Transforming Lutheran Middle School Education in Cleveland

Synopsis

The Cleveland Lutheran High School Association (CLHSA), consisting of both Lutheran High School West and Lutheran High School East, has proudly supported its churches since 1958. The Association’s founders set forth and accomplished a vision to provide an educationally rich, Christian education to thousands of graduates since its inception. Today, the CLHSA is proposing to intentionally invest in and support its middle schools with various types of educational programming.

Facing declining membership in its churches and enrollment challenges in its schools, the association finds itself at a crossroads. Collectively, those schools are now showing real gaps that are impacting Lutheran West. The largest identifiable gap is in the middle school grade academic product, including a lack of differentiated classes and electives for high-performing students. Gaps also exist on the lower end of the academic spectrum due to support programs that are absent from the church schools’ spectrum of coursework. This is a systemic issue, not a teacher-quality issue, and thus the entire system must be reenvisioned for sustainability. Still, in this environment, the CLHSA finds its high schools looking at record enrollment figures for the 2019-2020 School Year.

At this juncture, Lutheran West believes opening a middle school could give the church schools, which are all currently serving students kindergarten through eighth grade, an opportunity to redefine their school ministry in a positive way. The church schools could do more of the ministry that they do the best, which is early childhood education. A focus on doubling the kindergarten through fifth grade offerings, or more robust pre-school, could grow the churches’ educational ministries. Those ventures also happen to be more cost efficient to manage, which may help church budgets which are facing increasing pressure each passing
A well-run middle school will always cost more than a comparable elementary school. This model would allow the high school association to focus on what it does well and the churches to do the same.

Research

In August of 2019, the Lutheran West Operating Board approved the Principal, Michael Waugh, and Superintendent, Chris Steinmann, to embark upon a four-school journey across the country to study high-performing middle school-high school combinations. School visits took place from September 2019 through February 2020 and included Faith Lutheran in Las Vegas, NV, The Rock School in Gainesville, FL, Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, AZ, and St. Marcus Lutheran School, the LUMIN Schools, and the Milwaukee College Prep Schools all located in Milwaukee, WI. Research also included three meetings with the Northeast Ohio Lutheran Middle School Principals to provide direction for Lutheran West as it considers middle school education.

A summary of the middle school research, and particularly how it differs from high school education, is listed below:

From Northeast Ohio Lutheran Principals

- Job duties are overwhelming
- Impossible to perform all aspects of job at an exceptional level including: curriculum, staffing, admissions, marketing, financial management, spiritual leadership
- Declining or stagnant enrollment creates financial challenges
- Budget cuts lead to low admissions standards and thus declining academic results
- Economies of scale are limited when each school fully operates on its own campus

From School Visits

- “Craft a unique vision for middle school”
- 6-12 grade students can operate on one campus
● 6th grade students are isolated in fall semester and then integrated by the end of the school year
● Structure, not freedom, is necessary for middle school students
● Strong classroom management is required for middle school
● Discipline is different; more social/emotional than punitive
● Mentor programs exist for high school to middle school students
● Spiritual/academic foundation in middle school provides new opportunities for growth in high school at an accelerated rate
● “Make the middle school experience different than the high school experience - do not treat middle school students as ‘mini high school’ students”
● Middle school teachers are preferred rather than exclusively high school-aged teachers being retrained
● Administrative teams are scaled accordingly, over time

Outcomes

After performing the research, Michael Waugh and Chris Steinmann met with each of the seven church school leadership teams which consist of the pastor, principal, congregational president, and school board chair for each institution. That presentation consisted of a 14-slide discussion (see Appendix A) centered around the benefits, potential, and challenges of opening a middle school on the Lutheran West campus. Those seven meetings took place on the campus of each church school during the months of February and March of 2020.

During those meetings, Lutheran West emphasized that the entirety of Lutheran education in Cleveland will struggle in the near future if these issues are not addressed in a dedicated way. Collaborating with the Lutheran schools and churches is the best way to enact deep, systematic changes that will allow all schools to flourish for years to come. It was also emphasized that Lutheran West will be working on these issues and potential solutions, even if the churches and schools decide against a more encompassing collaboration.

Finally, the boards at Lutheran West approved a survey (see Appendix B) to be conducted to better understand the educational landscape for middle school education before
launching the school itself. That survey was to be conducted for current and future middle school families, both within the Lutheran school system and families outside of the system whose contact information exists within Lutheran West’s recruitment database. The survey was poised to launch April 1, 2020 but was never conducted due to COVID-19.

Effects of COVID-19

On March 13, 2020, the Governor of Ohio closed schools, in effect, for the remainder of the school year. Communication and collaboration on the middle school project ceased at that time. As referenced above, the surveys and market research was never conducted this past spring. However, the middle school project is still included in the Lutheran West Strategic Plan, but the project is now on hold until the 2022-2023 school year at the earliest.

Spiritual Leadership

As Principal of Lutheran High School West amidst a global pandemic which threatens the very nature of our existence as a Christian school, it quickly became my calling to lead our community, both educationally and spiritually, through this pandemic. Blessed with a great team of leadership at the association level and school level, Lutheran West was able to transition to remote learning over the course of one weekend. Only three days of school were lost the entire fourth quarter due to COVID-19 and students were able to receive their education daily from their teachers using their school-issued laptops and a variety of resources including Google Classroom and Zoom. Classes met daily during the crisis and the reviews from our families were some of the highest marks the school has ever received.

I also believed that chapel was essential to our school continuing to function as a Christian community. I wrote a series of six chapel messages, one of which was published in
the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools (ALSS) weekly devotional message. That message on Sacrificial Love is included with the other five chapel messages in Appendix C.

As a Head of School, my role changes depending on the needs of the community. When students need access to technology, it is my responsibility to provide those opportunities. When families need extra financial support, it becomes my role to find them additional financial aid. And when students and their families just need to know that we are all experiencing similar challenges, I wrote these chapel messages to provide another opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw us closer together.

St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:

There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

May God continue to lead our schools through this crisis and provide us with the wisdom we need to grow his kingdom through Christian education.

 Appendices

Appendix A - Lutheran West Middle School

Appendix B - Middle School Market Research Survey

Appendix C - Chapel Messages
Lutheran West Middle School
Lutheran West has been blessed by our Lutheran K-8 schools for decades. Collectively, those schools are now showing real gaps that are impacting Lutheran West.

The biggest gap we have identified is in the 6th-8th grade academic product. No Lutheran K-8 school has a middle school academic product which approaches that of their public school counterpart.

- Differentiated classes, electives, extracurriculars
- Our church schools will never be able to address these issues because it takes more students than they can hold and more money than they have available
- We believe this is a systemic issue, not a teacher-quality issue

We believe that Lutheran West can step in and fill that gap, offering a premier academic product that will elevate not only our high school, but all of our Lutheran schools.
Lutheran West Past Attempts to Address these Gaps

- Music & Math provided by and through Lutheran West for years.
- Collaborative academic & extracurricular proposals debuted by Lutheran West in March 2019.
  - Lakewood Lutheran chose to participate for the 19-20 school year
- Junior athletic programs provided by LW in Football, Cross Country, Track, Soccer, and Wrestling
- Research compiled on academic standing of Lutheran school graduates and provided to Principals and churches
- National school visits of high-performing Christian Middle School models
- Financial analysis performed regarding educational economies of scale
- Round-table discussions with Lutheran Principals about state of schools
- Collaborative academic & extracurricular proposals offered for 20-21 year
  - Lakewood Lutheran & Luther Memorial planning to participate
Lutheran West Can Do a Middle School Now

- We can do a Middle School in our current building, which allows us to leverage economies of scale in maintenance, faculty load, and space.
- With minor modifications to our current building, we can accommodate 150 Middle School students (in addition to 525 high school students) as early as the 2021-2022 school year.
- Every available space in our building will be used throughout the school day. No longer will we see open classroom spaces. Teachers will not have their own assigned classrooms.
Keeping Middle School Kids Separate

- Middle school lockers will be on in the 100s and the main floor, so they are together and away from high school students.
- Most Middle School classes (with the exception of Science, Arts, and Music) will be in that same area, while the high school students are mainly using the other spaces in the building.
- We move to a “9 period” schedule instead of our current “8 period schedule.” This allows for the Middle School to start later than the High School (and end later), so that pick-up and drop-off are at different times. It eliminates time for potential issues. It also frees up classroom space.
Our goal is to not only have a better academic product than our Lutheran schools currently offer, but to have a better academic product than can be found at the best public schools in the area.

3 strategies to achieve this goal:

- We can get there by focusing on high school credit in Middle School (which sets our students up for the highest amount of college credit in High School)
- We can get there by offering extra-curricular (Athletics, Drama, etc) at the 6-8th grade level that most other private schools are not offering
- We can get there by being intentional and rigorous in what we are offering.
  - We are not going to do anything once or twice a week.
    If a student is enrolled in a class, it will be daily (music, art, foreign language, etc.).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Classes</th>
<th>Elective Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math 6 (Honors)</td>
<td>MS Band (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 6</td>
<td>MS Choir (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature 6 (Honors)</td>
<td>World Language Survey 6/7 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Writing 6</td>
<td>STEM Survey 6/7 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 6</td>
<td>Art Survey 1 6/7/8 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion 6</td>
<td>Computer Applications 6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 6 (1 semester)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Classes</td>
<td>Elective Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 7 (Honors)</td>
<td>MS Band (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 7</td>
<td>MS Choir (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature 7 (Honors)</td>
<td>World Language Survey 6/7 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Writing 7</td>
<td>STEM Survey 6/7 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 7</td>
<td>Art Survey 1 6/7/8 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion 7</td>
<td>Art Survey 2 7/8 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 7 (1 semester)</td>
<td>Computer Applications 6/7 (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Classes</td>
<td>Elective Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear Algebra or Algebra</td>
<td>MS Band (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 8 (Honors)</td>
<td>MS Choir (full year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 8 (Honors)</td>
<td>Spanish 1 or German 1 or Latin 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 8 or Physical Science</td>
<td>Health (1 Sem) Physical Education (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion 8</td>
<td>Computer Applications (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art Foundations (1 Sem)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Can We Make a Budget Work?

- Tuition: $8,000 all-in (no fees for trips, laptops, etc.)
- 50 students at each grade level 6-8; 150 students total
- 8 new full-time teachers
- 2 full-time Administrators (1 Dean of Students, 1 Guidance)
- 1 part-time (25 hours/week) Admissions Counselor
- This budget is mostly devoid of start-up costs, which is a different conversation (but one we will need to have with our Board)
- We are open to a discussion about apportionment. There may be a model where we don’t apportion for Middle School students.
We believe that Lutheran West opening a Middle School could give our church schools an opportunity to redefine their school ministry in a positive way.
  - Who do you want to serve? How do you serve them best?

Our schools could do more of the ministry that they do the best - early childhood education. A focus on doubling our K-5 offerings or more robust pre-school could grow our church educational ministries, even without a 6-8.

Those ventures also happen to be more cost efficient to do, which may help church budgets which are under pressure.

A well-run Middle School will always cost a lot more money than a comparable 1st Grade. This model would allow the high school to focus on what it does well and our churches to do the same.
The Big Challenge and the Incredible Opportunity

- In order to deliver the academic product we are talking about, the tuition cost is going to have to be $8,000.
- There are families in our Lutheran schools who won’t be able to/want to pay for this.
- Additionally, a sizeable number won’t be able to meet the academic standard needed to attend the Middle School as currently constructed.
- If done well, this will not only push our student population further academically than we see in our Lutheran schools, it will push the High School to adjust curricula for more top-end students in the years to come.
- It also gives us a real opportunity to expand further into a world with more families who are paying full tuition (which would decrease dependence on state scholarships) while maintaining our Christian identity and mission. Given current law, we could not accept the CLE Scholarship.
Next Steps & Questions

1. We would like to run some focus groups and do some surveying of your current families as we determine feasibility. Are you open to that?
2. How do we work together to communicate a consistent message with our community and yours (understanding that much of it overlaps)?
3. We will need 18 months to prep and open this school. We would love to do this for the 2021-2022 school year. If you are open to this idea, how does that time frame work for you? Is there a preferable time frame?
4. What concerns do you have?
5. Ideas or suggestions that might help take these ideas to the next level?
Middle School Market Research: Survey Draft

**CHILD #1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current school: ________________________________</th>
<th>Current grade: _____</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long has he/she been enrolled at this school?</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far in miles (best guess is fine) do you live from the school?</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s hobbies, interests, sports, talents:</td>
<td>____________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being highly unsatisfied and 10 being totally satisfied), how satisfied OVERALL are you with Child #1’s current school/school system? [1 to 10 slider scale]

**Areas in which I feel my child’s current school excels:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum / courses offered</th>
<th>School facility and amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic programs</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts programs</td>
<td>Faith education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse student population</td>
<td>Top-notch faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/family communication</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture / community</td>
<td>School safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>STEM education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counseling / guidance</td>
<td>Extra-curricular opportunities (clubs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic intervention</td>
<td>Gifted education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Areas in which I feel my child’s current school could improve:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum / courses offered</th>
<th>School facility and amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic programs</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts programs</td>
<td>Faith education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse student population</td>
<td>Top-notch faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/family communication</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture / community</td>
<td>School safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>STEM education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counseling / guidance</td>
<td>Extra-curricular opportunities (clubs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic intervention</td>
<td>Gifted education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHILD #2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current school: ________________________________</th>
<th>Current grade: _____</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long has he/she been enrolled at this school?</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far in miles (best guess is fine) do you live from the school?</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s hobbies, interests, sports, talents:</td>
<td>____________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being highly unsatisfied and 10 being totally satisfied), how satisfied OVERALL are you with Child #2’s current school/school system? [1 to 10 slider scale]

**Areas in which I feel my child’s current school excels:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum / courses offered</th>
<th>School facility and amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic programs</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts programs</td>
<td>Faith education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse student population</td>
<td>Top-notch faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/family communication</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture / community</td>
<td>School safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>STEM education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counseling / guidance</td>
<td>Extra-curricular opportunities (clubs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic intervention</td>
<td>Gifted education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Areas in which I feel my child’s current school could improve:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum / courses offered</th>
<th>School facility and amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic programs</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts programs</td>
<td>Faith education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHILD #3:
Current school: ___________________________________ Current grade: ________
How long has he/she been enrolled at this school? ____________________________
How far in miles (best guess is fine) do you live from the school? ________________
Child’s hobbies, interests, sports, talents: ____________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being highly unsatisfied and 10 being totally satisfied), how satisfied OVERALL are you with Child #3’s current school/school system? [1 to 10 slider scale]

Areas in which I feel my child’s current school excels:
___ Curriculum / courses offered ___ School facility and amenities
___ Athletic programs ___ Leadership opportunities
___ Arts programs ___ Faith education
___ Diverse student population ___ Top-notch faculty and staff
___ Parent/family communication ___ Administration
___ School culture / community ___ School safety
___ Technology ___ STEM education
___ School counseling / guidance ___ Extra-curricular opportunities (clubs, etc.)
___ Academic intervention ___ Gifted education

Areas in which I feel my child’s current school could improve:
___ Curriculum / courses offered ___ School facility and amenities
___ Athletic programs ___ Leadership opportunities
___ Arts programs ___ Faith education
___ Diverse student population ___ Top-notch faculty and staff
___ Parent/family communication ___ Administration
___ School culture / community ___ School safety
___ Technology ___ STEM education
___ School counseling / guidance ___ Extra-curricular opportunities (clubs, etc.)
___ Academic intervention ___ Gifted education

Please answer the following questions about your family as a whole.

Our family’s relationship to private elementary school:
___ Currently enrolled
___ Formerly enrolled
___ Considered but never enrolled
___ Have never considered, but would consider
___ Would not consider

Above, if you answered “Considered but never enrolled,” “Have not considered, but would consider,” or “Would not consider,” what are the primary reasons you have not pursued private elementary school (check all that apply):
___ Cost
___ Transportation / distance from school
___ Our public school system is good or great.
___ Did not find the right fit for my child(ren).
___ My child(ren) is/are happy at current school.
___ My child(ren) has/have friends at current school and I wouldn’t want to move them.
___ I/We simply have never looked into it.

Above, if you answered “Currently enrolled,” what are your feelings on remaining in private schools? (please select one):
Our child/children will definitely attend private schools through 12th grade.

Our child/children will definitely attend private elementary school through 8th grade, but we are not certain he/she/they will attend a private high school.

Our child/children will definitely attend private elementary school through 5th grade, but we are not certain he/she/they will attend a private middle school and/or high school.

We don’t know what will happen -- we will stay at our current private school indefinitely but are open to other options if it no longer feels like the right fit for our family.

Above, if you answered, “Formerly enrolled,” what were the primary reasons for your departure from private school? (check all that apply)

- The school no longer felt like the right fit for our student(s) and/or our family
- Cost - too expensive and/or did not receive enough financial aid
- Transportation/distance from school
- Not enough arts/athletic/extra-curricular opportunities
- Educational product was not up to our expectations
- Parent/family communication and/or school culture was not up to our expectations
- Chose to attend our public schools
- Other

In our family, the primary decision-maker(s) about where to send our child(ren) to school is/are:

- Myself as the mother
- Myself as the father
- My spouse as the mother
- My spouse as the father
- Joint parental/guardian decision
- My child(ren)

If a particular school is Christian or faith-based, it has the following impact on my family’s consideration of that school:

- A school being faith-based is a driving force behind our consideration and very important to us.
- If a school is faith-based, it’s an added bonus -- but we would not exclude a school from our consideration set if it had no religious affiliation and/or faith elements.
- We do not actively seek out a faith-based education for our children, but we’re not opposed to it.
- A school being faith-based would be a deterrent for our family.

I would consider my family’s priorities in our students’ educations to be: (choose a value between 1 and 10, where 1 is a very low priority and 10 is one of your highest priorities):

- Faith-based school community (1 to 10 slider)
- Caliber of athletic programs (high level of competition, top-notch coaches, athlete development) (1 to 10 slider)
- Educational product (courses offered, how prepared students are for the next grade level) (1 to 10 slider)
- Caliber of arts programs (high level programs, ability for large-scale student involvement, development of student as an artist and/or performer) (1 to 10 slider)
- School culture (student expectations, student safety, healthy growth environment, healthy student social environment, counselors, community feel) (1 to 10 slider)
- Faculty, Staff, Administration (credentials, experience, passion for teaching, genuine care for students) (1 to 10 slider)
- Technology and STEM Education (level of current technology resources available, quality of student education and experiences with technology, STEM programs) (1 to 10 slider)
- Extra-curriculars (ways for students to get involved, clubs and/or student organizations, leadership opportunities) (1 to 10 slider)
Please answer the following questions based upon your personal opinions.

A school would be too far for us geographically if it were (select one):

__ More than 2 miles from our home and/or parent/guardian workplace
__ More than 5 miles from our home and/or parent/guardian workplace
__ More than 10 miles from our home and/or parent/guardian workplace
__ More than 20 miles from our home and/or parent/guardian workplace
__ More than 30 miles from our home and/or parent/guardian workplace

I would consider a private middle school too expensive if it cost more than (per child, per year without financial aid):

__ $0     __ $5,000     __ $7,500     __ $10,000

If I had to guess, I would guess that the average cost (per student, per year without financial aid) of a private middle school in Northeast Ohio falls into the following range:

__ $500 - $1,499     __ $1,500 - $2,999     __ $3,000 - $4,999     __ $5,000 - $7,999
__ $8,000 - $9,999     __ $10,000 - $14,999     __ $15,000+

If I had to guess, I would guess that the average cost (per student, per year) of a private HIGH school in Northeast Ohio falls into the following range:

__ $500 - $1,499     __ $1,500 - $2,999     __ $3,000 - $4,999     __ $5,000 - $7,999     __ $8,000 - $9,999
__ $10,000 - $14,999     __ $15,000 - $19,999     __ $20,000 - $29,999     __ $30,000+

Lutheran West is (check all that apply):

__ Worthwhile     __ Expensive     __ Traditional     __ Declining
__ Genuine     __ Exclusive     __ A healthy community     __ Too small
__ High quality     __ Down to earth     __ Faith-based     __ Affordable
__ Unique     __ Well-known     __ Modern     __ Thriving
__ Changing     __ Exclusive     __ Uptight     __ Strong

If Lutheran West was a person, the best description of my relationship with that person would be (please select only one):

__ A casual acquaintance     __ A total stranger     __ A long lost relative
__ A close friend     __ Someone I’ve only heard about     __ Someone I dislike

For the following questions, 1 means “Do not agree at all,” and 10 means “Agree completely.” (1 to 10 scales for all, with N/A option for certain questions):

Lutheran West is well-known in Northeast Ohio.

Lutheran West is known as a high quality school.

The majority of students at Lutheran West are from Lutheran families.

Private schools like Lutheran West are too expensive.

As a parent, I feel overwhelmed by the options available for my child’s education.

Public schools are sufficient and I see no reason to consider private schools.

Paying for private education for our children would be a challenge for our family.

Paying for private education is challenging for our family, but we are willing to make it work financially because private education is important to us.

Private schools offer a superior educational product than their public school counterparts.

Private schools are able to offer better arts, athletic, and extra-curricular opportunities than public schools.
**The following questions are for survey responder demographic data only:**

Your gender (circle one): Male   Female   Choose not to answer

Your age range (circle one): 25-32   33-40   41-50   51-60   60+

Residential zip code: _______________

Work zip code: _______________

Religious affiliation (if applicable): __________________________________________________

Annual household income (select range): Below $25K   $25K-$49K   $50K-$79K   $80K-$100K
                                        $100K-$125K   $125K-$150K   $150K+
                                        Decline to answer

---

**Middle School Market Research: Focus Group Questions**

**Q: Let’s talk about your kids.**
- Where do they go to school and what grades are they in?
- What are their interests? Sports? Arts? Hobbies? Talents?
- Do they enjoy school? Favorite subjects?

**Q: Overall, are you satisfied with the school your kids are currently attending?**
- What do you wish was different?
- What does the school do really well?
- Where could they improve?
- Regardless of how you as parents feel about the school, what do you think your kids feel about it?

**Q: Let’s switch gears and talk about private schools in our area. Those of you who have never considered private school, is it something you’re open to?**
- What have been the reasons you haven’t considered it previously?
- How do you think your child’s educational experience would be different (or not) at a private school?

**Q: If you decided that private school was something your family was considering, how far geographically from your home and/or parent/guardian workplace would you seriously consider schools?**
- If a private school that was a bit beyond your geographic radius were to offer bus service from somewhere nearer to you, would that change your willingness to consider that school?

**Q: Many parents feel like private school = expensive. Is that a sentiment you share?**
- Do you think most people feel this way?
- Do you feel that people are generally aware that private schools offer financial aid?
- If you had to take a guess, what would you think the average per student, per year cost of private MIDDLE school is in our area?
- And what about private HIGH school?
- At what point would you and your family consider private school cost (per student, per year) just too expensive?

**Q: How many of you have ever thought you might consider private high school for your children?**
- What are the main reasons private high school is a future option?
- Would private middle school be an option your family would consider?
- Do you feel like you have a good understanding of the private schools in our area?
- Do you feel like you understand the admissions/application process for private schools?
Q: Let’s talk about middle school and high school in general. It can be a time of growth and discovery, but it can also be challenging to navigate the social elements and have confidence in one’s own self and convictions.

- What are some things you’re nervous about as your children approach the middle school and high school years?
- Are there things your child(ren) are worried about when it comes to middle school and high school?
- What about middle school or high school are they particularly excited for?
- What are your hopes for your children during these years?

Q: Let’s get into more specific elements of middle school:

- How many of you have children who play sports? What are you hoping for in terms of their middle school athletic experience? What could be a dealbreaker for you at a particular school when it comes to your child’s athletic experience?
- What about arts -- performing arts or visual arts? If your child is interested in arts, what do you hope they gain from their middle school experience? What kinds of programs would your child be devastated if were unavailable at his/her school?
- Do your children have service opportunities at their current school(s)? Is service something that is important to your family?
- What about faith education? Is this something you’ve experienced at your child(ren)’s current or past schools? Is it something that is important to your family -- a driving force behind your decisions, something that is an added bonus if the school is the right fit for other reasons, something you don’t really consider in your decisions, or something that’s actually a deterrent to you?

Q: Have there ever been any programs that your child’s current school was forced to cut due to funding?

- Did this change impact your child(ren) and your family?
- Was the change major enough to make you consider other school options?

Q: Who here is familiar with Lutheran West?

- Do you know where it is located?
- What things have you heard about Lutheran West? / What is your impression of the school overall?
- Do you know anyone who has attended or sent their children to Lutheran West? What have they said about it -- overall or specifically?
- Do you feel that most people think you must be Lutheran to attend?
- What adjectives would you use to describe Lutheran West?
Community

This devotion is based upon a reading from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

We need each other. What I’ve learned from the COVID-19 crisis is that those four words are true now more than ever before. We need daily, face-to-face interaction. We need to be able to give each other a high five, a handshake, a fist bump, and a hug. We need to be able to talk to someone in the same room and not just remotely through a screen. We need each other.

When I think about the word “community,” there are a lot of images that come to my mind. An audience gathering to watch a play or listen to a concert. A crowd of people cheering at a sporting event. Friends getting together to eat some food at a restaurant. A group coming together to support someone who is coping with a hardship or tragedy.

Students coming to school...

COVID-19 has taken these things from all of us, for now, and to be honest, that is becoming increasingly more difficult each day. There are a lot of emotions that start to rise to the surface when we really reflect on what is happening to all of us: fear, anxiety, frustration, and anger. All of these emotions are understandable, all are valid, and sometimes all four can take place over the course of just one day. We need hope.

My hope comes from knowing that we will be back together again soon. Soon may be defined by weeks instead of days - and while I struggle to cope with that timeline, I know that when we do get back together, the celebration will be just what each one of us needs. Community will restore everything that was lost.

Even more importantly, my hope comes from God telling us that community is the only answer to our current status. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 reads:

“But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

The “body” in this passage is synonymous with “community.” There are two key takeaways from the way that God defines community in this passage.

First, we see that community, real community in a perfect sense, means that people genuinely need to get along for community to really work. “There should be no division in the body.” Well before COVID-19, our world was no stranger to being torn apart by division. These divisions have invaded the very fabric of our society. For some reason, we made it easier for people to disagree with one another rather than agree. Essentially, we created a society with division - the enemy of community.

The answer to healing these divisions comes in the second part of the passage. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” Basically, community takes work - it needs to be built. When people suffer, I have a choice to enter into their emotions and try to understand the true nature of their suffering. Will I help them? Will I ignore them? Do I care enough to engage their situation?

The end result, if I really want to do the hard work of building community on a daily basis, is joy. “If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” Joy is the output in this equation. If I live in a real community, then I have the opportunity to rejoice with my fellow members. We often don’t rejoice with strangers (I certainly never rejoice with Patriots fans when they win the Superbowl every year), but we do rejoice when someone in our community finds success. To get there - to get to the point where we care enough about each individual to suffer and rejoice with them, it takes work to overcome differences and see each other for who we really are. Only then can we have the community we desire.

When we get back together again, I don’t want the increased sense of community to go away. I don’t want to go back to the way, “things used to be.” I want something better. I don’t want division - I want community. That is something really worth waiting for.

May God heal our nation and our world, and may God bless our community here at Lutheran West.

Mike Waugh, Principal
Who do you miss? And maybe a secondary question is, what do you miss? As I have spoken (or more specifically, emailed and texted) so many different people over the past few weeks, I continue to feel there is an increased sense of longing for community in our world. Take a minute and make a list, either on paper or in your mind, of all the people or things you miss since our nation has taken shelter from the coronavirus.

Now, what’s on your list? I bet it includes things like family members, friends, going to a restaurant, going to a friend’s house, going to a movie—going anywhere. Whatever you wrote down, it matters. And whoever you miss, they matter even more. All of it was sacrificed, hopefully momentarily, for the community.

Last week I wrote about community and what that might look like after we put the COVID-19 crisis behind us. As I continue to reflect on this idea, it seems that sacrifice is an element of a healthy community.

Think about all of the people in our community who make sacrifices to sustain a healthy community: soldiers who protect our nation, first responders and health care workers who provide safety in the midst of an emergency, grocery store clerks who go to work and provide food despite being on the front lines of a global pandemic—the list goes on and on. You know exactly what I’m talking about because whoever you are and wherever you are reading this devotion, I know you are making a sacrifice too.

Jesus put it this way in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Sacrifice is a virtue, Jesus says, and what makes sacrifice so virtuous is because it is driven by love. Sacrifice is hard, but it’s worth it because we love the people who benefit from our sacrifice. Parents make endless sacrifices for their children daily, but they aren’t keeping score. They sacrifice over and over again because they love their kids—that’s all they know and that’s all that really matters.

Sacrificial love is the answer to my failures. And more importantly, Jesus is the one who has the power to change my heart and allow me to love others in this manner. Sacrificial love enables me to look past myself, and the things I want. It then allows me to genuinely care for another human being in a deeper and more meaningful sense than I ever could on my own.

Sacrificial love is in its purest form, might look something like this from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.

That’s a difficult definition to work with for love. Love isn’t easily angered? Because I’ve been angry many times in the past few weeks. Love doesn’t envy? Because I just want to be done with this and go back to my old life. And love isn’t self-seeking? Because I really need someone to give me some hope that this is going to get better soon. When I read those verses on love, I feel like I am failing in this department.

Sacrificial love is the answer to my failures. And more importantly, Jesus is the one who has the power to change my heart and allow me to love others in this manner. Sacrificial love enables me to look past myself, and the things I want. It then allows me to genuinely care for another human being in a deeper and more meaningful sense than I ever could on my own.

It means when I look a second time at that list of all the people and things I miss, I now can look at it through the lens of sacrificial love. That lens is patient, and it is kind. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres.

It never fails. Period. And it is a love that is worth the sacrifice.

May God heal our nation and our world, and may God bless our community here at Lutheran West.

Mike Waugh, Principal
My wife and I have a son who is five years of age and has a bedroom window which faces east. Every morning, like clockwork (literally), he is awake and ready to face the day at exactly 6:30 AM. One morning we accidentally left his curtains open and when I came in to see my son I could already see some light peeking through the window. As I looked closer, out the window, I saw a magnificent sunrise complete with rays of light illuminating the clouds. The colors were tremendous — every shade of orange, blue, pink, and red that you would ever imagine. My son said to me, “Dad, look at that sunrise!” Together, we sat there and looked at it, awestruck, until the sun had fully come into view. It was beautiful.

Because we live in Northeast Ohio, there is not always a beautiful sunrise. I don't mean that literally, since the sun rises daily, but many mornings are cloudy and you cannot see the sun. You know it's there in your mind, but your eyes are unable to see it. In fact, since the day my son and I shared that sunrise together we now look out the window each day to see another one, similar in nature. Every day the sun fails to light the morning with blazing colors my son says to me dejectedly, “Oh, no sunrise today Dad.” I can tell he then begins his day with a hint of disappointment.

Living through the COVID-19 crisis feels a lot like waiting to see a beautiful sunrise which increasingly seems will never come. Day after day and night after night, I find myself checking media outlets, looking for data, and analyzing the curve to try and gain some insight into when this all will end. I am constantly living in the future because the present seems to be so discouraging. There are not enough distractions to divert my attention away from the chaos that has descended upon our world. I am searching for a voice to speak life into our current situation.

Who will answer?

David, the writer of Psalm 19, explains it this way:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. 3 They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The response to the question is that God will answer. The heavens declare God's glory — they shout it every day. This declaration is not with any human language, but a language draped in beauty that can only be experienced when we stop and look for the sun to rise. God's voice goes out into all the earth and that voice is heard in the community.

Beauty manifests itself in our community each day. I see it in parents who make sacrifices for their children. I see in teachers still choosing to teach and students still choosing to learn despite not being in school. I see it in families caring for elderly or aging relatives. I see it in charitable organizations providing aid for those in need despite a lack of resources. The beauty is not hiding behind the clouds, it is in plain sight if we stop each day to look for it.

As we all struggle daily with our own unique challenges due to the coronavirus, I find that these examples of beauty are a source of inspiration and strength. “The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together (Psalm 19:7, MSG).” Those are the words of David as he found beauty in God's creation - a creation that still emanates with beauty even in the most dire circumstances. As children of God, we are the most important element of this creation, and God's beauty is displayed in our lives at a time when we need it the most.

Psalm 19 ends with the writer calling God his, “Rock and Redeemer.” After recognizing God’s beauty, our souls can rest in the presence of God. We no longer need to search for distractions because God has given us something much better. Then, we are able to stand upon that rock which redeems and saves us from the many troubles that surround our existence. We need this redemption more than ever, and it will come at the work of God's hands.

Don't lose hope. The sunrise is coming.

May God heal our nation and our world, and may God bless our community here at Lutheran West.

Mike Waugh, Principal
Loss

This devotion is based on a reading from Matthew 28.

During the COVID-19 crisis our communities have been dealt some heavy blows and had to endure great losses. We have seen loss of jobs, loss of income, loss of relationships, loss of school days. Loss of life. The list goes on and on.

In the world before COVID-19, sometimes the easiest way to deal with loss on a much smaller scale (although unhealthy) was just to ignore it and fix our minds on something more positive. However, as the losses keep mounting, we have no choice but to confront our current situation.

As Principal of a school, the losses I see are heartbreaking. Seniors who are having graduation plans altered. Students who miss seeing their friends and their teachers in class. Thespians who had been preparing for a musical performance for months and never had the chance to perform. Athletes who lost an entire spring season. I just want to fix everything for them and make it all better. I don't want the losses to ruin not only their high school experience, but their way of living.

What we need is some hope, because we all are living through some incredibly trying times. Hope that things will eventually get better. Hope that our way of living will be restored. Hope that someone will come to save us from this COVID-19 reality.

Jesus’ disciples had to endure the tremendous loss of losing their leader, teacher, and friend after Jesus was crucified on Good Friday. For the disciples, their response to loss was fear and despair and it’s easy to sympathize with their feelings. Jesus was found guilty of insurrection, for which the penalty was death, and the disciples thought they were the next ones on the executioner’s list.

Just as the loss was about to defeat them, Jesus intervened.

While the disciples were on the verge of despair, the women went to the tomb to care for Jesus’ body following the traditional Jewish custom. Instead of caring for his lifeless body, they found him alive and ready to deliver them from their anguish. The women didn't let the loss of their beloved friend overcome their lives to the point of losing everything. They kept living. They kept hoping.

However, the women at the empty tomb do something incredibly important that is essential before their sorrow turns to joy. They allowed themselves to experience grief. Remember, these women believed they were going to the tomb to care for Jesus’ lifeless body. The women were mourning on account of the trauma and loss they had to endure that Easter weekend. Much to their surprise, instead of having to live with loss, Jesus gave them the gift of hope instead.

I don't know where you stand right now reading this devotion. You might be coping with some terrible losses. You might be grieving. You might be trying to hold it together for the sake of your family. I have found that oftentimes I can experience all of these emotions with the same day. Wherever you are, know that hope can be found even in the midst of these losses.

And you are not alone.

The women don't go to Jesus’ tomb one by one. They go together. They embrace their community, leaning on one another, mourning with one another, in order to face their losses together. They believed that going together was easier than going alone. And Jesus was there to go with them as well.

At the end of this chapter, Jesus says in Matthew 28:20, “Truly I am with you always to the end of the age.” Community fosters the hope that allows us to cope with loss — and God is there in the middle of that community. We don't have to do this alone!

My prayer for you today is that your community, your circle, your people, provide you with the support you need to find some hope during these times. Even when the losses keep coming, our God is here with us to bring light to our lives during even the darkest times. And that same God is here to bring hope to each of our lives as we continue to walk through this crisis together.

Mike Waugh, Principal
Kindness

This devotion is based on a reading from Titus 3.

A few weeks ago I was walking in my neighborhood with my three children, who are all under the age of six. As I was pushing the stroller with two children inside and one walking next to me, a couple was approaching us, headed in our direction on the sidewalk. Out of nowhere, the couple started raising their hands and my heart rate started to rise. Immediately, I grabbed my children to make sure they were safe and then I started looking around frantically to see if more intruders were going to ambush us from behind. When I turned to look back at the couple, they still had their hands raised in my direction and then they spoke.

“Good morning, your kids are adorable,” the couple said, and then they passed by us while politely keeping a safe distance from our family. A sense of relief, woven with embarrassment, came over me as we completed our neighborhood walk. We made it home out of harm’s way and luckily no other couples dared to say “hello” to us on the rest of our journey.

Since the shelter in place orders have been in effect due to the COVID-19 crisis, I have noticed a lot more people walking than ever before. Before COVID-19, whenever I would encounter a stranger on the sidewalk, most often we would both look the other way pretending not to notice one another. I’m ashamed to admit that, but for some reason I was conditioned to behave in this manner.

Today, however, people are taking the time to acknowledge each other. In other words, we are choosing to be kind again. Kindness is a virtue that has the ability to strengthen communities, and we need kindness now more than ever before as we continue to face the COVID-19 crisis together.

I see kindness taking many forms. Communities honking their horns during shift changes to honor healthcare workers. People lining up their cars in a parade to celebrate a birthday as they drive by a child’s home. Individuals giving up their place in line after they have been waiting over 30 minutes to enter a grocery store so someone who can’t stand any longer may enter instead. Residents putting together a schedule to deliver food to senior citizens who are unable to leave their homes. Kindness builds community.

And kindness is different than being “nice.” When someone asks me how my day was, my most common response is, “I had a nice day.” If my day was especially good, I might even say, “I had a very nice day.” But that response is completely based on me — how I feel, what I want, and why other people’s actions either made me happy or sad. Niceness is self-seeking, but kindness looks outward as it strives to meet the needs of others.

The Bible speaks of kindness in this manner, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” God chooses to show kindness to his people no matter their circumstances. From God’s perspective, no one can earn the kindness he wants to bestow upon each individual. And no one really deserves God’s kindness either, but his mercy allows him to forget people’s sins and choose kindness instead.

A community that chooses kindness is the one in which I want to live. A community that values kindness is also one where fear is not allowed to settle. At a time when fear threatens our very existence, choosing kindness seems to allow fear to dissipate so hope can be found. My prayer today is that as these little acts of kindness abound, our communities grow stronger, and after we beat COVID-19 together, choosing kindness will be the norm and not the exception.

And yes, the next time I walk down the sidewalk and see a stranger, I am going to wave and greet that person. It is a kind thing to do!

Mike Waugh, Principal

May 1, 2020
Worry

May 8, 2020

The other day I was playing with my five-year-old son and we were having a great time. My son loves dinosaurs and his favorite thing to do with them is to build cages so each dinosaur is protected (because, of course, the dinosaurs are extinct and these remaining toys need to be preserved). It really is quite a production.

All of sudden I began staring out the window and subconsciously my mind began to wander. When will the economy bounce back? Will children be able to go to school this fall? When will businesses reopen, and even then, how will they do it? Are restaurants ever going to be the same again? What if this gets worse before it gets better?

All of these important questions and no concrete answers — I was worried.

“Dad! Dad!” I looked over and my son was still there, even though my mind was elsewhere. He said to me, “Dad, do you think the stores will ever open again so we can get some new dinosaurs?” It wasn’t just me, he was worrying too! Had my worrying spilled over and invaded my own son’s mind? What was happening here?

Worrying about events that may or may not occur, or about things we cannot control, is a natural part of the human condition. When we really stop to consider what is going on inside of our brains, we know that worrying cannot help us get the answers we are trying to find. Worrying does not provide us with any inside scoop or secret knowledge. Instead, the act of worrying snowballs into more and more questions that, if we let this process continue long enough, becomes an insurmountable mountain of doubt and despair with no end in sight.

The effects of worrying can be crushing, so what do we do?

Jesus said famously in Matthew 6:34, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” This statement is really insightful for a few reasons and contradicts the way we think about worrying.

First, he suggests that “tomorrow will worry about itself.” What does that even mean? A day, or 24-hour period of time, does not have a mind of its own — it isn’t a person. Only human beings can worry, but days do not have the ability to think or feel or worry. This doesn’t make any sense.

But maybe that is Jesus’ first point: worrying doesn’t make any sense, so why are we doing it in the first place? When you really break it down, most of the things we worry about cannot be controlled. And if we cannot control these things, then worrying really is a vain attempt, or worse, a harmful process that can impose unhealthy consequences like elevated blood pressure, stress, and even psychological conditions which threaten our wellbeing.

Secondly, Jesus says, “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” He recognizes that worrying is real — he isn’t blowing us off and suggesting that our deepest fears are meaningless. Rather, Jesus’ advice is to focus on the things we can control, namely the things that lie directly in front of us, right now, today.

Worrying, in and of itself, is damaging to our minds and bodies. Changing our perspective, however, is the key to freeing our minds from the self-doubt that worry so readily provides. In the previous verse (Matthew 6:33), Jesus says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In other words, focus on the things that are most important to us in our lives.

That focus, or change in perspective, is the key to unlocking our souls from the prison designed by worry. Go back to where we began — I was on the floor, playing with dinosaur toys with my son. He was right in front of me, the person I care most about, the person who deserves my focus and attention. I won’t allow worry to steal those moments from me.

Worry will creep in, we know that to be inevitable, but we also need to then allow our minds to refocus on the people who truly matter so we don’t lose them too. Take a moment today to allow yourself the time that is necessary to refocus and then your worries will begin to fade.

And, the dinosaurs will go extinct again if we keep worrying, so cut it out.

Mike Waugh, Principal