

BEST PRACTICES OF THE OUTREACH MINISTRIES
OF LUTHERAN SCHOOLS
AS A FAITH FORMING ECOSYSTEM

Marvin Bergman
July 20, 2015

BEST PRACTICES OF OUTREACH MINISTRIES OF LUTHERAN SCHOOLS AS A FAITH FORMING ECOSYSTEM*

Introduction

How many students in Lutheran schools are not connected to a church? Terry Schmidt, Director of School Ministries of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, stated that twenty-five percent of this population awaits being connected to a congregation. This percentage translates to about 45,000 students, with the additional potential of connecting with parents and other family members. (Mark Larson, "Outreach in Lutheran Schools: Significant Work, Great Potential," *The Lutheran Layman*, January-February, 2015).

How effective are Lutheran schools in helping families to connect with a congregation? A summary of data in the article identified twenty-two Lutheran schools that reported fifteen or more parents joining LCMS congregations through the ministry of their schools. The report also named schools that were most effective on a "per capita" basis in connecting with non-connected families.

In the Spring of 2015, the writer of this report made a survey which asked leaders of the twenty-two Lutheran schools to name four or five best practices in their outreach to children and parents not engaged with a congregation.

Part One of the report, "Best Practices Named by Lutheran School Leaders," is a verbatim account of the leaders' descriptions of the best practices of their schools' and congregations' outreach ministries.

Part Two, "Outreach Ministries of Lutheran Schools as a Faith Forming Ecosystem," is a content analysis by the writer which identifies key parts of a faith forming ecosystem based on the best practices named by leaders. The analysis is descriptive.

Part Three, "Components of a Faith Forming Ecosystem For Consideration" identifies possible parts of the outreach ministries of Lutheran schools that can be considered for expanding the faith forming ecosystem of Lutheran schools.

- A faith forming ecosystem defined in this report is formed by the parts of a community that interact with each other and their environment to promote the faith formation of disciples engaged in God's mission. (A concept of a faith forming ecosystem was suggested by John Roberto in <http://vibrantfaith.org/2015/02/new-faith-forming-ecosystem-part-1.>)

BEST PRACTICES NAMED BY LUTHERAN SCHOOL LEADERS: PART ONE

Responses by Lutheran school leaders to the survey identified an array of best practices in the outreach ministries of their schools and congregations. The categories that follow were named by the writer of the report.

Baptism

1. "We have found that as our students learn about baptism in Religion class (particularly at the upper-ELEM and MS levels), they often become the best ambassadors to their families, asking if they can be baptized. We often do those baptisms at a school chapel service rather than a church service. This can spark other students to consider being baptized."
2. "In our application to the school, we include the question of baptism. If the answer is "No," we can bring this into our conversations as we begin building the relationship with them."
3. "We very actively invite over and over families to all get baptized if they are not. We have a 3 week baptism class, then baptism, then a one year anniversary celebration for anyone baptized in the past year. It is a way to reconnect with all the families who had someone baptized in the past year."
4. "Post baptism dates for the students and celebrate these dates in your classrooms."
5. "Encourage these baptisms to occur during the weekly chapel services. Make the whole chapel service very child friendly. Invite the entire class up front to witness and share in the baptism service for their classmate. Have your pastor talk directly to the child and his/her classmates about the blessings of baptism."
6. "Normalize the event so the child being baptized feels special, not different. See it as a normal group activity. Make it a welcome to the family. Lots of hip, hip, hooray."
7. "Encourage families to supply a party in the classroom to continue the celebration of this life changing event in their child's life."
8. "Celebration of baptismal birthdays monthly. Reminding students and families of the importance of being a baptized child of God, and presenting a gift to the student as he/she celebrates."

Budgeting

1. "Invest- our church willingly supports our school budget by providing just over 50% of the funds! Because we can keep tuition reasonable, more families can afford it and more

children are in our seats to hear the Gospel every day. Many of those families are also choosing to join our church, some only for the tuition break that affords them. Yet, this still gives us more opportunities to share the love of Christ with them in school and in worship. Our church invests heavily in our students' futures!"

2. "Having financial aid available. Many families want a Christ-centered education, but the financial part can get in the way."
3. "We charge a higher tuition for non-members. Most people become members when enrolling in the school. We require a minimum of 50% worship attendance from our members, or they pay non-member tuition rates for the entire next school year. It is working very well in that 200 kids are members and only 20 are non-members. Very few families of those 20 are non-members. Most are members who refuse to worship with us and have to pay non-member rates."
4. "A big part of our success is our Child Development Center. In our area people can choose our 4K program for free. It is funded by the public schools. We still share Christ with the kids as always."

Connecting: Philosophy

1. "Meet them where they are. As prospective families visit our school or interact with our staff in the community, we make an effort to meet them, to see where they are coming from, and where they currently are spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. If a parent says they 'don't do church' or 'haven't really taught the kids about God,' just begin there without judgment or any negative feedback. We say we have families of all faith backgrounds and some without a faith background, which seems to allow prospective parents to feel like they could be part of us no matter where they fall on the spectrum. We make no apologies or secret of the fact that we are a 'Jesus school,' but we don't use that to screen out potential students. We have been blessed to teach a Muslim student and a Hindu student each for only a year. We don't know if the seeds we planted will bloom in their lives, but we were grateful to have the opportunity to share Jesus with the children every day."
2. "Be ready to give an answer at the appropriate time. Make sure those answers show the love and grace of Jesus at all times, even if some Law was also required. Our church makes use of attendance records to gauge member vs. active member status, which can feel very law-centered to some."
3. "Speak in the vernacular. Just as the apostle Paul so masterfully used the speech and customs of his audiences to help them understand the Gospel, we try to be understood easily. In our Lutheran school, gone are the days when asking 'What does this mean?' brings the automatic 'We should fear and love God so that....' Some of our parents have never heard of a catechism

or know what Lent or Maundy Thursday is, so we are intentional about explaining our Lutheran Christian beliefs and practices in an inviting way. Unlike the popular ‘...For Dummies’ book series, which makes its readers admit they are dummies, we want to be kinder to our families and show them respect. Teacher and principal newsletters are weekly communications which highlight church happenings with a constant welcome to join us.”

4. “Commit to your watch. Years ago, our principal was debating admitting a student who had been in some rather serious trouble. The family was not particularly spiritual and seemed to be shopping only for a fresh start for their child and would go along with the side order of Jesus we daily serve without any real interest in the spiritual life. Our staff talked about the risk to our current students, what the upper grade families might say, and how this might take us down a bad path. When all was laid out, our principal quietly said ‘Someday when I answer for all I have done, never let it be said that I kept a child away from learning about Jesus. Not on my watch.’ So whether our watch is as teacher, admissions director, secretary, or pastor we take our watch seriously. In this de-churched or un-churched world, we may be the only vision of Jesus that people may see today or ever. So we try, with God’s help, to represent Jesus’ love every day in every way. Easy to do when we are talking about greeting families cheerfully or helping parents navigate our athletics practice schedule, but much harder when we have to respond to an accusation of a child bullying another or why the coach has benched a player.... We try to speak the truth in love.”
5. “Be passionate about the mission- at Immanuel, our mission statement is ‘to draw people closer to the person of Jesus Christ and assure them of His gifts, namely, the abundance of life on earth and the endless life in heaven.’ We are passionate about bringing people closer to Jesus, from our students to our parents. We rejoice over every new member and encourage all with our prayers and our attention.”
6. “Welcome people- take a ‘fresh eyes’ tour of every part of your church and school to see if visitors are welcomed, can understand where to go and what to do, can get involved. Be genuinely enthusiastic when you see them in worship. Teachers who seek out their students’ families in worship can make newer families feel quickly connected and the students, especially little students, love to see their teachers outside the classroom!”
7. “Think like a marketer- always ask how you can let people know about your church and school. What are we conveying? Are we presenting our school and church in the best light? Do people have our contact info handy? (Notepads and branded items can help.) Ask your families for their word of mouth advertising. Connect church members and school kids- singing in worship, kids sign ‘Thank You’ cards to donors, photos of school events in church displays, kids sing and serve treats to senior Bible study.”
8. “Crazy as this sounds, we try to NOT talk about membership in our church. We talk about engagement, belonging, being one of us who worships here, being part of a family at Trinity, etc. This generation does NOT care about membership at all. Belonging is what they cherish.”

9. "All of our school and PTL activities are open to church members as well as school families. I believe informal involvement helps those without a church home seek to become members."
10. "Always welcoming ALL as our honored guests to New Hope. We work hard to not use the words 'non churched' or 'un churched.' Would we want to be called that? I would not feel warmly welcome to a church or school if I had that label."
11. "We consciously named the school New Hope Christian School ...a ministry of New Hope Lutheran Church. We deeply respect our heritage as LCMS Lutherans. Martin Luther said it best himself when he said he was a Christ follower and not a Luther follower. We welcome all who desire to learn more about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We stand amazed at the Holy Spirit's moving through the ministry of the school."
12. "Have a team of staff Pastors, Teachers, Administrators who really want to do ministry and see the value of the Lutheran School in sharing Christ with the community."
13. "All these things we try to accomplish. Sometimes they work well, and sometimes they don't work as well as we hoped. We work hard to speak with one voice to keep Immanuel's mission statement at the core of what we do each day."

Connecting: Events

1. "Open the front door- admissions, marketing, public relations and communications all introduce a school to a wider audience, many of whom may have never thought their kids could belong in a Lutheran school. Use campus events, Facebook, website, news articles and tours to let people in the door to see what you do in your church and school."
2. "Take a look at the side doors and the back door- when we saw quite a few families completing our new member class but not attending after the class was over, we tried a Bible study for new members and a mentor system to encourage attendance and involvement."
3. "We have a dinner for the parents to encourage them to register their kids in our Lutheran Day School. We have been very successful in this process."
4. "Have several social events planned. Trunk or Treat, Valentines parties, class academic fairs (where at the end of a project, parents come in to see what was learned). These are times it makes it easy to get to know other families, when families can feel connected they are more likely to join."
5. "Christmas Caroling in the school's neighborhood with school and church members together with hot chocolate afterward."

6. "Zion offers free breakfast and lunch to all children ages 1-18 in our community through the Summer Foods Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This program runs from the after school gets out until the week before school starts in the fall. All information is published in English and Spanish and is distributed through the public grade schools, the local food pantry, the area churches, and the newspaper."
7. "Zion's Summer Daze summer camp is publicized to the community and is open to all families. It is for children ages 3 through 8th grade."
8. "Zion participates in community events such as local parades and festivities. This presence strengthens the relationship with our community and helps people be aware of our school and what we have to offer. Zion has also handed out free food and water to attendees at various community events."
9. "Another activity is the 'Touch A Truck' sponsored by our preschool. People participating in bringing a vehicle are from throughout the community and surrounding areas. The event is publicized and everyone in the community is invited and welcome to attend. The athletic department sponsors a 5K shuffle which is open to all community members. We also host a variety of other clubs and organizations which are open to the public."
10. "Providing opportunities for students to just 'hang out' with each other is helpful in creating opportunities to connect with families who might not come to something where the expressed emphasis is on a devotional or worship service. In the past, we have used organizations like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to set up events like 'Saturday Night Live' where students just come together for a night of games and hanging out, but we still work in some spiritual growth activities."
11. "The administrator sends a 'Monday Note' which often includes specifics about events sponsored by the church that are not just school family activities."
12. "We try to have several church and school fellowship activities throughout the year. Some of the activities are Trunk or Treat, Bingo Night, School Auction, Ice Skating, Father/Daughter Ball, and Movie Nights. These help build the connection between church and school, and many parents start attending our services as a result."
13. "Packing gift boxes for the servicemen in November for Christmas or doing a Samaritan's Purse project bring families together to service and then pray with and for them and the project."

Early Childhood Director Role

"Our Early Childhood Director does a great job of knowing families and their situations. Inviting them to church, introducing families to others in the church family is important."

Enrollment

1. “Part of our enrollment and registration process includes asking new families if they currently have a home church. Those without a home church are invited to come and worship with us. They don’t always do that right away.”
2. “School outreach to non-churched families – Have an open mind when enrolling non-churched families and help them to feel welcome and accepted.”
3. “The initial conversation with a family when they inquire about the school, from our Admissions Counselor, Pastor, and Principal. The conversation is about being a part of a community of faith. Painting a picture of what that looks like including church membership. New member classes that are engaging and welcoming.”
4. “Admissions Director: we have a point person to not only head up admissions, but also to make sure that our churches and families feel connected to the school. Our Admissions Director reaches out to area preschools, area churches and other groups regularly.”
5. “Admissions Counselor – Trinity’s Admission Counselor is fantastic. Her ministry does not end with enrollment. She continually communicates with families throughout the years and invites them to be part of our school and church family.”

Faith Formation

1. “Our faith formation process is exciting for non-connected families because it does not feel like normal Religion class. We have gone away from the learn the facts, pass on doctrine, etc. model for engaging students and families in conversations about faith and real life issues in order to allow God’s Word to be actively used to discuss real life for people. It is a large step away from what we have been doing in our schools for years, and it is a very comfortable and exciting for non-connected people.”
2. “We teach faith formation. As part of our Champions for Christ curriculum, we take the ten components and work through the theory of what it means to be a CFC. Then we take it a step further and make sure what the students learn is applied so that it becomes part of their fabric.”
3. “At the older grade levels (especially high school), we have found our religion classes to be more effective when the emphasis is on how our personal response to Christ’s love for us impacts every aspect of our lives rather than digging deep into theological issues. To be clear, I don’t mean that we don’t dig into theological issues at times, but that is not the emphasis—especially in the early stages of the class.”

Family

1. "We try to make every decision about ministry with the idea of 'How do we actively engage the parents and kids together?' instead of constantly separating adults and kids in ministry."
2. "Family activities. Planned activities occur to involve the families. Events that excite and interest the students and involve the parents, i.e., back to school night, family fitness night, etc. Trinity's PTL is productive in this area."
3. "Volunteer Hours Program: this program encourages our families to get involved to earn service hours required each year. The hours can be performed at the school or at their home LCMS church. This encourages families to become invested in the school as a whole."
4. "Proactive Parent Communication: newsletter- both the high school and the elementary produce a newsletter to keep parents informed; social media (Facebook, twitter, etc.)- our social media presence ensures that not only our parents, but the community as well is informed of our activities both inside the school and in our congregations."
5. "I conduct a new family interview with any new family to the school. I learn as much as I can about their past experience with church. Most people who have a past are ready to reconnect to a church where they won't get hurt or judged like they were before. I simply invite them to come worship with us to see if it 'feels' different than what they experienced before. And I ask them to come say 'Hi' to me when they are here."
6. "Every new family is assigned a 'Mentor Family' who is a member of our congregation and works to stay in touch."
7. "We have begun a program called 'Family in Focus' with specific events designed to be inclusive for entire families."
8. "Mentoring programs for new families to our church and school. Mentored by current families who are members of our church."
9. "We are planning new initiatives to assist us to be even better at connection with non-connected families: mentor families; how to make community members feel like they are part of the Zion family; and especially – teaching the children how to respond to help make proper, God-pleasing connections."
10. "As administrator and one honored to be in leadership with the ministry of New Hope Lutheran Church and School, I work to get to know my families individually. We desire to meet them where they are and help all grow in the saving grace of Jesus. Personal touches, a note, an email, a personal greeting in the hallway or over the phone, have a great impact on 'living out loud' that we are Christ followers and want to show that as best as we can to all who enter the doors of New Hope School and Church."

11. "New Hope Christian School consciously works to invite the school families to the ministry outreach experiences of the Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, Adult Ministry and of course inviting all to Worship with us at New Hope...and 'check us out.' It is non-threatening, and we know that the Gospel message will always be shared loud and clear, front and center."
12. "When families inquire about our school, we invite them to come for a personal tour of Trinity with our principal. The tour involves getting to know the family and finding out what they are looking for as they choose a school. The principal tells them what Trinity offers, and the parents can see if Trinity is a good match for their family. The tour includes visiting classrooms and meeting teachers and students. Parents can sense the care and respect that is shown at Trinity. Our buildings are nice, but our people make Trinity special."
13. "Zion reaches out to young families through several activities. There is a Mom's United organization that is publicized and open to all moms in the community. A wide variety of current topics are presented and discussed."
14. "One of the ways that Zion encourages parents and families who may not be members but whose children attend Zion to be part of our church family is through involvement by the children in church activities. The different classes sing in church several times throughout the year. Many of the children participate in our annual 'Boars Head Festival' that brings in over a thousand visitors each Christmas. Families and guests are always encouraged to attend the various functions."

Outreach Focused

1. "Evangelism in the classroom. Trinity's teachers consistently share the Gospel message throughout the day. To this point, many school chapels are student lead which encourages parent to worship with their student."
2. "We are missionally-minded. One goal is to continue to increase enrollment not for the sake of numbers, but to help fulfill the Great Commission and to share the Gospel! When our students lead tours for new families, it is outreach. When the Principal interviews new families – Jesus Christ is shared and prayer is always part of the time spent together. Each conversation is an opportunity."
3. "Our Mission Board understands that our school is a place where evangelism and mission should be practiced often. It takes every opportunity to include our school children in active roles so they become equipped to practice sharing Christ at every turn – and to be bold in doing so."
4. "Be passionate about the mission- at Immanuel, our mission statement is 'to draw people closer to the person of Jesus Christ and assure them of His gifts, namely, the abundance of

life on earth and the endless life in heaven.’ We are passionate about bringing people closer to Jesus, from our students to our parents. We rejoice over every new member and encourage all with our prayers and our attention.”

5. “Above all, the Holy Spirit has blessed us by continually giving us the opportunity to share the message of Christ’s love with others.”

Pastor Roles

1. “Pastors are involved in the Pre-School and at these events. It is easier because pastors have children at these ages. But for pastors to be involved, for kids to know them and parents to know them is very important.”
2. “Our pastor is excellent at making contacts with new families and introducing himself and inviting them to worship. He offers new member classes 2-3 times per year.”
3. “Have pastors highly involved and invested in the school and families.”
4. “The associate pastor connects to every preschool family whose child is not baptized.”
5. “Trinity’s pastors are also key components as Trinity reaches out to the community. During the above-mentioned tour, the principal, whenever possible, introduces the family to the pastors. The pastors greet them warmly, ask them if they have a church home, and offer to meet and answer any questions they may have. The pastors also conduct our weekly chapel services. In that way the children become very familiar with ‘their’ pastors. The pastors visit classrooms and also teach confirmation classes to Grades 7 and 8 weekly. God has blessed our pastors with wonderful ‘people skills.’
6. “We have on staff a Pastor for Next Generation Ministry and Minister to Families with Young Children to work with me on developing intentional plans for faith formation and development with kids and families.”
7. “ZLS has amazing support from the pastors and congregation. The pastors are a strong presence in the school and at the school’s events.”
8. “Our pastoral staff and other leaders are very supportive of all our school families and their needs in ‘doing life’ together with us.”

Prayer

1. “Pray, pray, pray- surround your efforts in prayer. Pray for the new families who are not yet connected and the families you haven’t even met yet, as well as your current families who may help to connect the new people.”

2. "Pray for God's blessings on your ministry."
3. "All of the above is bathed in prayer...."

Quality Education

1. "Provide a high quality Christian education which draws families (both believers and non-believers) into your school's community. Teach them about the love of Jesus and celebrate baptism whenever possible."
2. "Remember why we are here serving families and what makes us different than the public schools – We want to be a school of excellence in all areas, but we must keep Christ as the center of our school."
3. "Many of our families come to our school for the excellence in education that New Hope is known for in the community. We give all thanks to God! Yet we know God is opening a door for us to share the eternal saving gift of Jesus."
4. "Also, we are thankful for the high quality education we can offer. Parents may choose Trinity due to our academic reputation, but they also will receive the 'one thing needful,' the love of Christ, the Word made flesh."

Relationships

1. "Building a positive, genuine relationship with a family is absolutely necessary first step before pointing out how they may not be living according to God's plan in some aspect of their lives. Even after establishing a positive relationship, tremendous discernment, wisdom, (lots of) humility, and prayer are essential when speaking to someone about something in their life they may need to change. Coming off even slightly judgmental will usually be completely counterproductive."
2. "We focus on relationship building at every level of the church, school, and ECC."
3. "Relationships – Relationships – Relationships. Trinity is constantly working to build relationships between student – teacher, parent – teacher, administration – student, administration – parents, support staff – student, and support staff – parent."
4. "Be relational – connect and get to know the families!"
5. "Relationships, Relationships, Relationships between parents, pastor, principal and teachers. (This is Key.)"

School and Church Connections

1. "Our church and school practices dynamic unity. Our pastors never say 'Zion Lutheran' without including 'church and school.' We are talked about together all the time, including our 133 year history together. When the church or school has a function that includes the community, we work together to talk about the benefits of Christian education."
2. "We work with the church staff to include church members within school functions."
3. "Church outreach program: several groups, including Administrators, sports teams, student and faculty choirs, and others, rotate to visit our congregation churches."
4. "Bottom line -- intentional effort between church and school and holding high standards for quality in our events."

Teacher Roles

1. "Caring teachers who gently and faithfully teach about Jesus and God's Word. We boldly teach the doctrines of the LCMS. As children experience the love and forgiveness of Jesus on a daily basis, they return to their homes as missionaries who share Jesus with their parents."
2. "Due to the wonderful reputation our teachers have with our current parents, these parents become our best 'recruiters.' Word-of-mouth referrals make up a large percentage of new families who choose to send their children to our school."
3. "A homeroom teacher inviting the students and their families to a specific worship service and then having an ice cream social/breakfast afterward."
4. "My teaching staff knows that they are on the front lines of ministry on a daily basis. They do a great job of teaching in school, but they also minister to families all the time."

Worship

1. "We very intentionally prepare worship services expecting there to be visitor and kids at every service – and those visitors are very likely not connected to a church and a bit lost by a regular service."
2. "Encourage folks to attend chapel worship at the school. We have our teachers and students lead about ½ of our chapels. We find the teacher led chapels have the largest parent following. For some parents this is their first church experience."
3. "Having the class chapel presentations by the classes duplicated in a worship service on the weekend."

4. "Having a special service that brings all the students in the school to the worship services to sing a couple of songs and then a fellowship opportunity afterward.....mission Sunday, teacher recognition Sunday, etc."
5. "All of our children K-8 participate in a choir as part of their music education. Our choirs often are part of our worship services and all children are encouraged to attend to sing, even if they are not part of our church. I believe that often families want to join our church after being involved in activities such as these."
6. "A blossoming music program has provided multiple opportunities for families not usually in church to be a part of worship."
7. "Involve students in worship and other church related activities. Children bring their parents to Jesus."
8. "During the Lent and Advent seasons, as well as other times throughout the year, we have classes sing during the services. Parents of these students attend the services, and many of them start attending worship services regularly because the students want to be with their friends. Often, these parents become members of our church."
9. "We moved our preschool to a separate campus a few years ago. The campus enabled our preschool to expand and gave us a separate worship hall for our contemporary service. The church staff who lead the contemporary service are very visible on the preschool campus and involved with school activities. This brings many preschool parents to our contemporary services."
10. "The children are scheduled to sing every month at our Divine Services. The parents attend and the Holy Spirit works in their hearts. By God's grace, some of these parents/children are baptized and become members of our church."
11. "Make it easy to get involved. Our classes sing in worship services during the school year which brings people into our sanctuary who may have never worshipped in a church before. Our church staff is welcoming and encouraging, even when newbies want to present their kids with flowers after singing an offertory hymn, or watching one young dad climb over the tops of the pews to get a better seat to see his child sing. Our pastors always welcome the visitors and give them crib notes such as where to find the songs or Bible readings. We hold services on Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday to allow families with busy schedules to find a time that works for them."
12. "But when our pastors, teachers and staff talk about encouraging families to 'worship together, raising their children under the umbrella of faith' because that umbrella covers the whole family with protection, it can change the dynamic and show our love and care for our families."

OUTREACH MINISTRIES OF LUTHERAN SCHOOL AS A FAITH FORMING ECOSYSTEM: PART TWO

What are the key components of a faith forming ecosystem that is based on best practices named by Lutheran school leaders? The following components are identified by the writer of this report for the purpose of highlighting the essentials of a faith-forming ecosystem designed to connect non-connected children and families with Christ and his church.

1. **VISION.** That school and congregation leaders are being guided by a vision which leads to events and actions designed to connect with those not connected to Jesus Christ is seen in many response, such as references to offering free breakfasts and lunches to children in the community and welcoming ALL as honored guests. That there is power in vision is demonstrated in the naming of multiple events named by school leaders.
2. **MISSION.** The focus of the leaders' view of their mission is clear, that of God's reconciliation of the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This mission focus is reflected in statements such as "Our mission statement is to draw people closer to the person of Jesus Christ and assure them of His gifts." By identifying the "who, to whom, what, where, when, why, and how" parts of a mission statement, school and congregation leaders are articulating the key components of their mission.
3. **PASSION.** A passion for outreach involving parents and children is reflected in a number of leader responses, such as "We are passionate about bringing people closer to Jesus, from our students to our parents. We rejoice over every new member and encourage all with our prayers and our attention." Passion reflects a clear answer to the question, "WHY are we doing this?" Vision, a mission focus, and passion lead to actions which connect non-connected parents and children and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. **COMMUNITY.** That we are a community of committed followers of Jesus Christ is reflected in statements of the education leaders, such as "We focus on relationship building at every level of the church, school, and ECC" and "Relationships, relationships, relationships between parents, pastor, principal and teachers (This is Key)." This emphasis on personal relationships in a community of believers addresses a significant societal search for belonging.
5. **SCHOOL AND CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP.** A number of references to the importance of the engagement of the school and congregation in the formation of disciples are seen in responses to the survey, such as: "Our church and school practices dynamic unity. Our pastors never say 'Zion Lutheran' without including church and school." While one's involvement of a student in a school has an ending, a disciple's engagement with a congregation is eternal.
6. **DESIGNATED ROLES.** Specific attention to the roles of personnel which are given outreach responsibilities named by Lutheran school leaders include Admissions Director/Counselor,

Administrator, Early Childhood Director, Pastor, Principal, and Teacher. The naming of such roles reflects intentionality by a school and congregation to make their outreach to non-connecting children and families a priority of their mission.

7. **IDENTITY.** The significance of young people developing an identity through one's baptism which connects one to Jesus Christ and continuing faith formation through family, school, and congregation is clearly recognized by Lutheran school leaders. This emphasis on the gift of one's identity addresses significant challenges posed by a culture and human nature which shape multiple pseudo identities
8. **WORSHIP.** With one's baptismal identity being formed in the contexts of family, school and congregation, worship in school and congregation settings is seen by school leaders as a key event that involves children, their families, leaders, and congregations. This perspective is reflected in a comment of a school leader: "We very intentionally prepare worship services expecting there to be visitors and kids at every service." Another leader observed that "Our classes sing in worship services during the school year which brings people into our sanctuary who may have never worshipped in a church before." As empirical studies demonstrate, there is a clear relationship between one's worship practices and faith actions.
9. **FAMILY.** The high value placed upon family is seen in repeated references to the importance of integrating the families of learners in the lives of schools and congregations, such as "We try to make every decision about ministry with the idea of 'How do we actively engage the parents and kids together?' and 'I conduct a new family interview with any new family to the school.'" Such recognition by school leaders of the central role of the family which connects with a school and congregation engages one in the three most powerful agencies that shape the faith of disciples.
10. **VOCATION.** The call to live as a follower of Christ in all facets of life, personal, family, congregational, work, leisure, government, financial, and the larger social order is described by a school leader in this way: "As part of our Champions for Christ curriculum, we take the tent components and work through the theory of what it means to be CFC. Then we take it a step further and make sure what the students learn is applied so that it becomes part of their fabric." A holistic perspective on living as a disciple in all contexts of life equips one for reflecting the light of Christ in a sin-darkened world.
11. **COMMUNICATION.** The intentionality of leaders and staff to develop multiple avenues of communication with those waiting to be connected to Christ and his church is expressed in such statements as "Open the front door – admissions, marketing, public relations and communications all introduce a school to a wider audience, many of whom may have never thought their kids could belong in a Lutheran school. Use campus events, Facebook, website, news articles and tours to let people in the door to see what you do in your church and school." A second leader added: "Both the high school and the elementary produce a newsletter to keep parents informed; social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)- our social media presence ensures that not only our parents, but the community as well are informed

of our activities both inside the school and in our congregations.” With the constituents of schools and congregations being bombarded by streams of information, effective communication channels and winsome content that focus on people, events, and the Best News in the world will impact the connecting ministries of schools and congregations.

12. **EVENTS.** An array of events sponsored by schools and congregations designed to promote interactions among families of the school, congregation, and larger community are identified by leaders in their responses, such as “Have several social events planned. Trunk or Treat, Valentines parties, class academic fairs (where at the end of a project, parents come in to see what was learned). These are times it makes it easy to get to know other families, when families can feel connected they are more likely to join.” A another leader described their outreach events in this way: “Zion participates in community events such as local parades and festivities. This presence strengthens the relationship with our community and helps people be aware of our school and what we have to offer. Zion has also handed out free food and water to attendees at various community events.” Participation in events promotes conversation, interactions, a sense of engagement, and images that strengthen relationships and connections with school and congregation.

13. **ECOSYSTEM.** The impact of the inter-relationships of individuals, families, schools, congregations, the media, the larger community, and the planet as an ecosystem is seen in references to a number of components of a faith ecosystem. For example, a school leader pointed out that the “Church outreach program: several groups, including administrators, sports teams, student and faculty choirs, and others, rotate to visit our congregation churches.” An example of disciple-involvement in the larger community is this description of a school project: “Packing gift boxes for the servicemen in November for Christmas or doing a Samaritan’s Purse project bring families together to service and then pray with and for them and the project.” Disciples who live in a society that promotes competing world-views and value systems will grow in faith and service through their engagement in ecosystems of faith forming families, schools, and congregations.

COMPONENTS OF A FAITH FORMING ECOSYSTEM FOR CONSIDERATION: PART THREE

While recognizing that the survey of “Best Practices” provided limited space for the responses of participants, reflection on the data suggests that giving consideration to possible components of a faith forming ecosystem may add to the outreach ministries of Lutheran schools and congregations.

1. **STRATEGIC PLANNING.** Engaging in strategic planning for outreach can heighten intentionality and increase opportunities for connecting with parents and children.
2. **SOCIAL MEDIA.** Implementation of a comprehensive use of social media may expand contacts with, for example, young adults.
3. **BEING INTER-GENERATIONAL.** Involving the generations, such as high school youth, young adults, retiring Boomers, and older adults, may lead to developing a variety of roles in the outreach ministries of Lutheran schools and congregations.
4. **FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION.** With Lutheran school leaders intentionally connecting with families in many ways, offering family life education events can impact the families of students, the congregation, and the larger community in significant ways.
5. **WHAT OTHER PARTS OF AN OUTREACH MINISTRY CAN BE CONSIDERED???**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Close

In the article referred to at the beginning of this report, the author wrote, “It is hard to imagine a better environment than Lutheran schools to reach the lost.” With many parts of a faith forming ecosystem of Lutheran schools and congregations impacting the lives of young people, parents and families, the power of this triad of agencies, family, school, and congregation, is clearly evident in the best practices reported by Lutheran school leaders.

APPENDIX ONE: PARTICIPANTS OF THE SURVEY

Concordia Lutheran School, Fort Wayne, Indiana	Michael Rosin, Principal
Lutheran School Association, Decatur, Illinois	Kyle Karsten, Principal
Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran, Scottsdale, Arizona	Chad Block, Principal
St. Peter Lutheran, Arlington Heights, Illinois	Bruce Rudi, Principal
Immanuel Lutheran, St. Charles, Missouri	Diana Meers, Principal
St. John Lutheran, Portage, Wisconsin	Douglas Jacoby, Principal
Trinity Lutheran, Sheboygan, Wisconsin	Gregory Becker, Principal
Springfield Lutheran, Springfield, Missouri	Paul Baker, Principal
Immanuel Lutheran, East Dundee, Illinois	Sue Domeier, Principal Julia Heinz, PK Director, Admission Director
Our Savior Lutheran, Springfield, Illinois	Jill Gerberding, Principal
Zion Lutheran, St. Charles, Missouri	Marc Debrick, Principal
Zion Lutheran, Walburg, Texas	Tom Wrege, Principal
Trinity Lutheran Early Childhood Center, Clinton Township, MI	Julian Petzold, Principal
St. Paul Lutheran, Munster, Indiana	Barbara Mertens, Principal
Trinity Lutheran, Tinley Park, Illinois	Stephen Sted, Principal
Zion Lutheran, Marengo, Illinois	Joanie Smith, Principal
New Hope Lutheran, Neenah, Wisconsin	Laurie Prewitt, Principal
St. John Lutheran, Ocala, Florida	Tim Schmidt, Principal

APPENDIX TWO: THE SURVEY

BEST PRACTICES: OUTREACH IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

The inclusion of your school in the list of twenty-two Lutheran Schools named for connecting with non-connected parents in the January-February, 2015 edition of *The Lutheran Layman* is commended!

Since there is considerable interest in learning about the “Best Practices” of the schools named in the article, this survey of leaders of the twenty-two schools is being conducted by Marv Bergman and Don Weber of the Nebraska District.

A request for your consideration is that you name four or five practices of your school which served to connect previously non-connected parents and children to Christ, your school, and the congregation.

BEST PRACTICES IN CONNECTING WITH NON-CONNECTED FAMILIES

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Please return to marv.bergman@cune.edu within a week if possible.

If you are interested in a summary of survey results, please check this space. _____

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!!!

APPENDIX THREE: HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

1. The initial contact with school administrators was made in the Spring of 2015 in a telephone call which described the purpose of the survey and asked for one's participation.
2. Affirmation of the invitation to participate was followed by distribution of the survey by email.
3. Delays in responses were followed by follow-up calls.
4. The return of surveys was followed by emails thanking leaders for their responses.

Appendix Four: Rate of Return

Population	Responses	Return Rate
22	18	82%

Marvin Bergman
Seward, Nebraska
marv.bergman@cune.edu