

Andrew C. Tomaszewsky - School Administrator  
Van Lunen Fellow 2014-2015

Faith Lutheran Church and School  
Bay City, Michigan  
faithbaycity.org



Consultant: Gretchen M. Jameson

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Faith Lutheran School is an educational ministry of Faith Lutheran Church in Bay City, Michigan. The Church currently has just over 1300 baptized members and the school is one of seven Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) schools in Bay City. Among the LCMS schools, Faith has been unique in its recent history, since it is the only LCMS school to enroll more students each of the past three years. Enrollment has grown from approximately 175 students, in the 2009-2010 school year, to over 230 students in the 2014-2015 school year. Before that, the five year period enrollment growth was stagnant with no more than five students more or less each year with an overall net zero growth. This enrollment growth has been noticed as the community and local LCMS schools.

During this period of student enrollment growth, Faith has also added teachers in the areas of specials including technology, music, art, Spanish, and Physical Education through the shared time program available in the state of Michigan. I have been at Faith for four years, and the previous administrator was there for three years, with an interim principal for two years before. This mix of several administrative changes and new shared time teachers has created a difficult adjustment period with the growth because of a lack of focus, strategic thinking, and planning how to serve God's ministry at Faith. A challenge is the next period of time is sharing with the internal and external communities our value as a great educational resource.

*What did I do?*

- In August 2014 Faith's Associate Pastor took a Call to Minnesota to become pastor there. With the process of searching for how best to fill the staff vacancy, the groundwork identification of core ideology began to develop.

- In September 2014 I presented a proposal to my Church Council to apply to our Endowment Fund for support and funds for the development of core ideology statements. The Council Church approved their support of the project and willingness to help with its implementation.
- In November 2014 consultant, Ross Stueber, from e3 Leadership led focus groups which included parents from the school, congregational leaders, congregational members, and staff. In total, seventy-five people participated in this process which involved meeting with mixed groups of community members to discuss what they wish would never change about Faith. The meetings included identifying key statements and ranking provided statements about possible core beliefs. The core statements which came from this group of members and parents were that Faith values its Bible based beliefs, being Christ centered, providing the opportunity for Christian education, and serving to the community.
- From February 2015 to the present I have been working with consultant Gretchen Jameson, Vice President for Strategy and External Relations of Concordia University, to develop a core purpose, to craft the core statements from the input of members of our community, and to develop seven general strategies for ministry. The strategies will focus, in a priority order, organizational strategies for growth in mission and ministry for the future.

Internally the process of creating the core ideology and ministry strategies has sought to involve as many members of the community as possible while seeking key people throughout the process to help with this cultural shift of creating community based upon an established set of purpose and values with strategies to surround them. The focus groups included key school community leaders and others who desired to participate in the process. The process for identifying key leaders and the creation of the core ideology identified and ministry strategies were crafted by Pastor Dan Meckes (administrative pastor), Gretchen Jameson, and me based

upon the focus groups' work. The process was shared with staff, members of our lay leadership, including all Boards and Committees, to get their input and buy in. These groups were also asked to provide activities and ways they support the ministry strategies. These are compared and contrasted with the input of the Church Council to ensure that responsibilities were accounted for in each group and to see what might be missing in terms of responsibility.

To begin the process of reaching into the community outside of those participating in the focus groups I have worked with Ms. Jameson to develop implementation strategies. These strategies are for sharing the core ideology with the church and school communities, as well as the community at large. A large part of that outreach is via social media. In the past few months, our Facebook presence has increased to regularly post based upon the core values which were identified previously. These regular posts include image and blog-based content on a scheduled basis of posting. The times for posting these is based on user traffic from the *AgoraPulse.com* algorithm for optimal viewing and engagement. When there are specific events for the school, pictures are posted on Facebook the same day as well as via Instagram. Each of these activities is intended to engage the community in social spaces, since the world of social media is the new neighborhood where people gather.

In each part of this project I have been working to create community around our core ideology and make priority decisions to strengthen our message, which I pray leads to growth in community and enrollment over time. As we move forward in the social media space, Faith is going to be branching out into a Facebook page separate for the church and school while maintaining the same core messages to build community. We have begun this process by finding out which platforms members of our community currently use and change the type of posts to include more practical, relational, and community based to create even more community now that the people engaging with the social space is growing. Over the summer I will be developing brand persona profiles which will direct our messaging into these three broad categories, practical, relational, and building community.

### *What did I learn?*

When I came to Faith four years ago, there was a feeling of keeping everyone at arm's length away. Today with changes, there is an interest beginning to develop in growing together as a community and seeing how together we can become more effective in our ministries. At the same time, the growth we have experienced, I believe, scares some people and makes them want to push against community as Faith needs as an organization and our priorities. It is much easier to have our own way, because that is what our world's culture tells us we should hold on to and value. Our challenge becomes about breaking out of the "my needs first" and silo mentality to move forward together so that we can hold true to who we are and expand our reach into the community as a viable option for Christian education. Culture change is difficult and this has proven true throughout this project.

When I was originally thinking about a project for my Van Lunen Fellowship, I was going to do a social media campaign. Throughout the week the Fellows met in July I kept hearing, "What is the most pressing thing your school needs right now?" I came back from the week knowing that I needed to do more than just a social media campaign. Developing a core ideology is not something I wanted to do right away, but I knew it was necessary to build everything out from there. Reluctantly, I changed my project knowing the support I would receive throughout the process would be great. When I was first discussing the project with our staff leadership, I knew the process for developing community, and changing culture, needed done, but do we really want to go after this? With the answer being "yes" we started to go forward step by step and that is how this project has been the whole time. The process has been sometimes a few or more steps back but always leading forward a little bit at a time. Learning how to address cultural change is a hard, but necessary, opportunity to make lasting change in a school.

The proposal to the Church Council was easy. Everyone wants to be part of an organization that is moving forward. But I remember Pastor Meckes asking if everyone was

committed to the process not just signing off to apply for the initial funding. There were several sure, “go aheads” and we went from there. I wonder if those in attendance and who voted for it really felt in their hearts they wanted to commit to the heavy lifting on identifying and, even harder, living a core ideology. The process of getting people to attend the focus groups was another in a series of small steps. Issues were bubbling under the surface for quite some time between staff members and myself and between lay and staff leadership. Some of the focus groups had very few people. There were 150 people invited to attend and there were 75 who came. Some had agendas. Some wanted to see what this was all about. Others were there to give their input because they were asked. In the end, as we discovered later, the core values matched almost exactly the same as thirteen years previously when the church was vacant and a similar process was undertaken. It is great to know that core values do not change, and should not. Yet the identified values were very much permission to play values as we learned about in *The Advantage*. We are continuing to work through these so they are more applicable to us in Bay City rather than Christian schools everywhere.

Time, energy, and effort into the identification of the core was just the starting point as the working into creating buy in, living, and making decisions upon the ideology. Even getting to the point of official adoption of who we are provided challenges, because I believe some people saw what the end result of this process could entail for them. For a culture and community used to living in a me centered world, going by what the whole community needs and is best for the mission and ministry an organization has been difficult. In our December 2014 Board of Education meeting we had forty-five guests including parents and staff who brought their “concerns” to the Board’s attention and wanted answers quickly. This was another few steps back because we (the Board chair, Administrative Pastor, and myself) knew it was coming even though we did not know what these concerns were that we going to be share. Taking time to get through the muck of the accusations against our leadership was challenging at time. Yet it is amazing how God helped me to see glimpses of hope in the most painful times of the

process. What we came up with from these “concerns” were the need for better communication, more transparency, and support for all members of the community. These community and relationship building skills are exactly what my project was going after. Now that the core ideology in front of everyone more accountability is coming out of it which is not something in particular my staff and lay leadership have been used to.

We continue to address these concerns at a higher level. But, they also provide a framework why core ideology is important and why we must work together to live these out in our relationships. It goes beyond the *nice* social media campaign I was looking to do for my project. I knew in July that I needed to do more but did not realize how and why I needed to do more. I wanted to accomplish the beginning of something which had lasting value through my project. I desired to put in place community ideas and values which guide who we are and who others see in us. We are not there yet. We take steps each minute or at each meeting, and there is a constant awareness on my part of the importance of my leadership and the impact it has on others.

*What difference did it make?*

I believe the difference it is making is an awareness of who we say we are and how we act. Community members are just starting to comprehend that they are accountable for what they say, think, and do. My Board is beginning to understand we are developing a community mindset, cultural change and the role they play, as leaders, in thinking as an organization even when confronted with people who want just what is best for them. The Board is becoming better at allowing me to hold staff members accountable and expecting that from them, because that accountability in the end produces a school where a Christian education will flourish under God’s grace. There is a wide spectrum among leaders and parents about the importance of community moving forward. I am sure we will continue to deal with those who are going to act with skepticism with the desire not to move beyond “it is all about my needs.” Yet, there are many who see the steps I have made in my leadership in relationships and in the social media

world and desire to continue their part in it. From the marketing side of the project, we are reaching out into the community, and there is still relatively positive word of mouth advertisement, which makes our enrollment look like it will grow again for next year. My administrative pastor wants to put together a Facebook page for the church where we will share more of the core values and especially the relational aspects of ministry to encourage Christian living outside of a worship or Bible study setting.

For me it has been a year of growth in how I approach ministry. There have been times where I choose to say or not to say things based upon how I believe it will impact us in the future. I have always been forward looking, the mastermind in Dave Medema's personality profiles. Understanding this has helped my Administrative Pastor understand the skills I bring to our overall staff leadership. While I am the administrator of the school, there are talents we both possess which balance us and provide the different types of leadership necessary for our overall mission and ministry at Faith Lutheran and to meet the challenges God lays ahead of us together in a unified and strategic way to build community.

### History

September 2014 – Andrew Tomashewsky presents a proposal to the Church Council to apply to the Endowment Fund for development of Core Ideology statements. The Council Church approved applying and their support of the project and willingness to help with its implementation.

November 2014 - Consultant, Ross Stueber, from e3 Leadership led focus groups parents from the school, congregational leaders, congregational members, and staff. 75 people total participated in the process. The core statements which came from this group of members and parents were Bible based, Christ centered, Christian education, and service to the community.

February 2015-present – In his Van Lunen Fellowship process, Andrew Tomashewsky continues to work with Gretchen Jameson on crafting the statements, developing implementation strategies for the core ideology and sharing them with the church and school communities.

April/May 2015 – Board, Committees, and Staff are asked to:

1. View a 2 minute video at [bit.ly/CoreIdeology](http://bit.ly/CoreIdeology) to learn a definition of core ideology by Gretchen Jameson
2. Consider and offer input on the priority of the core purpose and values statements and general ministry strategies to be shared at the May Church Council meeting with approval of the purpose and values.

May 2015 Council Meeting – Review input from Boards, Committees, and staff regarding priority of the core purpose and values statements and general ministry strategies and approve purpose and values.

May/June 2015 – Compile a list of activities and ways Boards, Committees, and staff participate in and support the general ministry strategies.

June 2015 Council Meeting - Start working through list of activities and ways Boards, Committees, and staff participate in and support the general ministry strategies.

### Core Ideology

Core Purpose - Connect the lives of people to Jesus today...and forever.

#### Core Values

- Use the Bible as the basis for our faith, beliefs, teachings, and decision making in life.  
*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*
- Live the mercy, grace and forgiveness earned for us by Jesus Christ.  
*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32*
- Provide Christian education to begin, nurture, and grow faith from infancy to grave.  
*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5*
- Serve others with our time, talents, and finances so they see God through us.  
*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16*



## General Ministry Strategies

Gather in worship and praise – As people who have been made new creations in Jesus, we rejoice that God calls us together weekly/regularly as one body to gather around His Word and Sacraments. Coming together as a community of believers is done so that God may encourage us with His Gospel promise in Jesus and that we might corporately thank, praise and serve Him.

*One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple. Psalm 27:4  
I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord. Psalm 122:1*

Study God's Word – We believe that the same powerful Word of God, which He used to create this world and that became flesh in Jesus Christ, is the same powerful Word that He makes available to us today. Therefore we value its presence among us by regularly following the Holy Spirit's leading in the reading, studying and applying of Scripture in our lives.

*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deuteronomy 6:6-7*

Empower Christian living - We go forward to live in our daily lives thorough what we say, think, and do in our occupations, families, neighborhoods, and in the church. Through our Christian life witness we can share and be examples of the Good News of Jesus with those who know.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:22-24*

Gather as a community - What a privilege to come to together as God's people in times of worship, celebration, learning, prayer, joy, and sadness! We believe these opportunities are honorable to God and His intent that Christian support and encourage each other through their earthly life.

*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. Psalm 133:1,3b*

Partner with families to provide children (3 year olds - 8th grade) an academic and spiritual education -

We seek to provide age appropriate instruction for students in a Christian environment and partner with families and support their Christian walk together. Through continual improvement we aim toward a quality program that meets the needs of today's diverse learners.

*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down...yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. Matthew 7:24-25*

Support Christian high school and college academic and spiritual education - Faith Lutheran is a proud member of the Valley Lutheran High School Association which allows students to continue the Christian academic education they began at Faith. Through this association and scholarships available for those interested in pursuing full time church work, we pray that God will raise up new servants in His church.

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6-7*

Serve others - As an extension of the local church, we desire to show through our actions the ability to help meet the needs of people in our local community and throughout the world. The privilege to partner with other agencies and through them allows us to witness God's grace and mercy to others who we would not otherwise come in contact.

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8*