

Cross Trained for Life and Eternity

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St. Paul's Lutheran School has been in existence for over 130 years. We believe that our purpose for living is to love God, and to love others especially by leading them to know Jesus as their personal Savior. We are asked by Jesus not only to be disciples, but to be disciple makers. One way to accomplish this is through the mission of our school.

The demographics of our Lutheran School are changing just as other Lutheran Schools around the United States. No longer do members of our LCMS churches automatically send their children to our school. Historically, members of the church would send their children through the school system without hesitation. Our school demographics consist of 70% church members and 30% community members (non-members). This statistic is slightly changing each year. The community member rate is increasing. A percentage of school families do join our church as they enroll their children for school. It is important to sustain our rich Lutheran culture and educational reputation while reaching out into our communities. The question to address; is our mission inward or outward focused? How do we expand our mission outside the walls of our school? The mission of St. Paul's Lutheran School needs to be inward and outward focused while maintaining our identity as a Lutheran School. Enrollment has flat lined over the past several years in preschool through 8th grade.

Community members have no understanding of what it means to be Lutheran or the purpose of why we exist as a Lutheran School. School families are charged tuition. The tuition rate reflects whether or not the family is a member of our church or not. This is the tuition model that Lutheran Schools have been using for generations. The philosophy behind the tuition model supports that members whose children attend our church also give an offering on Sunday mornings. There is a \$3000 difference in tuition between member and nonmembers. The church continues to give financial support to the school. Tuition does not cover the actual cost per pupil.

We know what we provide and the value of our program. However, we need to work on articulating that in our community and the surrounding area. Communicating the mission to a world that does not know why we are here is the challenge. The mission statement reflects who we are. We are a mission minded community. But the school does not have a vision statement. In many different ways we talk about the outcomes of students who attend our school, yet we don't have that in any communication form. A clear and concise vision statement drives the mission and our strategic planning for future generations.

Over the past year the Board of Christian Education at St. Paul's Lutheran School has been working through the process of evaluating our current mission statement and developing a vision statement. The board set aside 45 minutes to an hour at each meeting to work on this project once a month. The objective is to evaluate the current mission statement, identify the primary reasons for the school's existence and to observe why families are choosing St. Paul's

Lutheran School. In the process we need to remain faithful to who we are, yet discovered different ways of communicating the purpose and existence of our school. This has been a nine month process of evaluating, brainstorming, collaborative work with school board leaders and staff, communication and understanding the future trends of Lutheran Schools. During this process the following questions helped guide our discussions and brainstorming sessions:

- 1) Is St. Paul's Lutheran School mission minded?
- 2) Who are we? Yesterday? Today?
- 3) What was life like when you attended school at St. Paul's?
- 4) Why do you choose St. Paul's Lutheran School for your children?
- 5) How do we communicate our purpose to the community?
- 6) Does our tuition model reflect our mission statement?
- 7) What kind of parents are choosing Lutheran/Christian schools?
- 8) How is the mission statement and vision statement used for planning purposes?

The current mission of St. Paul's Lutheran School is *together with parents and congregation we nurture the whole child to become a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ*. This mission was reviewed in 2010 by a committee for our National Lutheran School Accreditation team. It was decided at that time to make no changes to the mission statement that existed. This is the mission statement being evaluated in this process.

At our September meeting large sheets of paper were posted up around the meeting room. The sheets around the room were titled as such; who are we? What was life like when you attended school or your children attended school here? Why did you choose St. Paul's Lutheran School for your children? The board members were asked to brain storm and answer the question, who are we? Answers were given such as Lutheran, quality, value driven, community, service, disciples of Christ, discipleship, partnership, quality, church and school, and nurturing. The board was asked to divide up into two groups, those who attended St. Paul's or sent their children to our school and those who are new to our church and school. Two groups were formed we nearly equal amount of participants. The board members who have a history with our church and school were asked to describe what life was like when they attended, why they attended or when their children attended. The following words were listed on the sheet; born here, value Christian education, parents attend here, tuition free, family, all church members attended, less distractions in the world, automatic, small class size, experience, and history.

The board members who are recently new to St. Paul's Lutheran in the past ten years were asked to share why they chose St. Paul's for their family. They listed the following words; traditional, family, history, personal experience, Christian education, value high quality education, relationships, quality of teachers and size. Observations were now made to items

that have remained over time and are consistent between both groups. Some things remain the same while others have changed such as free tuition, money, economy, and more distractions and choices in our world today.

When the board members were asked these questions, they frequently made comments such as, “well isn’t it obvious” and “we know this” and “how do you want us to answer the questions?” At the time, these comments were not addressed. The board need to do the work of the process not be told the direction seen. We continued to move through the brainstorming process. The board was asked to look at all the sheets posted around the room. The question was asked of them to answer, “who are we?” The board was amazed at what they realized when these saw the words in print, and what has remained constant over several generations. They summarized this portion with these words; Lutheran, quality, value driven, pretentious, and Christ centered. Does the mission remain the same? Does it communicate why we exist today?

At this time we discussed the role that the school board plays with the mission of the school. It is the job of the school board to protect the mission of St. Paul’s Lutheran School and direct the vision. It is the work of the school board to define the purpose and the primary objectives in the organization. This was the support needed for a vision statement for our school. 80% of our time in school board meetings needs to be spent on vision. All decision are to be made and driven by the mission statement and our strategic planning.

In our October meeting it was time to put all of the brainstorming information together. The school board needed to decide if the wording needed to change in our mission statement or does it need to remain the same. After much discussion, the members of the board felt that the mission statement needed a new face lift. There were words that we used to describe our purpose that we were not willing to compromise. The meaning needs to remain the same but it can be reworded to reflect our existence. This meeting was spent writing different words that articulated quality education, what kind of partnership, lifelong learners, and the identification of the word “we.” A final decision was not reached. Members expressed an emphasis on discipleship and quality education. Board members were asked to produce a mission statement that reflected the conversations over the past three months. Mission statements were to be sent to the board chairman one week before the next meeting in November.

Six different mission statements were submitted. The mission statements were printed out for each member to read at our November meeting. We discussed each statement in detail. The number of mission statements was narrowed down to two. After much discussion a vote was taken for the final mission statement. The following is the mission statement that voted on in the November board meeting.

We, as a Lutheran School in partnership with our parents and congregation will provide a high quality education to nurture the students to become lifelong learners, responsible citizens, and disciples of Jesus Christ.

In December the school board did not meet. We are now moving onto January and there is much work to still be done with the vision statement. The board spent time discussing the purpose and need for a vision statement. It was presented to them to word the vision statement differently by creating a portrait of a student. Through this project the goal was to produce a visual for families, who visit our school, to see what a graduate of St. Paul's Lutheran School looks like. Parents need to know what they can expect when their child attends our school. The goal was to list 5 things that a parent can expect to find and what their child will become due to attending St. Paul's Lutheran. The board struggled at first to understand what was being asked of them. It was a different way of thinking about the outcomes of students and how it could be presented. The board and leaders of St. Paul's all know what they desire for our students, however over time it has not been communicated or found in print. For everything the church and school does needs to serve the vision, which will always be quite broad. Every relationship needs to experience God's grace in our culture.

Over the next several meetings, the board spent time brainstorming words that identified what students learn at St. Paul's Lutheran School. The members of the board were given a stick figure with 5 to 6 lines drawn away from the entire body of the stick figure. They were to compile a list of words that would describe a graduate of St. Paul's Lutheran School. According to the goal of making disciples, lifelong learners, responsible citizens and providing quality education every student of St. Paul's

- Is compassionate
- Is biblically literate
- Christ like
- Think critically
- Confident
- Be academically sound
- Wise/smart
- Honorable, respectful
- Act responsibly
- Strong body
- Loving heart
- Forgiving and understanding
- Be creative
- Serving Jesus and serving others

- Lifelong learners
- Christ centered citizens
- Interacting with the world using a Christian world view

After a couple months of working on the wording for the portrait of a student, a completed project resulted in a vision statement for St. Paul's Lutheran School. Our job is to improve what is and to begin to develop what isn't. The school board and staff agree about whom we are and what kind of future that we prefer. Therefore, our strategic plan will provide the pathway between those statements as we plan for the next generation. The school board is committed to making decisions that will cultivate the learning of all students. These two statements drive all decisions.

Graduates of St. Paul's Lutheran School are **CROSSED TRAINED** for LIFE and ETERNITY.

- Living as **CHRIST-CENTERED CITIZENS** with a Christian world view
- **STRONG STUDENT PERFORMERS** thinking critically and creatively
- **LIFE-LONG LEARNERS** sharing their gifts and talents
- Acting as **DISCIPLES OF CHRIST** to love God and to love others

The mission statement and vision statement were adopted on May 15, 2017. I believe the school board has experience incredible growth through this process. As part of the process both the mission statement and portrait of a student were shared with the faculty and staff. The teachers and staff were complimentary to the work of the school board and look forward to the planning that lies before us "crossing training our students for life and eternity."

The project did not reach its completion according to proposed Van Lunen project. I am not disappointed. I know the process was very valuable to the school board, teachers, staff, as well as me. Due to the time used to work through this process we were unable to answer many of the questions towards tuition and funding. I believe the completion of this portion will move us into a new second phase of the project. The future goals include possible revisions and decisions regarding our tuition model, fund development and church membership tied directly to tuition.