrases only --

- Audience: Reaching families and the community through students;
- Action: Investing, Infusing, Living, Building
- Aim: Christian academic excellence

4. Compare with Calvary's current Mission & Vision Statement:

- Mission Statement: By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Calvary Lutheran High School is building a lifelong network of young adults centered on spiritual growth, fellowship, stewardship and learning.
- Vision Statement: Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Calvary Lutheran High School is dedicated to building our students as Christian Leaders.

General observation: This was the first time most of the Vision Team had seen these statements. They liked them. We discussed the intended audience of the mission statement – was it internal or external? If it was external, there were some theological words that would require explanation: “fellowship, stewardship.” If the audience was internal, the statement could stand “as-is” with no need for further extrapolation.

5. Assignment

Sleep on it. Are there words that better communicate our Mission to an “external” audience?