

CHARTING A NEW COURSE IN MINISTRY

The goal of this project was the creation of a total school ministry. The congregation that supported the mission of Leif Ericson Day School began plans to close, and to turn over its assets (property and finances) to the school for continuing, growing ministry.

Through the transition of congregational sponsorship to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's local support, the school has partnered with the Metropolitan New York Synod. As corporate law dictates, the process has been slow, but the results will confirm the initial goal.



Christine Hauge
Principal, Leif Ericson Day School
1037-72 Street
Brooklyn, NY 11228
School web site: <http://leds.home.mindspring.com>
Van Lunen Fellows Program 2007-2008

My school-based project focused on the transition of a ministry within the congregation with which the school was affiliated. Beginning January 2007, the congregation of Bethany Lutheran Church engaged in a conversation process regarding a new direction in ministry. The church, then, established a task force to evaluate the conversations and to develop recommendations based on the church's financial documentation, assessment of existing ministries, and discernments for future possibilities.

Three recommendations were brought to the congregation for action. The first recommendation involved the church's bequeathing its property, finances, and other assets to Leif Ericson Day School, providing that the Metropolitan NY Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America give written affirmation of validity, approval, and support. The second recommendation resolved that Bethany Lutheran Church pass to Leif Ericson Day School its legacy, and entrusts to the school the future development of Christian ministries and outreach as a successful, diverse, and effective witness to Jesus Christ and the Lutheran heritage. The final recommendation was the establishment of a task force to plan and guide the process of loss, plan celebrations of this transition, and develop a timeline for such. These recommendations were passed unanimously at the annual congregation meeting held in the spring of 2007.



[Opening Chapel Worship](#)

The Metropolitan NY Synod office received the documents and a meeting was called. Bethany Lutheran Church's vacancy pastor, the Dean of the Southwest Brooklyn Conference, an Assistant to the Bishop, the Synod Administrator, and I began to discuss this "never-done-before" project. The Synod Administrator, a great supporter of Christian education, and I continued to meet, almost weekly, to discuss church and legal policies, and to devise a plan for the continued mission and growth of Leif Ericson Day School.

The Synod Administrator and I worked together on re-writing the school's by-laws, while the Synod's legal team worked on the process of dissolving the religious corporation known as Bethany Lutheran Church and making Leif Ericson Day School an organizational unit of the Metropolitan NY Synod of the ELCA.

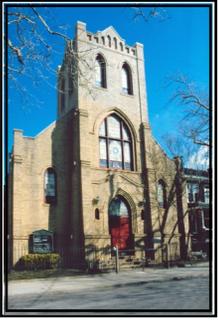
At a November 2007 congregation meeting, the Synod's first proposal and first draft of the school's amended by-laws were introduced, ideas clearly verbalized, and questions answered. The Synod Council passed the proposal and the congregation voted to plan to disband, request synodical administration, and ask the Synod to prepare suitable plans for the continued functioning and well-being of Leif Ericson Day School.

In March 2008, the congregation voted on their first closure resolution. The Synod continues to prepare legal documentation, and the Synod Council continues to approve proposals prepared by the leaders of Bethany Lutheran Church and Leif Ericson Day School, written by the Synod Administrator, for continued and expanded ministry of the school. The first closure resolution also included an investment of \$150,000 from the Synod for immediate repair of the property. This will initially be used for the purchase and installation of new windows in the school, and the installation of a French drain system in the school's basement.

It has been agreed upon by the Synod, church, and school, and put into motion, that most financial assets of the church be transferred to the school's investment funds, providing the guidelines for use of these funds stay the same. For example, Bethany Lutheran Church had a music ministry fund for the maintenance, repair, and replenishment of instruments. These funds were transferred to the school keeping the same guidelines and purpose.



Next steps include the formal passing of the school's amended by-laws by the congregation, the school's board of directors, the Synod council, and the State of New York. The school also began to expand its board membership to include clergy and lay people in congregations of the Southwest Brooklyn Conference. Two priorities for me are the formation of a spiritual care department, including the hiring of a youth and family minister, and the formation of a strategic plan for the school.



The results of this project are still unfolding, as the future holds exciting and challenging plans for the mission and ministry of Leif Ericson Day School. We have become a model for a new form of ministry in the Metropolitan New York area. Other ELCA congregations with schools may benefit from our charting a new course of ministry. The congregations of the Southwest Brooklyn Conference of the Metropolitan New York Synod are presently engaged with a consulting firm (NorthStar Consultants, based in Wisconsin) to explore how the ministry of the church can best bring the Gospel to the community. As Interim Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod David W. Olson stated in a letter to Southwest Brooklyn congregations, "It is evident that we are being called to a new way of thinking—and certainly—a new way of doing ministry and being church." Leif Ericson Day School's part in this purpose has been to "show-and-tell" congregations one way to act for renewal of ministry in this area.

Keeping my eye on the goals of this project, staying focused on, while administering a vibrant Lutheran day school, has been a challenge. Having the resources and the support of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the school's faculty, staff, parent body, and board of directors, along with building new relationships have been just a few of the many blessings encountered.

The Synod Administrator, with whom I've worked closely through the entire project, mentioned a "good news—bad news" scenario at the on-set of this project. The bad news was that this type of project had not been done before. The good news was that this type of project had not been done before. Leif Ericson Day School and the Metropolitan New York Synod of the ELCA have truly charted a new course of ministry. I look forward to the continuation and growth of this mission and vision, and pray that, through the renewal of ministries, the Gospel is shared, ministry needs are met, and opportunities are realized in the broader community.

*"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we
cannot see the ending, by paths as yet
untrodden, through perils unknown.*

*Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.317)



