



Trinity Lutheran School

Staten Island, New York
Vernell Renée Davis, Principal



Project Summary

Project:

To revise the existing School Manual, so that it provides the faculty and staff with clearly expressed guidelines for procedures and processes associated with the everyday operations of Trinity Lutheran School. Furthermore, this document will have the stamp of approval from the faculty, staff and school board members as we move forward with our shared vision for Trinity Lutheran Church and School.

Description of Trinity Lutheran School:

It is vital that we create a standard document, which will serve as a guideline for the Trinity Lutheran School community. Since the school's inception in 1960, this school manual has provided the structure needed to develop and maintain an efficient and exceptional academic program. With a record of graduating students attending distinguished high schools within the five boroughs as well as boarding school in New York State, its benefit to the community is clearly established. Furthermore, our alumni often return to share their accomplishments with the faculty and acknowledge the strong foundation instilled through Trinity. With the support of Trinity Lutheran Church in partnership with the school, Trinity has continued to open its doors to an ethnically and religiously diverse community of students on the North shore and in surrounding communities on Staten Island for approximately 48 years. Our enrollment within the last 10 years has varied based on economic issues as well as the aftermath of 9 – 11, which caused an abnormal increase in state transfers. Our current enrollment varies from 180 to approximately 190 students and we are in contract with the NYS Department of Education as a Universal PreK 4 program site for the city.

Yet, in order to continue this legacy, developing not only strong minds, but also the Christian morals and values cherished by our institution, we need to insure that Trinity has a sound foundation. Trinity Lutheran School will continue to reflect on our accomplishments and work constantly to improve. The ultimate goal being to better serve the needs of Trinity Lutheran School's faculty, student body and community at large for the glory of God.



Project Results

Project Process and Procedure:

Initially, this project idea was presented to the School Board specifically to receive a consensus on the importance to the school for such an endeavor. Once the board accepted the project idea then a sub-committee was established to review various sections of the School Manual. This sub-committee would consist of #2 or more School Board members, #2 teachers and an honorary advisory member. The committee members would receive a copy of the manual to review and insert comments to be considered for deliberation as part of the revision process. These comments would be discussed during the committee meetings and ultimately voted upon by the school board members as appropriate additions, removals or revisions. In addition, the faculty members were provided with copies of the manual to review and submit comments to the sub-committee as well.

Since, the manual consists of the Constitution and By- Laws, Parent's Procedures and Policies Booklet and the Teacher's Manual, each section was delegated to the appropriate school/church committee. The responsibility for reviewing the Constitution and By Laws with the recommendation of the school board would be relegated to a Church Council member with expertise in this area. Furthermore, the primary duty of the sub-committee was to revise the Teacher's Manual in a manner, which includes the input of the faculty and staff.

The Parent's Procedures and Policies Booklet is the final section. This section has been updated on an annual basis, whereby the administrator encourages the comments and concerns of the staff. Therefore, the School Board employed the Collaborative model as well. This approach was discussed as a viable procedure for completing this specific section in the manual – the Teacher's section. In addition, we hope this method will provide the School Board with a better understanding of the needs and concerns of the teachers, school staff and school committee.

Once the manual has been reviewed by various parties, then the collection of inserted comments, were compiled and compilation was discussed during the School Board meeting and voted upon. With this in mind, the ultimate goal is to place a revised copy of the Teacher's Manual in the hands of each staff member by September of 2008. Furthermore, this manual will be an integral part of the teacher's packet given at the beginning of each year, and to accompany Letters of Intent for the upcoming year.

It is vital that we create a standard document that will serve as a guideline for Trinity Lutheran School community. Since the school's inception in 1960, this school manual has provided the structure needed to develop and maintain an exceptional academic program. Due to the sound record of accomplishments, Trinity has opened its doors to a diverse community on the North shore of Staten Island for 48 years. In order to continue this legacy, Trinity must continue to improve in every way possible. This document- The School Manual – is one simple approach to continuing to reflect on the best practices and make improvements where necessary

What We Have Learned

Successes:

- An agreement regarding the vision for the school
- This project was a top priority for the School Board and Faculty
- Focus on the goal remained consistent throughout the year
- Collaborative Approach: which included every branch of the organization
- Interdisciplinary Team approach
- Created major discussion groups
- The staff participated in the development of the document
- The faculty representative presented comments and concerns to the School Board members during monthly meetings
- Faculty and Staff had a sense of empowerment and ownership during portions of this process
- This project was discussed and revision voted upon during School Board meetings
- A timetable was clearly established
- An insightful School Board President and committed school board members with a clear understanding of the importance of this document
- A person with the expertise and willingness to review the Constitution and By Laws portion of the manual
- Communicating by phone or email instead of scheduling another meeting each month

Challenges:

- Selection process for the sub-committee
- Developing an effective sub-committee
- Scheduling meetings outside of school board meetings
- Creating time outside of School Board meeting to discuss this issue
- When disagreements arise, follow through in a timely and appropriate manner
- Understanding boundaries
- Considering outside influences

Recommendations:

This process was a success for several reasons. First of all, you must have a vision for the school and with that, clearly outlined approaches or options for accomplishing your goal. This vision has to be clearly articulated to the various parties involved in the process. Once all parties have a sense of the importance of such an endeavor and they are fully invested, then proceeding is less trying task.

Secondly, if a sub-committee is created or even required for the express purpose of completing this task, then you must select the members with care and determine in advance the number of meetings planned and timing. What I found occurred were less face-to-face meetings, since the members of the sub-committee were also School Board members, who are scheduled for meetings once a month and less willing to meet again during the workweek. What ultimately happened were faculty meetings, emails and teleconference sessions regarding the manual and finally the discussion ended up back with the School Board anyway.

Thirdly, discrepancy and miscommunications are bound to crop up with so very many individuals involved in the visionary process. Make sure that you have an action plan in place for discussion and immediate follow-up by the Administrative staff and the School Board; so that lingering feelings do not develop in an inappropriate manner. Even if it involves an unscheduled visit by the School Board members, Pastor, or the Administrator to reassure the staff or staff member that their concern(s) is being addressed in a timely and respectful manner.

Finally, with this collaborative approach tried and tested, I can honestly state that I have and will continue to use this approach as the basis for major and minor paradigm shifts within our organization. Once the members involved were convinced of the project's importance and significant they were fully invested in the task. Having the support and commitment of your faculty and staff is paramount to the success of the project.

