

School Identity

Who are we and who do we need to become?

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In the 2017-18 school year Christ Lutheran School will celebrate 60 years of instilling a solid spiritual and academic foundation in the lives of thousands of students and their families. Over the course of the years there have been the obvious staff and board changes as well as a number of administrators that have contributed to the identity, traditions, culture and rhythms of Christ Lutheran School.

At its peak from the late 70's- late 90's, Christ Lutheran was blessed with consistent and strong leadership, in Head of School Duane Rohmaller. Over the course of his time at Christ Lutheran he took a struggling school and turned it into a school of choice in the community. At its peak Christ Lutheran School had the opportunity of impacting over 300 students and their families each day for Christ. After the retirement of Mr. Rohmaller, the school experienced several changes at the leadership level. Over the next 19 years the school has experienced 4 changes at the Head of School level. This lack of consistency and perhaps having a mixture of too many visions and ideas on who Christ Lutheran School should be, from the variety of past leaders may have been a key contributor to school's consistent decline to its low point being in the 130's. To today where the school presently serves 145 students and their families Kindergarten through 8th grade.

At the end of the 2016-17 school year Christ Lutheran saw 4 of its 10 teachers move forward into other ministry opportunities. The board of education chairman also retired as a

result of his daughter graduating from Christ Lutheran and moving on to high school. The board chairman had served on the school board for 13 years and was the board chairman for 5 of those years. In his place came a parent with renewed energy, leadership and visionary skills to develop a more future thinking board of education. The board of education began working on a needs assessment with opportunities for parents and staff members to share in small focus groups. These focus groups took place over the course of several months starting in the fall of 2016 and with the final focus group being the teaching staff in the winter of 2017. From there the data was compiled and presented to the board of education. During this presentation a visual journalist accompanied the group. While the data from the focus groups was being shared, she visually compiled the information and “painted a picture” by which to interpret the data even more practically. This visual poster was shared with the faculty and has been a strong reference point for myself as I plan for the future and make confident decisions for the future. It hangs in our meeting room and we refer to it on occasion as we seek to discern God’s will for our school and one another.

In the fall of 2016 the church staff along with myself, our preschool director and a lead teacher had an off campus retreat where we worked with ministry consultant Jim Galvin. We spent several days evaluating and looking at the needs of the whole ministry and received coaching and direction from him. During this time we came to the conclusion that much of our ministry and staff was spread thin and that we needed to have more focus and discipline in pruning certain areas of our ministry so that we could focus on doing deeper and being clearer in who we are and who we need to become as we serve coastal Orange County families. The key takeaway from this time for me was, “What do we need to prune, so that life can spring

forth?” “What parts of the past visions and passions from the previous leaders need to remain and what needs to be pruned?” “How can we do less, but go deeper and do it better?” “What *Necessary Endings* must result?” Rather than thinking about what we needed to add to our current school offerings to become more competitive I listened to the feedback from the focus groups and our WASC visitation team to shape what needed to be pruned, removed or replaced to enhance our school ministry.

Amidst all of this, Christ Lutheran School was also putting the finishing touches on our WASC Accreditation Report for our WASC visit in March. We were blessed by this visit and the validation and constructive feedback that came from the visiting team. They highlighted and affirmed our Action Plan and the 4 Tasks we presented as areas to grow in over the next 6 years. The team recommended to WASC that we receive a 6 year clear with a one day midterm revisit, which is the top recommendation a school can receive.

In a broad sense our action plan highlights the following areas as we seek school improvement and student success.

Task 1a: School Identity -- Refine and clarify the identity of Christ Lutheran School using the Mission, Vision, and Schoolwide Learning Outcomes as a filter.

Task 1b: Long-range plan -- Create a data-driven long-range plan to provide for the excellence and health of the school

Task 2: Sticky Faith - Develop a formal discipleship plan in conjunction with the church leadership team

Task 3: Student Success -- Develop and implement a Student Study Team process. Identify and implement needed services for students.

Task 4: Review and clarify the school's governance in order to effectively guide the work of the school.

Below each of these four areas are clear guidelines to accomplish each task as a team. As a school we will be held accountable to this action plan at the next visit in 6 years. The plan highlights the individuals responsible, along with the timeline, the resources necessary to accomplish the action item, and the evidence that will be collected that such elements are being properly address.

After our WASC visit and after our time of reflection of the focus group data we entered into our re-enrollment period. During this time I began researching and prayerfully allowing God to make clear the path to take the initial steps to meeting the needs represented in WASC and our Focus Groups. I developed a list of next steps and began having conversations with church leadership, school faculty and the board of education that we will prayerfully step into in the fall of 2017-18. I also shared the realities of some of the areas we will need to step away from as a school to re-establish our identity of the strong school that we are able to be. We found through our needs assessment and WASC visit that we were trying to be everything to everybody. Trying to be everything to everybody has caused us to be an inch deep and a mile wide. With renewed clarity we can begin to focus our energy by investing in fewer areas, redirecting our resources of time, talent and treasure, and have the peace and confidence to prune those areas that are not who we are able to be at this time in ministry.

The following is the list that was developed as a result of the feedback we have received this year through our focus group sessions and our WASC visiting team.

2017-18 School Year

Our focus group data and WASC Action plan for the next 6 years provided the filter that I used to develop the following list.

Updates and Future Planning and Adding Value to our Students and Investing in our Teachers.

- **Modified Monday's:** 2:00 Early Dismissal to foster staff professional development, planning, collaboration, analyzing student data and growth. [See attached document](#)

- **Lutheran Special Education Ministry:** Contracted qualified Special Education teacher on campus 4- ½ days per week for the entire school year that will oversee our “Student Success” Program. This person will work with students that have IEP’s assess students, work with teachers and parents to meet the diverse needs of our students.
- **Jump Start Sports:** Contracted PE teacher to oversee PE instruction and development for Kindergarten-5th grade 2x’s per week. Plan unstructured activities during lunch.
- **Active Learning Environments:** We have planned for teachers to have \$1,000 for classroom enhancements. They will be working with me to develop a space that fosters collaboration and active learning.
- **Grades 4-5 Blended Class in the Afternoon:** 4th and 5th grade classes will focus on their grade level content areas in the morning and will blend for enrichment opportunities in the afternoon with 5th grade. 4th grade teacher will teach half day.
- **Reimagining Class Schedules:** Going deeper in our content areas and removing the fluff that causes us to race through the day. Working with each department to capitalize on the strengths of our teachers and meet the needs of our students in smaller classes. Rather than an inch deep and a mile wide and stressed on every side, our goal is to go deeper with what matters most to our families and students.
- **K-8 STEAM Block [Innovation Spaces](#):** We are looking at providing space, time and resources for students to innovate and create similar to our Middle School STEAM Block.
- **Student Growth Summaries** for each child to accompany report cards 2016-17 these will highlight and celebrate the growth of each child over the course of the year.
- **MAP Testing:** Moving away from IOWA Tests and moving into MAP Testing in grades 3-8. Computer based assessment with more timely and more easily interpreted data. MAP Assessment assesses Math Language Arts with an optional Science at an additional charge. The overall package is comparable to what we spend for the IOWA Test.
- **RENWEB:** Parent Communication and Grading Program
- **Homeschool Hybrid:** “Curriculum Catalogue” work in progress
- **Recess Aide:** Primary and intermediate department.

Considerations:

- Morning Gathering- 8:05 Line up as classes, short song, or theme verse recited, prayer led by student, teacher, or principal. 8:10 Students follow their teachers to class.
- K/1 Aide Based on class enrollment
- Morning Mile: Working with passionate teacher and PE contract to incorporate physical activity before the school day begins as well as throughout the day.

Pruning:

- Rosetta Stone: 3rd-8th we will communicate the opportunity for each family to purchase Rosetta Stone at the School’s rate. The family can then choose whatever language they would like for their child to learn. There will not be school time devoted to Rosetta Stone with the exception of Free time in class etc.
- Choir: We are not completely removing choir, just moving to a more balanced approach to choir

- Band: Soli Encore will not be continuing with us next school year during the school day. We are looking at potential band opportunities that would happen before or after school.

This project came at just the right time in my leadership development. I learned the value of a visionary board. I learned the value of regularly holding parent and staff focus groups to gain a deeper understanding and perspective of the needs of our community. I learned that the verse in scripture “Without a shepherd the sheep shatter.” is right on as Christ Lutheran School began experiencing its decline after the “Shepherd” of 20 years retired. I have learned the importance of having the long view, being patient, and trusting that God will direct my path. I have learned how vital it is to a clear identity and vision for the future as this brings about confidence, and courage and the discipline to say No to all the “good ideas” that will suck the life out of a school. I learned even more the importance of creating space and time to listen to the Spirit of God and the perspectives of the other leaders He has surrounded me with.

I have been able to apply so much of the training that I have received through Van Lunens. Tapping into the resources that have been made available to me has allowed me even greater confidence in the many facets that I operate in. Many of my assigned readings gave me the insight and the wisdom that I needed to rely on God through this process and step out of my comfort zone to have crucial conversations and the confidence to speak to the endings that will need to take place in order for life to spring forth in our school ministry.

We are excited for the fruit that will be produced through the clarity that we have received through this yearlong project. Students will be blessed, teachers will be able to focus their time and energy on areas that will impact their students and the culture of our school. Parents will see the fruit of their investment in our school and in turn will share the great things

happening with others, which will lead to continued enrollment growth in our school program. I have renewed excitement for the years to come and a clarity and focus that I haven't had in years past.

May our Heavenly Father continue to guide us and direct us. May He graciously extend to us many opportunities to continue to impact lives for His kingdom as we allow Him to use our gifts and passions each day to serve and connect people to His Son, Jesus. Christ Lutheran Church and School is in His hands, may we continue to be good stewards of all that He has entrusted to our care.