



*CROSS TRAINED FOR LIFE AND ETERNITY*  
*A VISION FOR ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN SCHOOL*  
*BARB MERTENS, PRINCIPAL*  
*MUNSTER, INDIANA*

Consultants: none needed at this time

Future Consultants will be needed for phase 2

### **What did I do?**

The demographics of St. Paul's Lutheran School have been changing over time. Historically, our Lutheran Schools were filled to capacity with children whose families attended our church. That shift started 10 to 15 years ago. The organization of church and school continues to operate under the assumption that families will attend our school because of who we are as a Lutheran Christian School. However, that is not the mind set of families today choosing Christian Schools. Parents do not understand our identity as a Lutheran School. Without realization this can create an inward focus while we state that we exist to provide quality education for all of God's children. It was my job to bring this awareness to the school board and evaluate our current mission statement. I also discovered that St. Paul's did not have a Vision statement. In order to be good stewards of God's gifts we need be visionary in our planning in order for the goals to be obtained as we carry out His mission. At each school board meeting, 45 minutes was set aside to work on this project. We spent several months evaluating and brainstorming our current mission statement. The board only changed a few words for a new mission statement and then we created a vision statement. The vision statement was framed a little differently by using the concept of creating a visual of a graduate of St. Paul's Lutheran School. The School Board rallied around this project creating a visual for all parents and stake holders to understand the outcome of our students when graduating in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **What did I learn?**

In all of our brainstorming sessions I learned that St. Paul's Lutheran School has a clear understanding of why we exist. We have many values that hold true today as they did 135 years ago. Our culture and demographics has changed but God continues to call us to be in partnership with our church and families to provide a quality Christian education developing Disciples of Christ. We are not good about articulating our mission to those who do not know us. The school board was a little hesitant at the beginning of this process. They wanted me to give them the answers for all of the questions being asked. I was not willing to do so. The board needs to own and protect the mission. This needs to be a collaborative effort, not just the principal's opinion with the information needed for a final product. They quickly realized the value of this process. I learned that we are facing an ever changing world. We knew to continue to articulate our mission but to show families the value of what we have to offer through our Lutheran School. Community members do not

understand the identity in Lutheran education. We must continue to teach our children what we believe as Lutheran Christians. At the same time we must engage our community through our schools and continue to seek to do the important mission work. Once the school board was drenched in the mission statement it was not difficult to create our vision statement. In one of our Van Lunen sessions Mychal Thom encouraged me to create a vision statement with a visual, the portrait of a graduate. We all learned that this gives us a visual goal that we are constantly aiming towards for the good of our students.

### **What difference is it making?**

I believe that this process has made a difference in me as a leader as well as the school board. We know why we exist and we know what kind of future we prefer. I quickly realized that this project became a multi-step process and this is only phase 1 of the process. The difference it will make is yet to come. The school board and staff agree about who we are and what kind of future we prefer. It is our job to plan and protect for the future generations of our school. The portrait of a student will drive what we do and the decisions that we make. The Van Lunen information was used as a reference and guide for this project.

This project is not yet completed. It is only the beginning. This summer we are working on a graphic for the portrait of a student. This graphic will be shared with all of our school and church community and used for all publications. Phase 2 will also consist of evaluating our member and non-member tuition model. The school board is at the next step in our strategic planning process with on-going planning for the future. I will be seeking consultation on tuition models and future planning.