

Zion Lutheran Church • Fairbanks, Alaska

Pastor's Monday • May 7, 2007

Q and A on the Lutheran School

Q: What is a "Lutheran School"?

A: Lutheran Schools come in all shapes and sizes from simple preschool (2 or 3 mornings a week for 2 - 4 year olds) to world class Universities. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has 2,488 schools (enrollment 280,426) which include 1,018 elementary schools (enrollment of 130,395). There are 1,368 early childhood centers (enrollment of 131,225) of which there are Open Arms Lutheran Child Development centers. (statistics from LCMS, District and Congregational Services School Ministry department, 2005/2006 school year). The slogan is "Lutheran Schools, a Great Place to Grow."

Q: What kind of a Lutheran School is being planned for Zion/Fairbanks?

A: The goal is to determine if there is a basis of support for a K-8 Lutheran School. While many elementary Lutheran Schools go to just grade 6, it is the thinking of those who are working on the school that Fairbanks would best be served by a k-8.

Q: Why now? Didn't Zion investigate a Lutheran School several years ago?

A: Yes, a major feasibility study, the Genesis Project, was conducted in 2001. Our consultant for that study was Dan Seim, who later married Sandra Gadbury from our congregation. That study showed there was a likely market for a school of about 100 students. However, the decision was made not to pursue opening a school at that time as there was no space. The new building was designed with three classrooms and an administrative room for the school. However, when the new building was nearing completion, it was decided to allow the space to be used by Open Arms, which at the time had a waiting list of 300 plus. The graduating Kindergarten class from Open Arms is 19 strong. Many of the parents had expressed interest in a school. That interest was fielded by Lori Packee. As parent of a kindergartner, she asked Pastor Kuehnert about the possibility. A further informal poll showed strong interest if there was a commitment by the congregation to open a school that would continue into advanced grades. An effort of this size depends on volunteers who are willing to work...and volunteers soon emerged, some parents, some former students of Lutheran Schools and others. The energy and the breadth of experience and knowledge of those on the School Development Task Force are exceptional.

Q: Who is on the School Development Task Force and when do they meet?

A: Lori Packee, Coordinator; Pastor Kuehnert, Amy Betts, Kathie Bungart, Karyn Dehaas, Dawn Lafleur, Moriah and Jim Matherly, David and Jenn Matz, Michelle Meredith, Donna O'Dowd-Robb, Jim Oleson, Amy Olson, Candice Rigdon and Heather Koch. They have been meeting every Saturday morning at 8:30 and meetings are open to anyone.

Q: What has been done so far?

A: So Far:

- A survey was distributed to parents for more feedback (middle of April)
- An active consulting relationship has been established with Dick Weniger, Education Executive for the NW District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.
- Bob Fowls, Principal of Trinity Lutheran School in Bend, OR has been invited to visit with the committee and talk with the congregation about his Lutheran School. Details for his trip are being finalized.
- A parent meeting was held to answer questions and concerns

- Registration Packets were made and distributed (weekend of April 29) with a May 11th deadline for the current Open Arms Kindergarten class; then open enrollment to the public with a June 1st deadline.
- Subcommittees have been formed for Curriculum, Financial and Facility. These are functioning committees with detailed written reports being submitted to the task force.
- A Before and After School program has been researched. Several options are being considered.
- The process of finding a certified teacher has been outlined and is underway.
- A Food Program is being researched
- Extra curricular activities are being researched...field trips, music, gym, art.
- A space for the classroom has been identified.

Q: What will be the tuition?

A: The average cost per pupil in LCMS schools is \$5,052. Our proposed tuition is \$5,000 (year).

Q: What is being done to make sure that this effort is within God's will?

A; On April 14th a prayer vigil for this project was established. Today is day 24 of the vigil and Donna O'Dowd-Robb is holding the vigil today. Sixteen people have committed to the vigil. This is the third prayer vigil in the past 10 years at Zion. The first, lasting over 1,000 days was for the development of Open Arms, It concluded on January 2, 2000 when Open Arms was dedicated. The 2nd prayer vigil was for the development of the plans and the capital campaign for the new sanctuary, offices, etc and concluded on January 9, 2005.

Q; How will a decision be made about the Lutheran School?

A: Great question. There are several factors: first, the School Development Task Force understands that unless 13 full time registrations are received by June 3, the school will not open. Second, the understanding is that the school needs to be self supporting this first year (space is being provided for the school by Zion). Third, under the present constitution and bylaws, any new ministry has to justify itself under the Ministry Objectives of the congregation as those are passed at the congregational meeting. In March of this year, a revised set of Ministry Objectives were passed – the first one reads “Build our identity as a Missional Church.” Is a Lutheran School a Missionary project? It certainly can be. That is why Bob Fowls, the principal of Trinity Lutheran School, is now invited to share with us how his school is just that! The congregation would have to vote to change the budget if a request for funds to support the school was made. Fourth, a decision of this magnitude cannot be made without detailed and frequent communication to the congregation. I have called a congregational meeting for Sunday, June 3, after the late service. This is the day before the decision will be made whether or not to go ahead with the school. Before then, I or any of the Task Force members welcome your feedback! Honestly, we do.

Q: You said that the school will be self supporting this year. What about future years?

A: Lutheran Schools need the support of the community and of the congregation(s). Many Lutheran Schools in the lower 48 are supported by a number of Lutheran Churches. Our invitation to the other Lutheran Churches in our community five years ago resulted in no formal support. Lori Packee has contacted other Lutheran Churches but has received little positive encouragement from them. If the school is going to grow to be a k-8 school, facilities for the school will need to be found or built. The Guiding Team that has been working on the Ministry Objective “provide facilities ahead of growth” has now included space for a school in their plans. Congregational support for the new facility will be required for the funds needed to acquire or build space. Also, the school will need financial support from the congregation in future years.

Q: What is the Guiding Team?

A: That is a question for another Pastor's Monday, but briefly, it is the group of people (Loren Dobberpuhl, Kerry Gronewold, Eddie Packee, Lindsay Gill, Doug Schroeder and myself) who have been meeting weekly since February as a long range planning group for the Leadership Council to develop plans to provide facilities "ahead of growth."

Q: Any final Thoughts?

A: These are pivotal moments in our congregation's life. I do not think it is by accident that we find ourselves in the middle of our 21days.com stewardship emphasis. The sermon I preached this past weekend reminds us that it is not the greatness of the need – 5000 hungry men plus women and children (or project) nor the tiny resource (five loaves and two fish) to meet that need, but it is the touch of Jesus as he blesses and transforms what we offer. I hope that we all see this effort to begin a Lutheran School (an overwhelming project) in that light. And I am still amazed at how much was left over! So we pray and we offer what we have...

Prayerfully,
Pastor K.

Weekly Prayer Concerns

Cancer

Eva Lose (Mr. Gary's wife)
Linda Yeakley (Bill Fisher's sister)
Russel Paju (Marty Paju's father)
Michael Caskey
Beth Beeler (Kathy Gappert's sister)

Other Illnesses

Virginia Addy (Shirley Bouse's mother)
Annette Hartsock
Dick Korvola
Fred Schram
Merlin Barkdull
Daniel (Dave and Nancy Dobberpuhl's son)

Recovery

Nathan Burgess

Surgeries

Grady Cofer
Austin

Deaths

The Shelton Family (Jenn Shelton's grandmother passed away)

Others

For those who are in need.
Joe and Cindi Baumgarten and their two children Duncan and Mattie as they prepare to move to Alaska and serve at Zion.
Thanks and praise as Ed & Laura Gillen celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary