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Van Lunen Fellow 2014-2015

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



Consultant: Gretchen M. Jameson

Overview

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 7 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod schools in Bay City. During the past three years enrollment has grown from approximately 175 students to over 230 which has changed our culture from being thought of as small, to something bigger. Yet, there has not been transition into thinking as a bigger community or focus on strategic thinking and planning how to serve God's people and share the great things that are happening at Faith.

What did I do?

In August 2014 I began the process to identify and share our core ideology with members of the church, school, and local community. Involved in this process of development were our staff, lay leaders of the congregation, and other members of the church and school communities to create, compare and contrast, and apply these statements of belief. I have been working with consultant Gretchen Jameson, Vice President for Strategy and External Relations of Concordia University, to craft our core purpose and values statements from the input of members of our community, and develop general strategies for ministry. As community is built out of those statements, a large part of the outreach is via social media where our Facebook presence has increased to regularly include image and blog based content based on the *AgoraPulse.com* algorithm. When there are specific events for the school, pictures are posted there 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.

What did I learn?

Developing a core ideology and changing the definition of community is not something I wanted to do right away, but I knew it was necessary to build everything out from there. Time, energy, and effort into the identification of the core was just the starting point to creating buy in, living, and making decisions upon the community based ideology. An interest is 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 we have grown as community, there are some who are scared of change and push against understanding who we are as an organization and our priorities. The challenge became about breaking out of the "my needs first" contrived community and into forward moving organization where we hold true to who we are as Faith's community. From there we have started expand our reach into internal and external communities so we remain as a viable option for Christian education. Sometimes it has been a few or more steps back but always leading forward a little bit at a time. Relationship building with people of legitimate influence has been key to living our mission. We are not there yet. We take steps each minute or at each meeting and I am constantly awareness of my part in leading toward community and the impact of what I say, or don't say has on others.

What difference did it make?

I believe the difference this project has made is an awareness of community and who we say we are and how we act. All school community members are just starting to comprehend that they are accountable for what they say, think, and do and the impact that has on our sense of community. My Board is beginning to understand we are developing a community mindset, cultural change and the role they play in thinking as an organization. As the administrator of the school I am seeking to bring out talents we possess which mold our community into a mission and ministry ready to meet the challenges God lays ahead of us together in a unified and strategic way.