

OPERATING A MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL

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I

"Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NIV). These inspired words from the book of Proverbs certainly underscore the importance of Christian education for God's lambs. People need to recognize that fact and then work at doing something about it. I can not imagine that there are too many people, even in the secular world, who do not recognize the importance of education for children. In this high tech, fast paced world we live in an uneducated person hardly stands a chance. A person who can not read or write will find it extremely difficult to secure a good job. The person who can not add or subtract even the simplest math problems will find dealing with his or her personal finances almost impossible. And even if these uneducated people do make it in society, and many do, who are they really kidding. They may be able to fool the people around them but deep inside themselves they must be hurting. They can only imagine what their lives would have been like, how far they could have gone, with a good solid education.

Recognizing a need for something and doing something about it are two different things. Having the best of intentions is not going to get a child educated. You need action. Our country saw the need for action and set up a program of public education. The government, because it sees the importance of educating its youth, has stepped in and established certain programs and even laws to see to it that its citizens are educated.

The church also sees the need for education. Along with teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic it teaches God's Word. The church understands the importance of keeping God as the hub for all its activities. He has to be at the center of all we do and the reason we do what we do. Without God as the hub all the different spokes of activities in our lives would be useless. Educating children from that hub will make them stronger and better equipped to serve their Lord and Savior in society.

In this paper I will be showing how one school can be operated by more than one Christian congregation. The school that I will be using as my example is St. Paul's Lutheran Elementary School in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. This school was established and is owned by St. Paul's Church of Fort Atkinson. In addition, the school is also attended by children of four other area congregations. The names of these congregations are; St. John's, Cold Spring, St. John's, Whitewater, St. Jame's, Cambridge and Bethany, Fort Atkinson. The latter is larger in number than the other three combined so it will be the one referred to most often in this paper. I will show how these five congregations work together for the benefit of their children. The paper will touch on many different aspects of operating a school in this way as opposed to one congregation having its own school or two congregations working with a fifty-fifty arrangement.

II

St. Paul's congregation dates back to the year in which Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States, 1861. "The congregation was organized with 30 members under the name, The First German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Fort Atkinson".¹ It did not take the fledgling congregation long to see the need for Christian education of its young. Just one year after its conception it set up a 'Christenlehre' or Sunday School to provide religious training for its children.² From the minutes of August 24, 1863, "Mr. Philip Weisz was elected as elder for the school-an indication that the congregation intended to organize a school."³ The drive to start a Christian day school was very much alive in 1866 as can be seen from the every member visit to see if \$350.00 could be raised for school and minister's salary.

The dream of starting a school became a reality on August 11, 1868. Pastor J. H. Brockmann was called as pastor and teacher by the congregation. Student tuition was to be paid directly to Pastor Brockmann: first child 25 cents, second child 15 cents, third child 10 cents. A school committee was also established and the first classes were held in a room designated as the 'school room' in the church.⁴

The sincerity of the congregation to make the school an intrical part of its ministry could not have been more apparent than in 1869, one year after classes were started in the church itself, when the congregation decided to build a school between the church and the parsonage.⁵ One can certainly

see the hand of the Lord guiding his people in the direction he wanted them to go. There was no holding back, they were driven with the desire to educate their children in the truths of God and in the way of society.

The year 1876 saw the first calling of a permanent teacher to St. Paul's school. After this the school began to grow and in 1891 it became necessary to build an addition onto the school. In 1907 the school, now called St. Paul's School, expanded again and was divided into two rooms. The Lord continued to bless the educational efforts of the congregation so much that in 1916 work was begun on a new and larger school building. It was dedicated in January, 1917. This structure served its purpose until May 5, 1957 when the present school, minus one addition, was dedicated to the service of God through Christian education. (Five rooms were added in 1965.) Enrollment in the school now numbered 305 pupils instructed by seven teachers.⁶ (see appendix A)

III

St. Paul's congregation is not the only church whose children are enrolled in the school. Other area churches send their children there as well. One of the congregations that makes use of St. Paul's School is Bethany Lutheran Church. This group of believers came about as a result of the Mission Board of the Western Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod who granted the requests that a mission be opened on the north side of town. "The beginnings of Bethany

sort of grew out of St. Paul's and the nucleus were former St. Paul's members who made the requirement that members of Bethany be allowed to send their children over here (St. Paul's).⁷ This was the beginning of the working relationship between the two congregations.

On August 9, 1949 Bethany Church Council approved a motion to hold a joint council meeting with St. Paul's for the purpose of discussing school support. On August 22, 1949 the joint meeting was held. Pastor Jungkuntz (of Bethany) explained the purpose for the meeting was to discuss how Bethany should approach supporting the school financially. Pastor Gieschen (of St. Paul's) stated that they expected no financial support at present but as Bethany's enrollment increased some support may become necessary. The Bethany council appreciated the offer but wanted to help support now rather than wait until enrollment grew so large that it would be too much at once. Pastor Gieschen made the statement that, "The Spirit of Bethany members means more than money at the present time. Cooperation of the two congregations are very excellent... The Spirit shown means more than money to us."⁸ It was also adopted that Bethany be allowed to have an advisory member on St. Paul's school board. Also at this meeting mention was made of sister congregations at Cold Spring and Cambridge. These too were invited to make use of the school for their young.

IV

It is clear from all of the documents and minutes that the working relationship between St. Paul's and the other congregations was indeed a good one. The mechanics for operation of the school seemed to work as well then as they do today. Very little has changed over the years, as far as running the school is concerned. The school building itself is still owned and operated by St. Paul's congregation. There is no 'shared' ownership with the other church bodies. In its Constitution and Bylaws article XII states,

Sister congregations are welcome to send children to St. Paul's Lutheran School provided that the facilities are adequate. In such cases the congregations are asked to bear the cost of training their children, either by financial support of St. Paul's congregation or by supplying (a) teacher (s) for the school.

"You might say St. Paul's holds the reins as it were."⁹ Anything that affects the school such as calling teachers has to go through St. Paul's voting members before any action can be taken. The other congregations can only request that an action they desire be acted upon. The final say is up to St. Paul's. This is not to say that the other four congregations have no input. There has been a 'joint committee on education' set up for this purpose. This committee on education is made up of three members of St. Paul's, two members of Bethany and one each from Cold Spring, Cambridge and White-water. The pastors and male teachers serve on this committee in an advisory capacity. These men meet once a month to

discuss matters of mutual concern. It is this committee that then makes requests to St. Paul's voters.¹⁰ To date none of the congregations have voiced any disapproval with this arrangement. It seems that the voting members of St. Paul's respect the requests of this joint committee. In this way they are respecting the feelings and opinions of the other four congregations as well.

As was mentioned earlier the building is owned solely by St. Paul's but they do expect the other congregations to pick up their fair share of the bill when it comes to educating the children. There is no tuition at the present time as the congregations have this cost set up in their budgets. The cost per student is figured out in August of each year when the financial committees of each congregation meet. At this meeting the individual congregations figure out what their expenses for the year will be. These expenses are then added together to get the total cost for operating the school that year. Capital repairs are not included in this as they are picked up by the owner of the school. Things such as desks, cleaning supplies and other room related materials are added into this figure. These figures are then reported to the joint council. When the exact number of students for the year is determined a simple mathematical division is done to determine the cost per student. Any congregation that has called teachers then subtracts their total salary from that amount and whatever is left is what is owed to St. Paul's

and is paid in monthly installments.¹¹ (see appendix B) It should also be noted that St. Paul's does allow enrollment of "children of parents outside of these congregations, provided the parents submit to the rules and regulations pertaining to the school."¹² These students are charged an additional \$100.00 over the average cost per student. Thus far the Lord has seen to it that the money needed to operate this school has been available whether it arrives via St. Paul's or the other congregations.

It is apparent that this mode of operation works very well in this particular situation but one might legitimately ask why.

V

To answer that question one has to look no farther than the pages of Scripture. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28 NIV). "Christian congregations should be able to work together to the glory of God."¹³ It will only work if there is "a brotherly relationship, a common cause, a working together - when brethren work together in the fear of God it has to come out right".¹⁴ People have to be able to work together and iron out the differences that might arise. In the late 1950's and early 1960's Bethany was "criticized for not doing its fair share."¹⁵ This was worked out when the congregation was educated as to what the school meant to the congregation. Working together as Christians is a must. Thus far the five congregations have

been able to do so by the grace of God. There have been no major problems in the operation of this school as far as the congregations are concerned.

In this day and age one would have to assume that if the problems have been minimal the rules, regulations and contracts between the congregations must be numerous. This is not the case at all. "The gentleman agreement seems to work better than spelling it out."¹⁶ There are no contracts written in stone, there are only Christian congregations working together to serve God and man. When a need or a problem arises they sit down and work it out in a way that benefits all and furthers the work of His kingdom here on earth. Some examples of this gentleman's agreement in action can be seen from what Bethany did when the new school was built in 1957. That congregation, in appreciation for all St. Paul's Church and School had done for them, provided all class-room furniture for the entire school at the cost of \$15,000. St. John's of Cold Spring also contributed some \$2,000 toward the new school. In 1963 when it was apparent that more classrooms were needed it became the official policy of Bethany to send their children to St. Paul's School and to continually strive to increase the support for the school.¹⁷ This was done to assure St. Paul's that if they expanded the school they had Bethany's word that they would continue to do their share in support. That is the kind of gentleman's agreement that has helped the school prosper.

This type of setup has also fostered good will among the members of the congregations today. "Even now the Christian gentlemanly type arrangement that was around in the early days of the school still permeates things. There is not a hard and fast way of doing things but there is a lot of Christian leeway."¹⁸ And the members of the congregations seem to like this arrangement. All of the congregations think of this as 'their school'.

When we talk about what is going on at school our people refer to St. Paul's as being our school. I have enjoyed my work at St. Paul's and I never felt that St. Paul's was there and we were here in all my ministry here (Bethany). We promote a unity here in the school. Most of our people are agreeable to what we are doing.¹⁹

As a former student of this school and a member of Bethany, I can say that I never felt 'out of place'. The students always looked upon the school as their own. There were never any cliques among the children from the different congregations and I feel this is because of the attitude of the parents, teachers and pastors. They all work at making this a multi-congregational school that operates as one. It is for this reason that the school has been such a blessing in so many ways for so many people.

VI

You do not have to look too hard to see the many blessings that this type of arrangement brings about. There are

the intangible benefits such as how the whole community of Fort Atkinson "sees five congregations having a harmonious relationship and able to work things out. That is a pretty powerful gospel sermon there."²⁰ It also allows the children a chance to see children from other congregations "grow with them, sing in their churches once and a while, then as they get to be adults and take leadership roles in their respective congregations it does not become a rivalry of my congregation verses yours. It is kingdom first."²¹ This is going to reap blessings down the road. They will be able to work toward a single goal.

Getting into a few of the tangible benefits we can see how each congregation is able to help each other out. If one congregation is struggling to come up with the funds, "While I do not think that St. Paul's would just drop that congregation's financial obligation I am sure something would be worked out among the other congregations to see to it that they would be able to continue to send their children to school. Payment could be made at a later date."²²

The cost of building a new school comparable to the present one, would be prohibitive to the four congregations making use of St. Paul's. If not prohibitive, at least not very feasible. There would be a number of things that one congregation could not have or do that five congregations can. This is as true for St. Paul's congregation as it is for the other four. They too reap many blessings from

this structure. "If we would not have this type of setup we would not be able to have a full time special education teacher. I'm sure it would be the first thing we would have to look at cutting."²³ The use of computers in each room may take twice as long to become a reality. An updated and 'good' library and text books for the classrooms would be harder to obtain if not for the cooperation between congregations. I could go on and on as far as the blessings and benefits are concerned but let it suffice to say there are many.

VII

Now, lest one think that they have been reading about the 'Church Triumphant' some ink needs to be given to the problems that can and do arise in this type of environment. I imagine the first thing that would seem to be a rough spot is the fact that St. Paul's, as owner of the school, has the final say in all matters that concern the school.

"Bethany I think chafes a little bit under this stipulation... This goes as far even as their calling-their right to call a teacher... In having those plusses, as Bethany has, you have to make some sacrafices, like not having the final say."²⁴ While this could be a huge stumbling block for the other four congregations it does not have to be nor is it. Bethany's teacher Don Hartwig, did not feel that this has played as large a role as one would think mostly because of the joint

committee on education and the Christian attitude that has prevailed on the part of the five congregations. But it is a possible problem that needs to be considered when looking at this type of arrangement.

Another potential problem that has not really festered into a full blown controversy is the name of the school. "I can see where it is hard for Bethany to talk about our Christian day school when the name on it is St. Paul's."²⁵ It would not seem to be an effective evangelism tool outside or even inside the congregation when the name of your school is the name of a sister congregation in the same town. Here again, in this case at least, this potential problem has, by the grace of God, been worked around.

In talking to some of the parents of children who do not belong to St. Paul's congregation I get the impression that they feel somewhat separated from the school. Although this feeling is minimal at best, it still exists at least in theory. The Pastor from Bethany may have summed it up best when he said,

Some of our parents feel that they are a little cut off in the interaction with the school. That if they have a complaint or a valid Christian concern who would they go to? And even if they bring it to our school board members does that get all the way through. In other words do we have a complaint that, even though it might be legitimate can get shoved under ... The larger our enrollment gets the more that seems to be a concern.²⁶

Again, because St. Paul's has been very Christian and understanding this has not become an issue yet but the potential is there if the Devil sees to fan the flames of discontent.

Location of the school must also be looked at when one is looking at problems or potential problems. For St. Paul's there is no problem in this regard. The school is in their backyard. For the other four, logistics is a legitimate problem. There is the potential for the members of these congregations to divorce themselves from this aspect of the church's ministry. They see it as just a school and not as an intricate part of the congregation's ministry. "The called teachers also have a tendency to think in terms of 8 to 4 at school and that is my call."²⁷

There is also a lack of activities at the church such as children singing or called teacher involvement with the church. These things that normally serve as a basis for internal recruitment are lost because of the location of the school.

As with the blessings I am sure I could enumerate on the problems or potential problems of operating a multi-congregational school. It must be remembered that these problems can be avoided or worked out if the congregations first of all remember who it is that they must turn to for help. If they work together in a spirit of Christian love and concern most of the rifts can be stilled quickly and quietly.

VIII

As far as St. Paul's School in Fort is concerned this is the best way to operate a Christian elementary school but it

is, of course, not the only way. There are many schools that operate independent. Each individual congregation operating its own school. This too has its advantages as well as disadvantages. If the financial support is adequate to run a school effectively in the day and age in which it is operating, so much the better but if it has to cut corners to fit the budget who is to say that is the best.

Another option that is available is a fifty-fifty arrangement. In this, each congregation becomes a co-owner of the school and is equally responsible for maintaining the operation of that school. An example of this type of arrangement can be seen in Jerusalem and St. Philip's congregations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In this case both congregations worked equally hard to get the school started. They entered the arrangement with a fifty-fifty mindset. They operate with an independent school board that is made up of two non-called members from each congregation along with the principal from one congregation and the vice principal from the other. The board is autonomous. They meet each year and come up with a budget that is not split fifty-fifty but fifty five St. Philip's and forty five Jerusalem. "This does not reflect the actual proportion of children in the school, though St. Philip's has without a doubt had more students each year. But this is what they (St. Philip's) said they were able to do."²⁸

As far as the operation of the school is concerned the school board makes most of the decisions. They are the ones who

are responsible for the financial aspect as well as calling teachers. "They see what the needs of the congregations are and then send out the call. Each congregation is to have the same number of teachers in the future as they have now."²⁹ In this way if one teacher quits or takes a call they replace, as they see it, a member of that congregation not a called teacher.

"Neither of the congregations would have been able to have a school if it was not for the consolidation."³⁰ Jerusalem had the school building but very few school age children and St. Philip's had a number of school age children with no school building. The merger just made sense to both parties involved. It is interesting to note the name of the school, Beautiful Savior. The neutral name is evidence of the joint ownership of the two congregations. For these two congregations this was the only arrangement that could match each ones particular needs.

IX

What is the best way to operate a Christian elementary school? There is no best way, there is only the way that works best for you in your particular set of circumstances. What works for one congregation might not work for another. The arrangement that St. Paul's has with the other four congregations would not work in every situation. The Jerusalem and St. Philip's set up, while it is fine for them, might not work for two other

congregations. What is the answer then? Only the Lord knows for sure but he has given us the ability to observe what might be best and work in each particular set of circumstances.

Whatever route is chosen one thing is certain, you need to educate the people. By this I do not mean educate the children but educate the members of the congregation as to the importance of Christian education. In the case of St. Paul's school the four congregations who send their students to that school need to educate their people to the fact that that school is also their school. It is not just St. Paul's school and our children go there. No, it is our school and we need to take an active part in it. "Education of the parents is the key, the children will feel comfortable and feel it is their school."³¹ If one can convey the fact that the school is an extension of the church, that it is beneficial for all, it will succeed. "Recruit and promote by telling people that Christian education has a positive benefit, the education of the soul. The ministry aspect is 'we are training disciples'. Tell the people that public education (in the public school system) can not take the place of the discipleship training. This type of attitude will go farther in reaching parents than the negative type."³²

I am afraid that there are a number of Christian members and or congregations out there who are not making full use of the church as far as education is concerned. Congregations who have taken the easy way out rather than work at arranging something

where their church could help provide for the education of their own children as well as children of sister congregations. Congregations who think that because they can not have their own school are off the hook as far as education is concerned. These congregations should think again and open their eyes to the many blessings that can be received from a multi-congregational school.

APPENDIX A

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	Total	St. Paul's	Bethany	St. John's Cold Spring	St. John's Whitewater	St. James Cambridge	Others
1956 - 1957	280	191	58	11			20
1957 - 1958	305	203	62	17			23
1958 - 1959	334	218	69	23			24
1959 - 1960	356	226	75	23			32
1960 - 1961	361	242	74	24			21
1961 - 1962	370	248	75	30			17
1962 - 1963	382	250	86	32			14
1963 - 1964	364	240	81	36			7
1964 - 1965	354	227	86	26			15
1965 - 1966	389	248	87	23	21	4	6
1966 - 1967	385	235	85	24	24	10	7
1967 - 1968	374	231	80	19	27	9	8
1968 - 1969	366	219	88	18	27	6	8
1969 - 1970	366	222	81	20	29	5	9
1970 - 1971	338	214	68	15	27	5	9
1971 - 1972	303	189	65	17	21	5	6
1972 - 1973	317	189	70	14	21	10	13
1973 - 1974	323	174	81	19	21	10	18
1974 - 1975	327	186	74	19	22	9	17
1975 - 1976	330	189	72	24	23	9	13
1976 - 1977	335	195	65	25	24	9	17
1977 - 1978	332	201	64	23	21	10	13
1978 - 1979	338	197	71	20	24	11	15
1979 - 1980	342	199	70	18	25	13	17
1980 - 1981	333	195	71	17	25	13	12
1981 - 1982	341	201	75	19	22	13	11
1982 - 1983	339	206	77	15	23	13	5
1983 - 1984	328	199	72	15	26	13	3
1984 - 1985	319	199	79	6	21	10	4
1985 - 1986	327	208	80	4	22	9	4
1986 - 1987	332	205	86	4	24	7	5
1987 - 1988	342	197	100	8	26	6	5
1988 - 1989	359	210	120	9	14	2	4

Totals are beginning Fall Enrollments.

Others include Tuition, St. John's, Jefferson, Christus, Richmond, St. John's, Milton, Etc.

JOINT COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

OPERATING COSTS - ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

July 1, 1987 - June 30, 1988

	<u>ST. PAUL'S FORT</u>	<u>BETHANY FORT</u>	<u>ST. JOHN'S WHITEWATER</u>
Salaries & Allowance	214,163.83	64,871.37	17,241.79
Group Insurance	13,337.00	6,816.00	1,674.00
Synod Pension	4,175.50	1,760.00	435.00
Utilities	22,203.64		
Paper & Supplise	2,618.72		
Maintenance	16,633.24		
Insurance	2,795.53		
FICA	10,756.42		
Furniture & Equipment	-0-		
Vacation Bible School	64.49		
Hot Lunches	2,133.75	645.00	
Housing Allowance	2,400.00		2,400.00
Misc.	1,778.66	718.50	
TOTALS	<u>293,060.78</u>	<u>74,810.87</u>	<u>21,750.79</u>

3:

School Lunch Program	1,200.00
Hall Rental	-0-
TOTAL CREDITS:	<u>1,200.00</u>

NET COST:

St. Paul's	291,860.78
Bethany	74,810.87
St. John's WW	21,750.79
TOTAL OPERATING COST	<u>388,422.44</u>
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	359
COST PER STUDENT	\$ 1,081.96

	<u>ST. PAUL'S FORT</u>	<u>BETHANY FORT</u>	<u>ST. JOHN'S WHITEWATER</u>	<u>ST. JAMES CAMBRIDGE</u>	<u>ST. JOHN'S COLD SPRING</u>
Number of Students	210	120	14	2	9
Cost per congregation	\$227,711.60	\$129,835.20	\$ 15,147.44	\$ 2,163.92	\$ 9,737.64
Expenses paid	--	\$ 74,810.87	\$ 21,750.79	--	--
Due 1989	--	\$ 55,024.33	--	\$ 2,163.92	\$ 9,737.64
Due per month	--	\$ 4,585.36	--	\$ 180.33	\$ 811.47

ENDNOTES

¹ A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961 (Fort Atkinson, WI: n. publ., 1961), p. 11.

² A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961, p. 11.

³ A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961, p. 11.

⁴ A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961, p. 13.

⁵ A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961, p. 13.

⁶ A Century of Grace 1861 - 1961, pp. 13-37.

⁷ Rev. Donald Bitter, Pastor serving at St. Paul's, Fort Atkinson, WI, taped interview, April 5, 1989.

⁸ Official Minutes of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Fort Atkinson, WI, August 22, 1949.

⁹ Arden Wenzel, Principal serving at St. Paul's, Fort Atkinson, WI, taped interview, March 30, 1989,

¹⁰ Wenzel.

¹¹ Wenzel.

¹² Constitution and Bylaws of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, (Fort Atkinson, WI, n. pub., revised 1974).

¹³ Donald Hartwig, Teacher called by Bethany serving at St. Paul's, Fort Atkinson, WI, taped interview April 5, 1989.

¹⁴ Bitter.

¹⁵ Hartwig.

¹⁶ Wenzel.

¹⁷ Official Minutes of Bethany, January 22, 1963.

¹⁸ Rev. Mark Zarling, Pastor serving at Bethany, Fort Atkinson, WI, taped interview, April 7, 1989.

¹⁹ Hartwig.

²⁰ Zarling.

²¹ Zarling.

ENDNOTES

²²Wenzel.

²³Wenzel.

²⁴Bitter.

²⁵Wenzel.

²⁶Zarling.

²⁷Zarling.

²⁸Rev. Duane Erstad, Pastor serving at Jerusalem, Milwaukee, WI, taped interview, April 12, 1989.

²⁹Erstad.

³⁰Erstad.

³¹Bitter.

³²Zarling.

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