

The Lutheran High School is an Extension of the Lutheran Congregation

[Presented to the Wisconsin Lutheran High School Conference, 1983]

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Introduction

The Lutheran high school is an extension of the Lutheran congregation. That sounds fine. It has a nice ring to it. We have heard that statement or words to a similar effect often, and there seems to be at least a tacit acceptance of their meaning among us. Much of what we are doing is the practice of this principle.

The words express a principle of great importance for both the high school and the congregations of our Conference. Are we willing to commit ourselves to that principle and to the many applications that flow from it?

Surely a principle is of no greater value than the commitment which stands behind it, and commitment requires understanding and evaluation. So let us spend some time together in considering and discussing the meaning and various applications of this principle. Our goal is that we may arrive at an accepted understanding of the principle among us and that together we may work under God for its development.

I. When and How Was This Principle Established?

Together with the home the Christian Church has been given the command to teach. This is contained in the Great Commission of our Lord to His Church of all ages. Jesus said to Peter as the representative of the disciples and the Church: "Feed my lambs," John 21:15. In Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders we read, "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood," Acts 20:28.

It seems that early Lutherans in Milwaukee were very intent upon following these Scriptural injunctions by establishing schools. Doris Brueggeman has written a history of the Lutheran school system in Milwaukee, and she states the following about those early Lutherans: "Their vision began with the premise that the central factor in a good education is the education of the heart. 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it,' Prov. 22:6. Often quoted was Luther's familiar 'Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools.' In this letter he wrote: 'Young pupils and students are the seed and the source of the church. Above all, in schools of all kinds, the chief and most common lesson should be the Scriptures.'"

Milwaukee Lutheranism has a long history of Christian elementary education. Virtually every Lutheran church in the area had its own parochial elementary school by 1900. Since for most people formal education ended with confirmation on Palm Sunday, these congregations were providing all schooling for most of their members.

Still there was already interest in establishing a Lutheran high school. In 1902 Prof. August Pieper read a paper before the city pastoral conference on the question of a high school for the children of Lutherans. Interest was stirred on the part of several pastors, and in 1903 an association of individuals was organized by Pastors G. Harders, O. Hagedorn, J. Brenner and Teacher E. Sampe, entitled Evangelical Lutheran High School Association. In September the school opened with 21 students. In the articles of incorporation we read: "The aim of the school

is to offer a general higher education in the Lutheran spirit to our youth, for the first, to the girls who have absolved the course of our parochial schools or who have received preparatory training corresponding to the same.” In the following year the school became co-educational.

The school operated under an association of individuals until 1918 when the pastoral conference of Milwaukee proposed that congregations assume responsibility. On May 15th a general meeting with four delegates representing interested congregations met and determined to form a new conference. On November 20, 1918, 18 congregations organized as the Evangelical Lutheran High School Conference, with the same purpose as its predecessor.

Because of existing differences within the Synodical Conference, in 1952 a divisional setup along Synodical lines was resolved; on May 26, 1952, congregations of the Wisconsin Synod organized and adopted a constitution, which brought into being our present Wisconsin Lutheran High School Conference. The same purpose was maintained. In the preamble of the constitution of the new Conference we read, “aware that the Lutheran high school is an effective means of keeping our adolescent youth under the influence of the Gospel.” Article II says its purpose is to “promote the cause and extend the scope of Christian education.” Article III states it is the “aim of this Conference to offer Christian education on the high school level.”

In summary our history shows a continuing conviction that Christian education is essential. It indicates an understanding that Christian education is more than imparting facts, but that the heart, conscience, emotions and will must be touched also. Its purpose is to give our youth a Christ-centered philosophy of life to prepare them for a life of service here and a life of bliss hereafter. That is accomplished best by providing a Christian setting in which all education takes place. To that end Christian schools, both elementary and secondary, have been established among us. Our elementary and secondary schools do not differ in essence, but only in scope and manner of operation. Our history shows that it is valid to say that the Lutheran high school is an extension of the Lutheran congregation.

When we speak of the Lutheran high school as an extension of the Lutheran congregation, therefore, we mean to say that it is integral to the purpose and functions of the congregation. It is not an addendum. It rather forms an essential link in the congregation’s program of Christian education for its members.

II. How Has This Principle Been Put to Use Among Us?

Congregations desiring to be a part of the Wisconsin Lutheran High School Conference must decide to join the Conference and make formal application for membership. Congregations select four delegates to represent them annually at three meetings of the Conference. Constitutionally congregations have reserved to themselves the authority to: increase or decrease the size of the faculty, add or discontinue courses, fix the amount of tuition, approve or disapprove incurring extraordinary liabilities, and approve or disapprove the sale of real estate. Interestingly the constitution makes no mention of establishing a budget, though it has been a consistent practice among us that the congregation delegates have this authority.

Congregations of the Conference have empowered the Board of Directors to manage and administer the affairs of this organization “under the direction and for the use and benefits of this conference.”

Within the school itself the principle is likewise operative. A conference visitation program has been established so that congregation delegates might be informed in still another manner about the educational process and the conduct of the school personnel. Two pastoral luncheons are annually held for the purpose of seeking input from pastors about the ministry of

this high school on behalf of students who are under their pastoral care. Annually there is a day set aside for pastors to meet with their member/students to discuss various aspects of this joint ministry. Elementary principals regularly meet at Wisco and include the high school on their agenda. The elementary school coordinator is a staff member of the high school and serves as liaison between the high school and elementary schools.

When students of the high school counsel with high school teachers about personal problems, the principle of extension is evident. Because of the shared ministry with the congregation students are encouraged to consult also with their pastor. Very often joint counseling is done.

In various ways our Synod also gives recognition to the principle. Just as it does for our Christian day schools it provides support staff to assist in such matters as preparing call lists, promoting activities such as self-studies and composing a newsletter to share information about all of our schools. The Executive Secretaries of the Board for Parish Education and the Commission on Higher Education also serve as advisory members of the Executive Board of the Association of Lutheran High Schools. Our Synod is evaluating programs of secondary teacher education and has authorized that certain programs be offered through Dr. Martin Luther College. It recognizes with thanks the role area Lutheran high schools play in providing students for our worker training colleges and has provided a subsidy to area Lutheran high schools for this contribution.

In summary, the various practices that exist among us likewise affirm the principle that the Lutheran high school is an extension of the Lutheran congregation.

III. What are the Implications and Applications of this Principle?

Since this principle is vital to the welfare of both the high school and conference congregations, we want to be assured that we practice it to the fullest. We have already looked at a number of applications. Let us also give consideration to still others which would seem to be correct applications. Some are already practiced among us; others are not. For better understanding they are divided into four groups.

A. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

1. The Synod should continue to urge congregations to establish elementary and secondary schools and that this be done in the context of Kingdom balance.
2. The Synod has clearly stated its desire to continue to provide what is needed for improvement of teacher training on the secondary level. We encourage that continued study and urge our school to provide its insights to the proper Synodical Boards.
3. The Statistical Report lists congregation's support of area Lutheran high schools under the heading "Other Outside Purposes" along with support given numerous other ministries. A better way of reporting high school support would seem appropriate.

B. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Dr. Martin Luther College

The preparation of graduates for the public ministry of our Synod should include instruction about the relationship that exists between congregation and high school and the day school and high school.

C. Wisconsin Lutheran High School

1. Surely the first application of this principle for the high school is that we endeavor to keep this school truly Christian.
 - a. That means the school is faithful to God's Word in all that is taught.
 - b. A spirit of Christian love and concern must pervade our school.
 - c. Teachers and administration must see themselves as ministers of the Gospel and be given adequate time and training to provide the support and counsel which students need.
2. A second application is that our school must maintain high standards of education. Our day schools have such and this school is an extension of that educational process.
 - a. Teachers need to continue development of professional skills. Certainly this is the highest priority of summer months.
 - b. The classrooms, media center, etc., need to be well-equipped.
3. Wisco must provide the ministry needed by the congregations. In addition to members who are well-grounded in the truths of God's Word and imbued with the spirit of Christ we need:
 - a. People who are equipped to be good spouses and parents because strong families are essential to congregations.
 - b. People who can serve as leaders and faithful workers in the congregation.
4. Wisco needs to be "visible" in the congregations of the Conference.
 - a. Various musical groups do this well. Others would be helpful.
 - b. Administrators, faculty and staff need to be involved in the life and work of their home congregations.
5. The students at Wisco need to be well-educated in all that their congregation is doing to enable them to be students at Wisco.
6. New pastors and principals of the Conference need thorough orientation in the purpose, organization and activities of Wisco.
7. Wisco should continue to provide and seek to increase valued services that an individual congregation cannot provide, such as:
 - a. Joint worship services.
 - b. Use of facilities for congregation activities.
 - c. Tuition Assistance Program.
 - d. Programs in music and the arts that are uplifting and that provide Christian fellowship.
 - e. Services of the elementary school coordinator.
8. Wisco needs to have the flexibility to work with congregations on an individual basis according to agreed upon guidelines. Not all congregations are the same—some are center-city and some suburban, some are old and some young, some are strong and some weak. As an extension of all the congregations of the Conference Wisco must have the ability to work with congregations in such a way that harmony and growth are the result.
9. All programs of support for Wisco must be congregation-based, that is, programs that work through the congregational structure.
10. Wisco must provide an open channel at all times to listen to the conference congregations and to respond to their concerns.

D. Conference Congregations

1. Surely the first application is that congregations make the fullest use of Wisco.

- a. That means intensive recruitment efforts. The principle enunciated strongly suggests that recruitment for the high school ought to be an activity of the congregation and not the high school. For various reasons the high school ought to continue to produce recruitment materials, but actual contact of prospective students and their parents by congregation members, day school faculties, and pastors would serve two good purposes: 1) it would be extremely effective, and 2) it would be an excellent demonstration of congregation “ownership”.
- b. Tuition levels and assistance must be such that Wisco is financially available to all students.
2. Congregations should strive to make fullest use of high school activities. That involves such things as:
 - a. Prompt distribution of all announcements and information.
 - b. Personal promotion of certain events.
 - c. Adjustment of schedules whenever feasible.
3. Congregations must take seriously the management of the high school.
 - a. The selection of conference delegates is very important. Men are needed who have good spiritual insight into the mission of the Church, who are good decision makers, who will be faithful, and who are respected in the congregation.
 - b. Well-established channels of communication in the congregation are essential. Reports need to be given regularly to Boards of Education, Church Councils, voters’ assemblies and the congregation.
4. Congregations should consider the use of the high school as a mission arm of the congregations.
5. Congregations must provide financial support which properly reflects this principle.
 - a. The called workers and staff at the high school should be remunerated on a level which reflects that given to called workers in conference congregations.
 - b. Support of Wisco should be placed into a category of the budget which shows that it is an extension of the congregation, not support given to an outside agency.
 - c. Remittance of the amount committed to the high school should parallel that of remittance for work carried on within the congregation.

Undoubtedly many more items could be added to this listing. For example, the subject of curriculum and student services have not been addressed. Others more qualified than I should do that. It is my prayer that consideration of what is listed will open our eyes to still other applications and lead to fruitful discussions and actions.

Conclusion

In conclusion I ask, if the principle for which we have striven is not valid, then what is? If the Lutheran high school is not an extension of the Lutheran congregation, then what is it? A private school over which we exercise no control even though we entrust our young members to it? A step-child of inferior quality and importance which we require to do a first-rate job in developing the next generation of the Church? A luxury for certain students only; if so, what right do we have to indulge a luxury? Or something else?

If Wisco is an extension of our congregations, then let us be wholeheartedly committed to that principle, and with that principle in mind let us work diligently for the development of its many applications.