

In Defense of Lutheran Education

Delivered by David Waltz to the Voters of Saint John
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Good evening. At last year's January Voters' Meeting, I shared comments and thoughts regarding the church's 150th anniversary. The celebration beckoned reflections on the blessings and opportunities God has provided to His people here at St. John. Since we have left the anniversary year, the focus on the church's mission and ministry needs to be constant, consistent and wrapped in prayer by the congregation. We know who we are by studying our history and heritage. We benefit from continuous reminders of *whose* we are and of the spiritual identity we possess as church on earth, the community of believers, here at St. John, Fraser.

This congregation has remained faithfully focused on the Word and Sacrament. St. John has responded to the imperative of the Great Commission by baptizing, teaching the faith, and allowing the Gospel's call to reach the lost through the working of the Holy Spirit. Besides this critical witness and proclamation of the Gospel message, St. John's congregation has also included the ministry of mercy to those in physical and social need, as well as providing opportunities of fellowship. These valuable components of witnessing, mercy and fellowship exemplified the Christian life in the early church found in the Book of Acts and can now be identified and evidenced here at St. John.

The question that arises during changing times and dwindling resources is "Why should a congregation continue to support a Lutheran day school?" It is essential to know the response to this question. Purpose, direction and energy will help define this congregation's intentions of serving Christ today and in the future. Here are some definitive purposes and reasons I believe that St. John has been intentional in its educational ministry since 1864.

1. The Lutheran school exists to strengthen the congregation.

Lutheran schools equip children to become Christian leaders in the congregation. The school involves young parents in the congregation's activities more readily than in congregations without schools. These young parents frequently become new leaders of the congregation. Surveying the current St. John Church Council, a majority of the church's officers and board members have or had their children in the school. These young leaders model and encourage others to engage in the ministry opportunities and let their Gospel light shine. Also in recent years, several former St. John students have become current pastors and teachers, ensuring an ongoing supply of church workers for the Church-at-large. Another aspect that enhances and enriches the congregation is the availability and presence of highly trained, called workers to help equip and assist the laity in the corporate ministry of the church.

2. The Lutheran school exists to nurture the children's faith.

Faith is nurtured by the daily proclamation of the Gospel, teaching children the Word of God and how to read and understand that Word on their own. Integrating the Christian faith in a variety of subject matter helps a Christian student see God's active, creative hand in all subjects. Lutheran educators model a faith life for parents and their children observe and imitate. While a child's parents are the primary means of spiritual development, other Christian mentors like Lutheran School Teachers provide more examples of the faith walk at school.

3. The Lutheran school exists to strengthen its community.

Every community needs students who are academically qualified and who have learned to practice appropriate morality and respect. Christian citizenship is another witness of how a Christian lives in the hope and joy of their baptismal citizenship. A Lutheran school accepts students from all parts of the community, which provides an invitation for others to become engaged in the St. John faith community. St. John's reputation in Fraser and the surrounding community as a congregation committed to the Gospel and sacraments is very evident and mentioned frequently by visitors and friends alike.

4. The Lutheran school exists to provide a safe, caring place for children.

Unfortunately, in many communities, children are not safe. Lutheran schools provide places where children don't have to worry about being attacked verbally or physically. Loving teachers and other caring staff members daily demonstrate Christ's love for them and their love for children. In some cases, St. John school has acted as a parent for children whose home life has left them in need of parental support. The school becomes a special safe, loving place for them, as well as for others. Families who participate in school programs such as our SACC (*School Age Child Care*) know they have loving and compassionate hands and hearts at their disposal for their children.

5. The Lutheran school exists to help children to see their entire life from the perspective of God's Word.

Christian decision-making and problem solving are only possible through the Word and promises of God. The secular world view permits a person to justify their actions and decisions based on relative terms and personal thought. St. John helps the student to see the proper application of God's Law and His Gospel in his or her life as a wholly loved and redeemed child of God. God's Word, the Bible, leads the students and families to see and experience His story and plan. Discipline is seen as love applied to draw one closer to God and the respect of others.



6. The Lutheran school demonstrates the high value the congregation places on children.

Lutheran schools require a considerable investment of prayers, energy, money and staff. Such an investment by a congregation clearly demonstrates to the community that the church places a high value on children, God's beloved little ones. St. John touches the lives of children as early as 3-years-old to 14-year-olds. The congregation allows the called staff to work in their stead daily to help their children and other young families interact and to be a resource to them. Human resources are not inexpensive, and the costs from a business model might suggest that the returns are not always sufficient. However, the church is not a business. It is a ministry. When God's work is done in God's way, there will never be a lack of God's supplies.

7. The Lutheran school enhances the public relations of the congregation.

As the school reaches many segments of the community, the parents who come to the school begin to inquire about the sponsoring congregation. Members frequently ask each other, "Does this congregation have a school?" Similarly, non-member school parents frequently ask the school, "Does this school have a church?" The congregation becomes better known in the community because of the school parents and the school's marketing efforts. In a very crowded, active world, the public reputation of the congregation is connected to the school's relevance and visibility, and both need promotion before people. St. John is very fortunate to be blessed with a school public relations committee that is active and responsive in new and exciting ways, always seeking to promote the benefits of attending St. John Lutheran Church and School. St. John alumni are all over the world and can speak to their educational experience and spiritual witness to others.

8. The Lutheran school seeks out the lost.

Lutheran schools, which enroll children from all parts of the community, provide new and varied opportunities for evangelism by the congregation and its staff. These opportunities are not available in any other way. That's why Lutheran schools are considered the most effective agencies in congregational evangelism. Pastors of growing congregations with a school in nearly every case identified the school as the congregation's most effective outreach agency. Eighty-five percent of the fastest growing congregations in the Synod operate schools.

9. The Lutheran school exists to fulfill the congregation's responsibility for the Christian education of its children.

When the Missouri Synod was formed, it became a requirement of synodical membership that congregations would provide Christian education for their children. This was before public schools were available and before Sunday schools were popular. Thus, a congregation was expected to operate a Lutheran school if it was to become a member of the Synod. The Great Commission was not given only to parents, but to all members of the church. A current proverb, "it takes a village," reminds congregations that it is their corporate responsibility to provide a Christian education for the children of the congregation.



St. John has embraced these “whys.” No doubt there will be challenges and difficulties throughout the church’s efforts to sustain the Lutheran day school. Limited resources, organization, governance, changing demographics, and just a few of the obstacles the devil can and will muster in an effort to discourage or mis-direct us from this vital mission of educational ministry. However, God encourages us to educate in His name. The opportunities are still available to work with young families who are seeking to live faithfully as baptized children of God. Non-member families still seek out St. John School to teach their children, giving us the opportunity to teach the faith from the Lutheran perspective. The church and school unified permits the “whole package” to be available and accessible to all whom the Lord calls to St. John. Besides, parents, grandparents, cousins and others are attracted to a spiritual home which considers this opportunity, involvement and love now.

Why should a congregation like St. John continue to support a Lutheran school?

Simply put: When Jesus returns, He will find St. John’s congregation working diligently. And through its primary mission instrument, the school, He will be pleased to find His people inviting, caring and preparing others for their heavenly experience with Him.

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