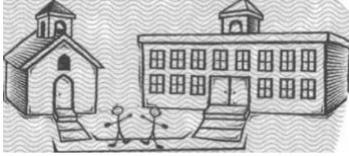


Why Can't We Get Families from Our School to Join Our Church?



Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior. Since my last column, the school year was completed, Vacation Bible School is most likely done, the summer heat has kicked in, vacations have begun, the kids may or may not be binging off the wall (if they're not, it won't be long) and soon we will need to start preparing for the upcoming school year. If you are not ready to think about that yet, just know that your school's teachers and staff are well into their plans for the year to make sure *"junior"* gets a good education this fall.

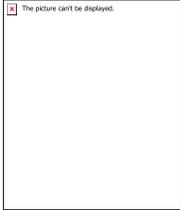
In light of this, it makes this month's column timely as churches need to plan for the school year as well. If you remember, I am discussing the most frequent comments and questions I hear when presenting the pastor profile survey to church leadership and Call committees. Previously I have discussed youth involvement then community involvement in the church. This column is focused on school involvement in the church. More specifically, why can't we get families from our school to join our church?

Lutheran schools and churches have been around since the first days when the LCMS was formed. In most cases, one has created from the other. From a church, a school was formed or from a school, a church was formed. However, in today's world, churches primarily are the ones who start and support the school. As a result, questions like our topic begin to be asked. Another question, more to the point is "we spend all this money on the school and build all of these nice buildings, where is our return on investment?" A nicer way of saying that is "this is a ministry of our church, when will it bear fruit?"

Before we go any farther, I think it is important to define what a ministry is. The following is a definition of ministry I like and use in planning sessions, as it captures the essence of ministry. It is from an article written by Dr. Roger Pascoe entitled **WHAT IS CHURCH MINISTRY?**

Christian ministry is the activity and responsibility of the local church in the fulfillment of its biblically defined mandate in the world. It can be defined in several ways.

- 1. The ministry of the church can be defined as the fulfillment of the Great Commandment of our Lord: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39).*
- 2. Christian ministry can be defined in terms of the Great Commission of our Lord: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).*
- 3. The process and objective of Christian ministry can be defined in the apostle Paul's terms as "the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect person, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we...may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15).*



4. *Ministry can be defined in terms of the model of the early church - viz. teaching the apostles' doctrine, engaging in fellowship, commemorating the breaking bread, praying together, caring for one another, worshiping God, and actively evangelizing the community (Acts 2:42-47).*

No where in this definition does it talk about what we get in return for undertaking a ministry of the church. Ministry is selfless, it is about how we serve and what we do for others. The fruit that is born is the winning of souls for Christ and bringing God's Word to all nations.

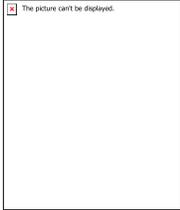


However, in saying the above, I am not naive. Even though it is a ministry, we need to know we are accomplishing something. We need to feel like our ministry is having an impact. So, we are back to our topic. How do we get school families to join our church? It definitely is possible but to achieve it requires more of a commitment or investment than just spending money.

It requires an active involvement in school life by the church, the pastor and the church staff. It requires building a relationship with the school, its students, families, teachers and staff. It has to be more than that building on the other side of the parking lot or that wing of the church we never go down. Active involvement by the church is key.

Thus, in light of this, I have identified some suggestions from my research to help you build that relationship and grow a bond between church and school. They are in no particular order and are as follows:

- Purposeful involvement in the school by the Pastor(s) and ministry staff. They should be walking the halls, meeting and greeting mom's, dad's and students. Conducting chapel and interacting with teachers. They should dedicate a specific time everyday to do this. Varying it week by week.
- Involvement in the school by church members. The caution here is that it should be done as a support for and under the direction, permission and approval of the principal/headmaster/director of the school. Schools always need volunteers, members can and should volunteer as well. Ease the load on parents.
- The church should purposefully encourage the school's staff and teachers. Install them annually in church. Pray for them in public prayers and in small groups. Recognize them for their service to the school and your church.
- Celebrate the school. Include them periodically in church services, write about them in your newsletter, acknowledge them publicly for achievements or recognitions, recognize individuals in the school for their successes and definitely when a student comes to church to be baptized!!
- Value the school and show your respect for them. Have a school board member on your church council, make sure school leadership and the school board are involved in major decisions that affect the school,



share financial issues or other issues with the school so no one is caught off guard, let them be a part of the solution.

- Coordinate with school leadership to lead and/or support focused ministries for students and their families. Examples would be for special needs kids, single moms, special education classes or life skills classes, after school programs or summer enrichment programs.
- Mentoring students – connect students with church members in mentoring programs for living a Christian Life outside of school – life lessons. Other mentoring programs that can be brought in are **Academy 4** and **Kid's Hope**. Very good programs.
- Have your small groups, care groups, bible classes or other groups in a church adopt a class or grade in the school. Pray for them specifically, support their teacher(s), write them notes, volunteer for their functions, get to know them personally and they get to know you.
- Encourage the active involvement of school and its students in the church. Let those kids who are old enough, read your Sunday morning lessons. Encourage those who play instruments, to play in a service. Invite student choirs and individuals to sing in your services. Have special Sundays where the entire school, students, teachers, staff and families are specifically invited to worship with you. Celebrate and recognize that coming together.

Again, these are just ideas and suggestions. Hopefully this will generate some creative thinking in your church of how to draw the church and school together.

The key though is that schools are active and participatory ministries of the church. The purpose of the school is not what it brings back to the church but that it is bringing a Christian education to your community and neighborhood by spreading God's Word and winning souls for Christ.



Blessings as you spread the Gospel,

Marty

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