

IS A CHRISTIAN DAY SCHOOL ESSENTIAL
FOR SURVIVAL IN THE INNER-CITY?

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The essay which was assigned to me: whether or not the Christian day school is essential for the survival of the Lutheran Church in the inner-city, is one of the most difficult writing assignments which I have had. The nature of this topic and the response to it is, at best, speculative. There is no one who can say without question whether or not the inner-city congregation can survive with or without the school. Many ventures have failed in the central city: churches, schools, businesses, and public housing. Some have survived. There seems to be an absence of literature which addresses itself specifically to the topic. There is a multitude of information which identifies the problems of the central city, but this seminar is not being conducted again to identify these problems, but rather to make plans to move in a sensible direction toward resolving the difficult circumstances which we face.

In order to get a variety of views regarding the question of the essay, I interviewed several people. Some of those people were from other church groups. Among those interviewed was the former principal of the abandoned Cross and Immanuel Lutheran Schools in Milwaukee - two schools whose inner-city work had received considerable attention. Another is a well-known Missouri Synod pastor who feels that the Lutheran School is not the best stewardship of our monies, and who is attempting to work in the inner city through social programs. Although there was an assortment of individuals interviewed, most of them discussed and were concerned with the same issues. This paper will discuss the resolving of these issues.

Historically, the Lutheran elementary school was considered an agency

whereby the church could indoctrinate the children of members with the teachings of the Christian church. It was aimed at supplementing the Christian instruction of the home. The central-city Lutheran school, however, has developed into an evangelism tool. Although it also aims to do what the Lutheran school was historically meant to do, its emphasis is more on getting new Lutheran families into the church. Whether by design or by chance, it has been demonstrated as the best evangelism tool which inner-city congregations have found to date, whether they be Lutheran, Catholic, or Seventh Day Adventists. The reality of the situation is that the learning atmosphere of most central-city public schools has deteriorated to the point that almost no learning can take place. As a result, central-city residents are looking for an alternative, and they are finding it in the parochial schools. Most would agree that it is not the religious affiliation of the school which attracts these families, but rather that the private school affords the inner-city family an opportunity to escape from the public school.

If it is true that the Lutheran school in the inner city is thriving because people are escaping public education, does the school even have a right to continue? Even though you get them, you still have not got them. That is, even though these children enroll in the school, it doesn't guarantee that the family will be won for Christ and that the family will become a Wisconsin Synod family. There are few principals, teachers, and pastors who have had any experience at all in the central city who are not sensitive to this point. As a result, they have established a variety of procedures for pulling these people into the church.

The point which is being developed here is that it is through the school that the Lutheran Church is making contact with the inner city. Other avenues

for contact have brought minimal success. The inner-city parent feels a great need to have an education for his child. He considers this a way out-the way to the good life. This point is made very clear to us in the daily newspapers. Almost every issue has an article related to the efforts to raise the academic achievement of those students who attend the inner-city schools. We are capitalizing on this basic need for an education as did Albert Schweitzer capitalize on the need of people in Africa for medical attention.

Can the inner-city congregation survive without the school? Perhaps we have to be more specific. Survival is a relative term. Does survival mean keeping the building heated and keeping the name of a pastor on the bulletin board on the front lawn of the church? Certainly survival means more than this. It means keeping at least what we have today and building on it. Because of the contact which the school has given us with the residents of the central city, congregations cannot survive without the school. The school is essential.

Are there alternatives to the school? Are there ways of meeting the need for an education which inner-city parents are seeking for their children? Basically there are not any that I can identify. Vacation Bible school, Saturday school, Sunday school, day care centers, Pioneers, choirs, and breakfast programs are weak alternatives. They might be supplements to the school, but they cannot be considered alternatives which would keep the inner-city congregation thriving. The once or twice per week contact which these activities give the church with the inner-city family is too limited. They also do not attach to that need for education which is so dominant in the thinking of many of the people in the inner city.

We have proved that we can get the inner-city child into our schools, but

are we using this door (that is the school) as effectively as we might? Most of the research literature available indicated that the changes in value orientations which do occur in schools are limited and are conditioned by the previous experiences of the student in his family life. That is, the home still has more influence than a child's school or his peer group. Parents must come to understand the vital place they have in the developing of attitudes and standards of behavior in their children. A Christian day school may then be able to supplement the attitudes and standards of the home with a greater knowledge and deeper understanding of the meaning of Christian activity in the various aspects of living, worship, and learning - a function which the school historically had. If we are going to get to the inner-city family we need a strong base of operation. We need an organization which fulfills the educational need of the families, which has holding power, and which has clout.

If the inner-city Lutheran school is again going to be a supplement to the home, the school will have to make some demands of the parents. They will have to attend instruction class, they will have to attend church, and they will have to come to school meetings. We must not only GET them, but we must KEEP them. We might elaborate on this point by referring to the White Owl commercial. The man says that "sooner or later we're going to get ya". So the Lutheran church gets the inner city to make that first contact through the Lutheran School, and through the Christian training of both the child and the family, the Holy Ghost will have the opportunity to bring these people to Christ through faith in Him. We are told in the Bible that where His Word is taught it will not return void. So we can then say with all confidence to these parents, "Send your kids to our school, you come to our church, and we're going to getcha. Sooner or later, through the Word and the Sacraments and

with the help of the Holy Spirit, we're going to getcha."

Perhaps nothing has been said in this essay which has not been said before. Most would probably agree with what has already been stated. The problem, the crux of this whole discussion is this, where will the money come from to support this active inner-city congregation? Without exception, all of those who were interviewed expressed the opinion that the school is becoming too much of a burden on the congregational budget. In several areas the middle class minority groups are beginning to move out and poorer families are moving in. The Seventh-Day Adventist school in Milwaukee, the Missouri Synod schools, and two of our Wisconsin Synod schools are getting financing from outside the local congregation. People from these congregations all agreed that they will need more outside support in the future.

The issue facing us then is that the inner-city congregation, depending solely on its own membership for revenues, will not be able to support a day school indefinitely. The question finally becomes quite simple, can we afford to do mission work in the central city? We all know that we must. Consequently, new ways of financing are going to have to be sought. The two most obvious sources are charging tuition and tapping the budget of the General Board for Home Missions. We have traditionally avoided charging a tuition to the parents of elementary school children. We have done it on a high school level, but not in the elementary school. The reason that tuition has not been charged is basically because of the fact that the command to feed Jesus' lambs applies to all Christians, and not only to parents. Yet, we have been somewhat inconsistent by charging a tuition on the high school level.

No one wants to charge tuition. However, if we are presented alternatives,

tuition is preferable to closing. A tuition charge seems to have become necessary in all inner-city schools. Hopefully, it won't be considered necessary only when a congregation reaches the day when the school either closes or charges tuition. Dr. Dickenson suggested this last year. Holy Angels, a Catholic school of 1300 students in the poorest section of Chicago's ghetto, is charging an enormous tuition and has a long waiting list of students. An article regarding this school is referred to in the bibliography.

The tuition revenues will also need to be supplemented. A school of 125 students needs a minimum of \$50,000 for an operating budget. A tuition charge of \$100 per student would only supply \$12,500 in revenues. It is doubtful that a congregation would be able to provide the additional \$37,500 necessary for the operation of the school. If the Synod's General Board for Home Missions is convinced that the school is essential for the survival of the inner-city congregation then it will have to provide the balance of the support for the school. They have indicated a willingness to do this, but they, too, are pressed for funds.

In addition, Pastor Berg has indicated that if they are to support inner-city schools, they are going to need some answers to some very important questions. Are they going to be asked to support an "Old Guard" operation? That is, keep a white oriented congregation alive until the elderly, long-time members die? Is the entire inner-city program being run as efficiently as it can be?

Whenever a central office gets involved with the manipulation of local affairs there are certain fears which arise. The fear of losing the autonomy

of the local congregation is the chief fear. As soon as the Synod begins holding the purse strings there are definitely going to be some changes. The fear of losing some autonomy is justified. Synod will naturally become involved with the decision making at the local level because they are responsible for making the wisest use of their limited budget. The General Board for Home Missions has the entire nation to consider in its planning. The work in the central cities is only a small part of the scope of their efforts.

If Synod aid is the answer to financial problems, it seems inevitable then that the central-city congregations are going to lose part of their authority. They will not be able to make all of the final decisions, and they are going to have to demonstrate the fact that their total operation is being efficiently administered. Some congregations might even have to close their schools because the General Board for Home Missions might decide that their area can be served more efficiently by consolidating their efforts with a neighboring congregation.

Perhaps the greatest danger in this entire set of circumstances is the loss of local attachment to the local school. Our congregations take great pride in their schools. If they lose part of their authority to run their schools, some of the pride in and love for the schools might be lost. If the school is to serve as an evangelism arm of the church, this strong relationship of the congregation to the school must continue. Otherwise, the school could simply become a community school, and the evangelism purpose would be lost.

This essay could end at this point. Basically, I have stated that the school is essential for the survival of the inner-city congregation; that part of its support will have to be raised through tuition and from the budget of the General Board for Home Missions, but that care must be taken so that the

school does not become a community school with only a superficial affiliation with the church. Yet, the whole inner-city evangelism effort, as it pertains to the school, is more complex than has been indicated.

There is overstaffing and understaffing. Some classes are too large and some are too small. There are other staffing problems. In some cases the school has made contact with the community, but the pastor and the congregation have been unable to relate to the new families and bring them into the main-stream of the congregations, and consequently, the school's evangelism effort falls short of its potential. Hopefully these problems will lessen as the inner-city congregations become more experienced in inner-city work. And hopefully, the limited involvement of the General Board for Home Missions will serve as the catalyst which will help to expand our efforts to bring the inner-city resident to the Lutheran Church, through which he will be exposed to the unadulterated preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Still, as a last ditch effort, if all that has been suggested fails, I want to present the following for your consideration. It is related to consolidating our efforts in the inner city. To a certain extent, this has already begun through the inner-city pastors organization here in Milwaukee. Before I elaborate, I want to mention this. First of all, I am not an advocate of the large school on the elementary level. Consolidation usually suggests this. An elementary school of 125-180 students can accomplish all that is necessary on an elementary school level. Many years of research and countless studies have failed to show that school size or even one approach to teaching is consistently better than any other for use with all children. Furthermore, there is no way to determine which school size or which way of teaching a given subject would be the best in a given situation, with a particular

teacher and a particular group of children. The effectiveness of any school regardless of size or regardless of the methodology finally depends directly upon the skill of the teacher. It is his ability to tailor methods and materials to the needs of each child that counts.

School finally boils down to a single situation. A teacher and a group of kids. In large schools the students in each class are usually the same age. In small schools, the group usually consists of children of varying ages. But in all schools we find teachers who have individual teaching styles and preferences: children who have varied backgrounds and experiences, different levels of language skill and concept development. Regardless of school organization, no matter how decisions are arrived at, regardless of the materials that are used or the equipment which is available, it is important to remember that teaching can be successful with one approach or a combination of approaches, in big schools and small schools. A factor then which is of prime consideration is that of personalities---those of teachers, children, parents, and administrators---they greatly affect the success or failure of any given school program. Secondly, if the consolidation of any type means the diminishing of the close contact between congregation and school and parents and school, then consolidation would not be worth the effort since it would doom the school to failure, which in turn would limit a congregation's contact with the inner city.

Some people are, nevertheless, currently discussing various consolidation ideas. The General Board for Home Missions is on record as favoring it. I personally feel that the tuition and General Board for Home Missions subsidy which has been suggested will be enough of a financial resource for the survival of the inner-city congregations. But we do want to talk about solutions to our problems and we do want to consider as many alternatives as we can.

The proposal which I have to suggest would be a drastic change from the operation which we now have. I am sure that we are not ready for this in Milwaukee yet. I am not acquainted enough with the congregations in other cities to pass any judgment on them. Nevertheless, consider this:

MID-CITY ORGANIZATION OF LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Proposed that:

1. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod elementary schools of the inner-city area be reorganized into a joint educational system under the direction of a single governing body.
2. The new organization be incorporated as a non-profit educational corporation for the express purpose of directing and operating the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod elementary schools of the inner city.
3. The corporation be governed by a Board of Directors whose members are representative of and elected by the Lutheran inner-city community at large. The Executive Secretary for the General Board for Home Missions or his delegate (possibly a District Mission Board Official), shall be an ex-officio member of the Board.
4. The Board of Directors be given full responsibility and authority to formulate and establish policies regarding the educational program, the calling of teachers, management and utilization of physical plants, procurement of equipment and instructional materials, establishing and administering uniform charges and methods of financing, and all other matters pertinent to the direction and guidance of the schools.

To effect this reorganization, it is proposed that:

5. An interim Board of Directors be appointed to:
 - a. Draft the constitution for the new corporation;
 - b. Prepare and file papers of incorporation;
 - c. Draft the By-Laws for the Board of Directors;
 - d. Prepare uniform contract terms for the transfer of each school from the jurisdiction of the local congregation to the new corporation for a limited period of time---initially perhaps three years.

Mid-City Organization of Lutheran Elementary Schools
vis-a-vis General Board for Home Missions

It is proposed that:

6. The Board of Directors shall be subject to the advice and consent of the G.B.H.M.
7. The Board of Directors, subject to G.B.H.M. approval, shall have jurisdiction in matters pertaining to continuing, closing, consolidating, expanding, restricting, and establishing new schools.

Mid-City Organization of Lutheran Elementary Schools
vis-a-vis Local Congregations.

Some schools are in less serious financial difficulty than others, at least for the present and immediate future; most are well organized; in a number of schools there is excellent rapport and cooperation between the school and members of the congregation. Under these

circumstances, there may be a reluctance to relinquish schools to the control of the corporation.

It is the belief of some, however, that if the present system is continued the schools will be closed one or more at a time until only one or two schools remain; that during this period of deterioration financial, educational, staffing and other problems will feed and enlarge one upon the other; and that consequently our evangelism effort in the inner city will be seriously jeopardized.

Therefore, it is proposed that:

8. All of the congregations in the inner-city area, even those without schools, be included in the new corporation and the educational facilities of the schools be open to all members of the area.
9. The local congregations cede their jurisdiction over the schools; that they withdraw from actual direction and control of the individual schools; and participate in the direction of the new corporation to the extent of and through their elected representation on the Board of Directors.
10. The individual congregations, by appropriate leasehold contracts, cede the management and control of school plants and facilities and all instructional materials, supplies, and equipment to the Mid-City Organization of Lutheran Elementary Schools.
11. Existing congregational School Boards or Committees

assist the congregational Boards of Trustees in planning the transfer.

This consolidation proposal will not, unfortunately, reduce the total cost of Christian education in the inner city. Rising salaries and other costs make this an unfounded hope. It was designed rather to achieve a more equitable distribution of costs and to insure maximum educational return for every dollar spent. This educational return being evaluated in terms of adult confirmations, day school enrollment, plus other indicators of effective evangelism.

As was indicated, there seems to be little evidence that we are ready for any type of consolidation. First because of the fact that consolidation does not bring with it any guarantee of success. Secondly, we have never, historically speaking, been interested in any type of a consolidated effort on the elementary school level. And thirdly, there is always the fear that the local congregation will lose its close relationship to the school - something which would seem to be very important if the school is to serve as an evangelism tool.

It should be noted that the Catholic schools have not worked together in the inner city nor have they insisted that the parents of non-members be involved with the school. They have not been very successful here in Milwaukee. The Missouri schools in the inner city have not, until recently, worked together. They have lost three very large schools and could lose a fourth. This seminar gives evidence that we are trying to work together. But maybe it should extend beyond the point of only sharing ideas.

As with all evangelism work, making progress in evangelism in the inner city is difficult. People do not come in droves to the steps of the church. It is the natural tendency of man to avoid accepting Christ as his Savior. Yet, through the Christian day school, we have been given a tremendous evangelism tool. It has been found to be the most effective evangelism tool that the inner-city churches have used. The school is a place where God's Word is taught, and He has promised that "wherever my Word is taught it will not return void".

The essay has attempted to take a realistic position regarding the problems and the solutions to the inner-city school and its evangelism efforts. It was not intended to be a pessimistic, "Oh, me, oh, my, I've got problems I can't solve" presentation. Only God can see whether our efforts will survive. We cannot doubt that God has called us to serve the souls in the inner city. We know that the school has proved to be the best and most effective tool to reach these souls. It is not a question of whether the inner-city school will survive. Until a better way to bring the Word to the inner city it MUST survive. We must remain ever prayerful that God will direct us. Our chief goal is to bring Christ to the people. God has promised to bless us. Surely, as we face our problems with the assurance of God's blessing we can have a positive attitude. We might find that our Synod's greatest evangelism and mission successes might be found right here in America - in the centers of our nation's largest cities. Whether it be bringing God's Word through the schools or some unforeseen means not yet considered - Lord grant us success in the name of our Savior.

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