

# What is the Direction?

Creating a Strategic Plan for St. John's Lutheran School

**Project Title: "What is the direction?"**

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Strategic Planning Facilitator, Pastor Kevin Wilson



The Challenge: St. John's Lutheran Church and School have a long and rich heritage. Because of the tradition and heritage, strategically planning for the future has not always been at the forefront of thinking.

The history behind the need for strategic planning and the formation of a road map: The personal project I selected for the Van Lunen experience was to create a strategic plan for St. John's Lutheran School and to address the change process associated with planning. St. John's Lutheran Church and School resides on 70 acres of farm land in Union County Ohio. The school exists in the center of a triangle between three small towns. The school is six minutes from downtown Marysville (a town of just over 25,000 people), seven minutes from Plain City (a town of over 20,000 people) and seven minutes from Milford Center (a town of over 4,000 people). St. John's Lutheran Church was established in 1838 and the school was established in 1843. St. John's has a rich tradition and is well known in the Marysville community.

Recent history at St. John's has not been conducive to change. The members of the congregation are friendly and welcoming but have a tendency to be set in their ways. Add to this the fact that St. John's Lutheran Church has not had a vision plan for at least the past 10 years. Given these two circumstances I felt this was the appropriate project to complete.

What happened: With the assistance of Don Distelberg (the consultant assigned to me through Van Lunen) and Pastor Kevin Wilson (facilitator for the strategic planning that took place) we Van Lunen Strategic Planning Project

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created a strategic plan. Throughout the course of creating a “roadmap” for St. John's, I met with Don Distelberg and Kevin Wilson via phone or in person. The process began by gathering a list of constituents who Don and I felt should be involved in the process. With Don's guidance a list of people was created including grandparents, alumni, church members with children in the school, church members without children in the school, some members of the Board of Christian Education, and some members of the teaching staff, pastors, early elementary parents and middle school parents. The list included 18 people. I called and/or emailed all 18 people and was pleasantly surprised when all 18 people agreed to be a part of this process.

The initial meeting took place on Friday, November 5 from 6:00-9:00 and Saturday, November 6 from 8:00-7:00. The first follow up meeting took place in February from 5:30-9:00 and the second follow up took place on June 3 from 7:00-9:30. Please note that there was follow up and working with the teaching staff all through the school year.

The team began with a look at the St. John's Lutheran Mission Statement:

**Equipping the family of God to joyfully and boldly**

**Make Disciples of Christ as we  
KNOW Jesus and one other  
GROW to be more like Him  
SOW His love in word and deed.**

The decision was made to leave the mission statement as is and proceed forward. The team spent the initial Friday night and Saturday focusing on three questions. Who are we? Why do we exist? Where do we want to go?

Who are we? (The St. John's Core Values): A small group brainstorming session was set up.

Each group was given sticky notes to write thoughts and ideas down. Each group gave the notes

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to the facilitator. The facilitator stuck the notes on a board. The whole group analyzed the notes and began categorizing them. The result was inspiring. Five categories emerged from the process: 1. A Christ-centered Focus; 2. High Achievement; 3. Service Beyond Self – intentional; 4. Sense of Community; and 5. Developing – Developing people. One of the illustrious team members stated that this would look amazing in the shape of a cross. Another team member (Joe Balderson) began designing and came up with the St. John's Core Value Cross.



Why do we exist? (What is our purpose): The next step was to determine why St. John's exists. Using the information about our history and current practices, time was spent discussing the purpose of St. John's. Because of the time allocated St. John's Lutheran School now has a purpose statement:

**St. John's Lutheran School exists in Christ to educate and equip students by developing the mind and engaging the heart to impact communities through the Gospel.**

One of the many wonderful results that came about from this planning was the generation of what I very creatively titled a "Stats Page". After composing the purpose, an idea was hatched. I begin researching "dashboards", a term learned from Jim Marsh. I began compiling data in the

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three areas under the purpose statement. Attached at the end of this paper is the created "Stats Page". This led to the creation of postcards and other media to share with parents. Parents were given these resources to use in spreading the word about the many blessings happening at St. John's.

Where do we want to go? (Planning the future): In order to help determine the proper future direction the team studied our strengths and challenges (both internal and external). Another brainstorming list was generated. The February and June follow up events, along with staff input over the course of several staff meetings, were dedicated specifically to creating the roadmap. In planning the future, some immediate plans were put in place and some long term plans were created. The immediate plans included:

- The creation of marketing tools
- The creation of the exceptional school campaign
- The creation of the Ambassadors Program
- The restructuring of the annual open house to a family and friends night for current families to invite friends to St. John's
- The reformatting of the Principal Chat with parents from twice a year to monthly; including skyping the chat and video casting
- The beginnings of restructuring staff meetings around the plans for the future.

The roadmap has been created for the next five years. Some of the items in the roadmap are:

- Connections, in many different areas and across many different levels
- Connections in terms of spiritual growth for students, families, and staff
- Refining funding mechanisms for St. John's
- Advancing technology in the school
- Advancing student engagement and achievement

Unexpected results: The most beneficial aspect of everything that came about was sense of excitement that was generated. The feeling leaving the weekend planning retreat was one of

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excitement. There was a buzz about the school in many positive ways. Other result was the way the word spread. Add to this the addition of information, the creation of an Ambassador Program, a restructuring of the open house, and the initial plans created for the future have all lead to increased joy all around.

Challenges encountered:

- Many hours were spent creating the many items that have now been created. More assistance is needed in many areas for the future.
- Many areas or common practices were changed this school year. The change happened too fast for some people. In one case, an email was sent to the President of the congregation that Principal Hartmann is pushing too many things through too quickly.
- Spending much time and countless conversations to the Board of Christian Education to sell them of the needed ideas.
- The need for more building space as we have seen the enrollment expand from 241 in 2013/2014 to between 285 and 290 for 2014/2015. This included a waiting list in our Early Childhood Programs.
- The need arose to add a second Kindergarten. The enrollment in Kindergarten has gone from 22 to 50.
- More staffing needed.
- The need to generate more income to deal with the needs moving forward.

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## Why St. John's?

Pursuing Excellence For Christ

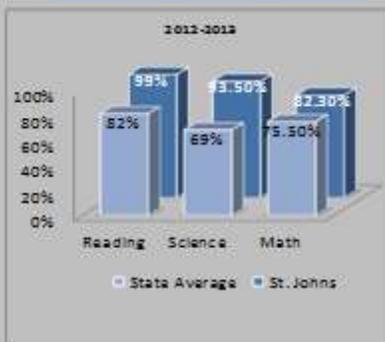


**1** Developing the Mind

**2** Engaging the Heart

**3** Enriching Lives

### OAA Scores



achievement test scores **exceeds national and state levels**

### Stanford Scores

**81st**

percentile for the last 5yrs.

success continues into high school ...

### GPA

9th grade avg:	3.62
10th grade avg:	3.553
11th grade avg:	3.647
12th grade avg:	3.475

**3.55 GPA** is the average for ALL SJS graduates currently in high school.

**600+**

hours of student community service in 2012



weekly chapel & Lutheran faith curriculum

The **ONLY** LCMS preschool through 8th grade in Ohio



### Daily Occurrences

- Prayer
- Devotions
- Biblical Instruction
- Faith integration

**17**

average class size, ensures student receives personal attention



**32**

sports championships in the last decade

**88%**

of middle school students play on one or more of St. John's eight sport/club teams.



enrichment offerings include Art Club, Chess Club and Science Club, drama, band, choir, media arts, and digital technology.