

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHOICE AND CHARTER SCHOOLS: DEALING WITH A  
PARADIGM SHIFT

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WISCONSIN

MARCH 2013

## ABSTRACT

God has given parents the primary role in the religious education of their children. The church's role has always been secondary as a supporting partner. In recent years cities like Milwaukee, Wisconsin have started voucher programs which pay for private or parochial education for students who would attend public school without it. The Lutheran Elementary Schools (LES) of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) that participate in this program have a large number of students from outside the WELS. This has forced them to try to find a balance between nurture and outreach to their community which has brought with it a change in that partnership with parents in Christian education.

This paper is a resource for congregations who are considering a voucher program as an option for their LES. It will: 1) give biblical and historical evidence that the parent/church partnership is essential to Christian education, 2) provide evidence from secular education and from contemporary Christian education outside the WELS that this partnership is still considered ideal, if not essential, and 3) show how WELS schools that are currently participating in the Milwaukee School Choice Voucher Program are dealing with a paradigm shift in parental involvement that comes when the majority of their students are from outside the WELS.

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## INTRODUCTION

Consider this hypothetical situation. You belong to a congregation in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod that supports and operates a Lutheran Elementary School. Perhaps you are a school board member, the principal or a teacher in the LES, or the congregation's pastor. The LES has been operating for decades. There is a rich harvest field of possibilities for mission work in your neighborhood, and the LES would be a good way to reach out to the community. You have a dated but usable facility that could use a facelift. Enrollment has been steadily declining for years while the cost of educating the children of the congregation has been steadily increasing even faster. This has caused your LES to struggle to maintain the status quo, let alone strive to excel and improve. There is uncertainty as to how much longer the school can continue financially without some changes.

There are many factors that contribute to the struggle of your LES. The birth rate in your congregation has declined over the years. A good number of younger families travel a fair distance to come to church, and they say that driving this distance every day to school would be a hardship. These are just symptoms, however, of the bigger problem which is that the congregation has struggled to financially support its LES for a while. Ten years ago, the school board decided that members of the congregation would have to pay some fees which caused enrollment to decline even faster. As a result, the fees have gone up year after year to the point where members of the congregation are paying almost as much as non-members who are charged tuition.

The school board has struggled to keep a positive outlook. There's growing sentiment that some cuts have to be made to the budget, but there is no more trimming that can be done. The last thing that anyone wants is to cut staff, but it is looking more and more like that will be a reality that has to be faced real soon. Not long after that, the fear is, the LES will close altogether if something doesn't change.

This hypothetical situation is one that is an unfortunate reality for many WELS congregations. It is becoming increasingly difficult to operate an LES in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the five years between 2006 and 2011, the number of WELS elementary schools declined from 345

to 328. In that same time, synod wide enrollment at WELS elementary schools dropped by 1,735 students from 26,035 to 24,300, a 15% decrease.<sup>1</sup>

Some congregations have been helped by the emergence of school voucher programs like the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This program provides state money to pay the tuition of students from low income families who are not satisfied with public education in the community and wish to enroll their children in private schools. In 1995 this program started to allow religious schools to participate.<sup>2</sup> In Wisconsin, the Choice Program has extended to include Racine and similar charter or voucher programs have been implemented in other parts of the United States. Voucher programs are a new wave in education that has been successful in cities like Milwaukee. They likely will be expanding into many more communities across our country.

Now go back to the hypothetical situation described above. A program like MPCP sounds like a perfect solution to the problems that your congregation faces. It would provide an influx of students and the tuition money would keep the school from closing. It would take away the need to raise fees for members of your congregation. Perhaps, if the congregation saw fit, it would even eliminate the need to charge them at all. It would also provide an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with many people that may never have known their Savior without it.

However, there are some concerns that you have. How would a program like MPCP change the way we do things at our school? How would these changes be handled when they become necessary?

Volumes could be written about all the ways which such a change could affect a school. This paper's purpose is not to judge the merit of programs like MPCP. This paper does not intend to promote, nor does it mean to besmirch such programs if a congregation chooses to use their school as an evangelism tool. It is not to question or to criticize what anyone has done or

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Reports and Memorials, 2011*. (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2011, accessed October 31, 2012); available from [http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/synodreports\\_2011boram.pdf](http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/synodreports_2011boram.pdf); Internet. 19,20.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Ritsche. *Milwaukee School Choice Voucher Program*. (Legislative Reference Bureau, January 2001, accessed October 31, 2012); available from <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb/pubs/wb/01wb4.pdf>; Internet.

any decisions that have been made by congregations or schools as to how they have conducted their ministry. The purpose of this paper is simply to inform.

This paper addresses the change of paradigm that takes place in an LES with regard to parental involvement in religious instruction when there are a large number of students from outside the WELS. Throughout the history of God's people, it has been understood that parents have the primary responsibility to teach God's Word to their children. The church's role has always been secondary as a supplementary partner. This partnership in religious instruction has always been an integral part of the LES worldview. For most WELS schools, the partnership is assumed by parents and teachers because the vast majority of the students are WELS members. Parents and teachers know that they have a common confession of faith which is the basis for this partnership. For schools that participate in a program like MPCP, a large number of students are not WELS members. Because of this there is a natural shift in the ways that the parent/school partnership is formed. This shift has some effect on every student, WELS or non-WELS.

In order to properly study this shift in paradigm and how it has affected Christian education in charter school settings, and in order to provide a resource to congregations who are considering participation in a charter program as an option for their LES, we must first trace our partnership paradigm back to its beginning. In other words, before we can understand where we are or where we may be going, we must first understand where we have been and why we do what we do.

This paper will give the scriptural reasons why this partnership is important. It will show how throughout the history of God's people this partnership has been considered essential to Christian education and why it has been so valued in the WELS. It will show the importance of this partnership to education in general, even secular education. Finally, it will inform as to what is being done to address the above mentioned shift in paradigm among schools that currently participate in MPCP, challenges they face, blessings they've experienced. This paper seeks to be a resource that can be used by those who are considering participation in a voucher program for their LES, so they can gain perspective and make a more informed decision as to whether a voucher program is right for their congregation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Because choice and charter programs are such recent developments in education, there really is nothing yet written about the impact of these programs on parental involvement in religious education. The literature which was used in researching this paper contributed to the historical portion of the paper, pointing out that since the very beginning it has been considered essential that parents and the church partner in the religious training of children. The paradigm has always been that parents have the God given responsibility to take the primary role in bringing up their children in God's Word. The church's role has always been secondary and supplemental.

Books that chronicle the history of Christian education are especially helpful in researching this paradigm. One book that does this very well is *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* edited by Michael J. Anthony. This is a collection of articles and book excerpts from a wide variety of contributors that cover many aspects of Christian education. One of two articles from this book that are referenced in this paper is *Historical Foundations of Christian Education* by Kevin E. Lawson, which breaks down the history of Christian education into time periods and discusses each individually. Lawson's stated goal is this: "Reading this historical overview will provide the reader with an appreciation for what others have done to facilitate the spiritual formation of God's people."<sup>3</sup> In each era of church history, one of the aspects of Christian education that Lawson targets is the paradigm of parental involvement.

The other article from this book that contributed to this paper is *Family Life Education* by Judy Ten Elshof. The following introductory statement shows her focus on the essential nature of parents' role as primary provider of religious training of their children.

Family life education should be centered in the home, supported by the church, and grounded in both biblical theology and strong intimate relationships with God and others. This means that guiding, training, and educating the next generation's spiritual lives is primarily the responsibility of parents in the home.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin E. Lawson, "Historical Foundations of Christian Education," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, Michael J. Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Judy Ten Elshof, "Family Life Education," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, Michael J. Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 195.

Elshof then lays out a four point plan which provides a biblical basis for the essential partnership between parents and church in the religious training of children.

Journal Articles like “The Study of Religious Education” from the January 1916 issue of *The Biblical World*, and works found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) Essay File like *A Brief Study of Confirmation: Historical Development, Theological Consideration, and Practical Implications* by Prof. John Brenner helped supplement the historical information presented in this paper.

The partnership paradigm is part of our Lutheran heritage. While Dr. Martin Luther did not write a lot about Christian education, much has been written about his ideas concerning the essential components of Christian education. One of the components that Luther deemed essential was parental involvement as the primary educator of children in God’s Word. The two books written about Luther’s focus on the parents as primary educators of their children that contributed to this paper are *Luther On Education* by F. V. N. Painter and *Luther’s House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* by Gerald Strauss. Both of these books portray Luther as not just a reformer of the church, but also as a revolutionary thinker in the field of education. Luther’s contribution to education went a long way to bringing the religious training of children out of the dark ages.

Luther’s greatest contribution to Christian education was his Small and Large Catechisms. The impetus for their creation was the abysmal state of affairs that Luther found during the visit to the congregations throughout Saxony in 1528-29. The circumstances which led Dr. Luther to write the catechisms as tools for parents to use to teach their children the basic truths of Christianity, as well as a book to be used by the church to instruct catechumens in preparation to take Lord’s Supper are chronicled in F. Bente’s *Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord*. Research concerning Luther’s contribution to education was supplemented by articles from the WLS Essay File such as the aforementioned essay by Prof. Brenner and *Our Instruction and Confirmation Practices – Is It Time for a Change?* by Dale R. Schulz.

Research was also conducted to show that this partnership with parents is considered essential in all forms of education today, both secular and religious. Parental involvement is



widely considered an educational “best practice” in secular education.<sup>5</sup> A simple *Google* search of the phrase “educational best practice parental involvement” will render websites, blogs, and studies from the Education Departments of every state in the United States. Since the target area of this paper is in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s website is referenced to show that parental involvement is considered essential. Also cited is a 2002 synopsis of 51 research studies done by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory called *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. This synopsis is an exhaustive report showing that parental involvement in education is considered essential to achieve the best results.

All across Christianity today, experts are realizing that the church is fighting an uphill battle to educate children in an increasingly secularized society. This battle with society makes it all the more important that the parents take seriously their responsibility to partner with the church and assume their role as primary religious educator. The two works which give the perspective of modern Christian education from denominations other than WELS are “The Clue to Christian Education” by Randolph Crump Miller, which is a chapter from his book by the same title that is included in *A Reader in Christian Education: Foundations and Basic Perspectives* edited by Eugene S. Gibbs, and *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* by Nicholas P. Wolterstorff.

This partnership paradigm where parents are the primary religious educators of their children and the church’s role is secondary and supplemental has been counted on - even demanded throughout the history of the LES in WELS. WLS Essay File articles that show this to be true are *A Changing World, An Unchanging Challenge: God’s Plan for Rearing Children* by Gerald F. Kastens, *Achieving the Purposes of the Church through Parish Education* by Paul E. Kelm, and *Issues in Parish Education* by Prof. James Tiefel. These essayists provide their readers with practical insight into the way that Christian education has been carried out in the LES, and the aspects of Christian education that many congregations in WELS have come to take for granted, including the partnership between parents and church.

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<sup>5</sup>A “best practice” is just that – best. It is a practice that with research and study has been found to be the best way of doing things.

## 1. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR THE FORMATION OF A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHURCH IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Since the very beginning of time, God has given parents the primary role in teaching their children his Word. Before Moses wrote the Pentateuch, this was the only way in which the Word of God could be passed down from generation to generation. The family also served as church. Adam and Eve took their role of teaching their children the Word of God seriously. We know the first family had this arrangement by the account of Cain and Abel bringing sacrifices to God.<sup>6</sup> Later, Noah and his family held a worship service when they were delivered from the flood, complete with the promise of God that a flood would never again destroy the earth.<sup>7</sup> Abraham taught his son Isaac to obey the LORD, even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his own son if the LORD had willed it.<sup>8</sup> Until the LORD established a system of public worship for his Old Testament people, the family was the only means of religious training that existed. Parents had to take the primary role because there was no one else to do it.

When God used Moses to bring the nation of Israel out of Egypt, he established the corporate religious life of his people, first with his guidelines for the Passover before leaving Egypt, then when he gave his covenant law at the foot of Mount Sinai. During the Exodus is when the Old Testament worship practices were codified. Here is where the Levitical priesthood, the sacrificial system, the Israelite church year was started, and the partnership between parents and church in the religious education of their children began. Parents and church were two entities with different God given responsibilities with regard to the education of children. Since this time the parents' role in the religious training of their children has remained primary, with the church as a secondary and supplemental partner. This is the way God set it up, and the way it has been carried out among God's people ever since.

For examples of this from God's Word, we will split the history of God's people into four parts: 1) Old Testament pre-Babylonian captivity, 2) Old Testament post-Babylonian captivity, 3) during Jesus' life, and 4) the apostolic age.

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 4:2,3.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 8:20 – 9:17.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 22:1-19.

## Old Testament Pre-Babylonian Captivity

The first time we see the partnership between parents and the church in the religious training of their children is when the LORD instituted the Passover feast the night before Israel left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. After giving the instructions for how to prepare the Passover meal and eat it, the LORD gave Moses the command that it was to be celebrated annually from then on. The LORD included in these instructions about the Passover festival a distinct command to teach children what the festival meant.

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.<sup>9</sup>

Here we have the roles of parents and church laid out and the partnership between them established. Parents are giving the primary responsibility of teaching their children what is meant by the ceremony the church is performing as the LORD commanded. The church’s role in educating the children is secondary and supplemental to the parent’s responsibility.

This same partnership was solidified and expanded on when the LORD gave the people his Law. The Israelites were given a law code to govern every aspect of their lives. It was so important to God that two of the books of the Pentateuch (Leviticus and Deuteronomy) are devoted almost entirely to the giving and re-giving of the Law. When the Law was given the second time in Deuteronomy just before entering the Promised Land, the LORD again established the parent/church partnership as his way of educating the children.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 12:24-28.

<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

The role of parents and church are even more defined here. God wants parents to not only teach their children once a year when Passover comes, but to let the Word of the LORD permeate every aspect of the family's life. Parental involvement in Christian education is essential.

The role of the church is again secondary. Throughout the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the priests are performers of the sacrifices, officiates at the ceremonies and preparers of the feasts, not teachers of the children. Children were taught by their parents the significance of what the priests were doing.

God's people would not remain faithful to their task. They fell away from the LORD in grand scale over and over. When one looks at the history of the Israelites before the Babylonian Captivity, the temptation is there for modern Christians to shake their head and wonder how a people living in a theocracy, and later in a monarchy with kings that were hand-picked by the LORD could turn from the LORD so many times. The root answer is that sinful people are capable of any sin, and the devil works hard on God's people to pull souls to his side in hell. Nobody is immune from Satan's snare because of our sinful nature.

But perhaps there is a factor in this wholesale lust for all things pagan that is seen in Israel's history that has to do with this paper. Nobody is able to poll the Israelites as to how the roles were being carried out with regard to the religious education of their children, but one can easily assume that a major factor in the vast majority of people falling away from the LORD for generations was a breakdown in the religious training of their children.

In the time of the Judges, when "everyone did as he saw fit,"<sup>11</sup> it seems that most of God's people weren't heeding the command of the LORD from Deuteronomy 6 to let the Word of the LORD be present in every aspect of life, including the rearing of children. We can infer that those with the primary responsibility to train the next generation were shirking that responsibility. Yet we're never told that the priests stopped performing the sacrifices or that the festivals stopped, that the church of that day stopped carrying out their responsibilities. We are told that toward the end of the period of the Judges, Eli the priest was still carrying out his priestly work.<sup>12</sup> While nobody would call Eli a model priest or father to his sons, the outward function of his office was carried out. The only exception could be when the Ark of the

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<sup>11</sup> Judges 17:6.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 1,2.

Covenant fell into the hands of the Philistines.<sup>13</sup> However the LORD made sure that the Philistines only kept it for a short time.<sup>14</sup> Scripture's silence as to whether there was any form of religious training of children carried out by the church makes it reasonable to infer that parents were the sole religious educators of their children. Parents were to impress upon their children the truths of God's Word as it was given to his people. This era would be one example of the breakdown of the partnership between parents and church in religious training of children where the ones with the primary role were the ones who did not carry out their responsibility. The result was that the spiritual state of God's people got progressively worse.

Compare that with the period after King Solomon and before the Babylonian Captivity. Generation after generation had turned their back on God. Baal worship was rampant among God's people. The nation was often rotten from the top down. Heathen kings outnumbered the ones that followed the LORD. One of the low points of the religious history of the Israelites was during the time of the great prophet Elijah.

[Elijah] replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. *Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.*"<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added).

At this time, everything had fallen apart, at least in Elijah's mind. The corporate religious functions and practices had ceased. Certainly the vast majority of families in Israel were not concerned with teaching their children God's Word. Yet the LORD comforted Elijah with the revelation that there were still seven thousand who had remained faithful to the LORD. One can make an assumption that these were family units that had taken to worshipping the LORD on their own in spite of the lack of public worship. The fact that these people remained faithful through the generations of idol worship in the land shows that there were some parents who were carrying out their responsibility to train their children in God's Word.

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 4.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Samuel 6.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Kings 19:14-18.

During the time of the Judges, the church continued to perform its daily function. The sacrifices and ceremonies went on, and the priests officiated as the LORD commanded while most parents shirked their responsibility to train their children as to the significance of those sacrifices and ceremonies. The result was the spiritual decline of the nation. During Elijah's time, both the church and most parents turned their back on this responsibility. While the spiritual decline reached its bottom at this time, seven thousand faithful people still remained because of faithful parents training their children. This comparison is useful in connection with the subject of parental involvement in Christian education as evidence that when the partnership that God established with parents as primary educators and the church as secondary educators breaks down, religious training of children can survive without the church if the parents carry out their responsibility, whereas it is in far greater jeopardy without the parents, even if the church performs its duty.

### **Old Testament Post-Babylonian Captivity**

While in exile in Babylon, the family once again became the sole source of religious education. God's Word needed to be studied in the home because there was no corporate setting for worship. Comforted by the writings of prophets like Isaiah, the faithful remnant in Babylon was assured that the LORD would sustain them and return them to their homeland.

The LORD did just that. Cyrus of Persia allowed them to return to the Promised Land. When the rebuilding project was completed, Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses to all the people and the people renewed the covenant with the LORD that had been made at the time of Moses. This is the same covenant, with the same regulations, and the same roles in religious training of children that was laid out in Deuteronomy 6.

The rest of the people – priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives *and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand* – all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.<sup>16</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>16</sup> Nehemiah 10:28,29.

The emphasized portion of the prior quote is evidence that there were children present. Parents recognized their role as primary religious educators and valued the partnership with the church that God had set up.

During this era, the religious life of the Jewish people experienced its first paradigm shift. Before the exile in Babylon worship was centralized, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Kevin E. Lawson, a professor of Christian education at Biola University's Tablot School of Theology explains how Christian education was achieved through synagogue worship in his essay, *Historical Foundations of Christian Education*. Following the exile, synagogues were built all around Palestine. There the people would gather on the Sabbath for worship which included readings from the Scriptures and explanations of the Word of God from scribes who studied and interpreted the law and taught it to the people. This instruction was geared for adults who would then take the lessons learned in the Synagogue and teach them to their children. Rabbis, or teachers, were highly esteemed in society. Education became highly valued in Jewish culture, because it gave the people an opportunity to know God and to become closer to living the way that he wanted them to.<sup>17</sup> Synagogue worship was another tool that God provided to his church to supplement the primary role that he gave to parents to educate their children in God's Word. During this era, the partnership between parents and church in the religious education of children was retained.

### **During Jesus' Life**

The roles and partnership in religious training of children continued in Jewish culture. It was still carried out in the same way when Jesus came into the world. Mary and Joseph were pious parents, the religious educators of the Christ child and brought him to the temple for his first Passover when he was twelve years old.<sup>18</sup> Before the age of twelve, children were taught solely by their parents what the parents had heard and learned at the temple or the synagogue.

Religious training of children endured a paradigm shift with the coming of Jesus into the world. Before Jesus there had never been a teacher who taught with such authority.<sup>19</sup> Jesus introduced parents to an entirely new world of teaching their children the truths of God's Word. He taught in parables.

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<sup>17</sup> Lawson, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 2:41-52.

<sup>19</sup> Mark 1:22.

The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”<sup>20</sup>

The lessons that Jesus was teaching the people with his parables were not just for the adults. Like the lessons that were learned in the temple and the synagogue, the teachings of the parables were to be taught to children. Jesus, the Master Teacher, gave the adults of God’s people better tools than they ever had before to use as they taught these truths to their children in ways that they could understand.

Jesus also opened up a new world in the religious training of children by allowing children to be brought by their parents directly to the teacher.<sup>21</sup> This did not remove the parents’ responsibility as primary educators of God’s Word. In saying “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,” Jesus is not saying that parents do not need to teach their children God’s Word anymore because they can come and get it on their own. Quite to the contrary, Jesus is using children as an object lesson for parents by saying the parents are to believe like their little children.<sup>22</sup> In other words, “Learn from your children as you teach them, because the way that they believe what you tell them is how you should believe what I tell you.”

After his resurrection, Jesus reinforced the essential nature of the roles in the partnership between parents and church in the religious training of children. Jesus command to Simon Peter, “Feed my lambs” was also to the entire Christian Church which he would help found. But as we look at the account of Jesus’ reinstating Simon Peter to apostleship, we would be remiss if we didn’t take note of the fact that Jesus tells Peter to “feed my lambs,” then tells him “take care of my sheep,” and right after that Jesus again says, “feed my sheep.”<sup>23</sup> There is certainly an emphasis on the sheep but this emphasis is not at the expense of the lambs. In light of the way that religious education of children was set up by God in the Old Testament, it appears, in the

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<sup>20</sup>Matthew 13:10-13.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16.

<sup>22</sup> Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17.

<sup>23</sup> John 21:15-18.



opinion of the author Babinec, that Jesus is reinforcing to Peter that the church's role is primarily the education of adults and as secondary partners with parents in the education of their children.

Any study of ministry since the time of Christ would be lacking without mention of the Great Commission.<sup>24</sup> It certainly applies to the topic of parental involvement in Christian education. Some may use Christ's command to make disciples of all nations as a reason to say that because all children are included in all nations, even children whose parents have no interest in partnering with the church, the partnership is not essential to Christian education. Some may go as far as to say that to desire to keep an LES as a tool to nurture WELS children instead of using it as a tool for outreach when there is an opportunity provided such as participating in a voucher program is to go against what Christ commanded.

When Jesus told the twelve to "make disciples of all nations," other than commanding them to teach and to baptize, he did not tell the disciples what form that disciple making should take. Our Savior told us to bring the gospel to all nations, which includes children, all children, not just the ones who have parents that will partner with the church and carry out their God given responsibility to be primary Christian educators of their children. But to use the Great Commission as the basis for denying that the partnership and roles which God set up are essential in the Christian education of our children is putting words in Jesus' mouth. Instead, Lutherans have always sought the narrow middle road without falling into the ditch on either side.

Christian education is a form of gospel ministry which the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith in Jesus as Savior. An LES is a form, a tool, a way of carrying out the Great Commission, but it is not the only way. Christians are given many ways of carrying out Christ's command, and the freedom to choose how to use them. Making disciples is our job, and Jesus tells us that we are to do it, and we are to do it with as many people as we possibly can. He gives us many tools to use, but how we use them is up to us. We cannot bind hearts and consciences to any specific form of ministry, or bind them to any specific use of any form of ministry based on Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations.

If a congregation in the WELS chooses to participate in a charter program with their LES because they want to use the LES as an outreach tool, knowing full well that the parents of the voucher children will not be from many religious backgrounds outside the WELS, then may the

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

Holy Spirit work through their ministry to create faith in as many children as he wills, and may that faith be sustained until they reach heaven with all the saints. And may they be able to reach the parents through the children and be able to instruct the parents how to perform their God given duty of being primary educators of their children.

But if that same congregation decides that they would rather use their LES to nurture and train the next generation of leaders in the church by partnering with parents in the raising of their children in one mind, one faith, in unity and fellowship, no one can rightly accuse them of denying the gospel to children who would have come into their school through a voucher program. No one can rightly say that they are going against Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations. Instead, let God be praised that they've decided to focus on keeping and strengthening the disciples they're making by planting and watering the gospel seed in the little hearts and minds of their LES students so that the Holy Spirit can make it grow strong. Neither scenario is any more or less right or wrong. Both are God pleasing ways of carrying out Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations.

### **The Apostolic Age**

In the years following Jesus' ascension until the apostles' lives ended, Christian education of children was much the same as it always has been. Parents taught their children what they learned from the church. The roles were unchanged, parents as primary educators, church as secondary and supplemental partners. Information is not extant of the apostles having specific programs in place among the first Christians specifically for the training of children.

This is not to say that children and their training were unimportant. Lawson puts the teaching of the apostles into five areas:

- 1) the good news of the gospel of Christ
- 2) the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in light of Christ's life, death, and resurrection
- 3) the confession of faith held by Christians
- 4) the teachings of Jesus
- 5) how to live in response to God's love and saving work.<sup>25</sup>

None of these areas of the apostles' teaching downplay the importance of Christian education of children.

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<sup>25</sup> Lawson, 18.

One new development during this era in Christian education is that the Old Testament priesthood was no longer in effect for God's people. Those who wished to be overseers or leaders in the church in any capacity had to be trained to do so and had to meet certain criteria, one of which was the ability to teach.<sup>26</sup> With Christianity in its infancy, the teaching task was of the utmost importance so that the gospel of Jesus Christ could be spread throughout the world. Gone were the days of the theocracy and keeping separate from the nations. Gone were the days of waiting for the Messiah. Jesus had come, completed his work, and gone back to heaven. Now was time to teach, and children were naturally included in that teaching so that the gospel would be passed from generation to generation. In the age of the apostles, the partnership and roles of Christian education were essential. Parents taught their children the truths of the gospel from infancy,<sup>27</sup> and the newly formed Christian church was there to be their supplemental and secondary partner.

### **This Partnership is Modeled by God**

In conclusion to this section on the scriptural basis for this partnership approach to parental involvement in Christian education is a different perspective than what has been presented thus far. Judy Ten Elshof is an associate professor of Christian ministry and leadership at Biola University's Talbot School of Theology. In her essay, *Family Life Education*, she lays out four points to a plan of biblical foundations for the family that has this parent/church partnership in mind.

It needs to be pointed out that her essay contains some language that reveals a misunderstanding of faith and the Means of Grace, but her points about the relationship between parents and the church in Christian education of children are valid. She refers to the religious education of children as the parents' task first and foremost. God partners with parents by being a model parent for them through his relationship with the children of Israel in the Old Testament as well as with the Christian church in the New Testament.

The first of these four points is God's fatherly commitment to his people, which is shown in his commitment to the church and the church's commitment to its members. This parallels the

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 3:2.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15

commitment and unconditional love that leads a parent to assume their primary role as Christian educator of their children. It also makes them able to work with the church as their supplementary and secondary partner.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, God is the model parent in that the grace of God should be ministered by parents toward their children. Parents and their children receive the assurance of God's grace toward them and their children at church but they then need to reinforce that grace in their homes.

The church again needs to be actively modeling the redemptive process of forgiving the sins of its members. Hebrews 12 says loving discipline that includes forgiveness is good for everyone, parents and children alike. As the church creates an atmosphere of grace that includes acceptance and forgiveness, a model will be established for parents to raise their children within an atmosphere of grace.<sup>29</sup>

Third, the Christian is then empowered by Christ and his Word to live sanctified lives. This empowerment needs to be taught through the Word and through the church, so that parents can teach it to their children, so that as they grow in their faith they will grow in godly living also.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, intimacy within the body of Christ, in which the church partners with parents to develop a strong Christian family and train Christian children for a life of faith in and service to Jesus. Families who can openly confess their sins and receive forgiveness in the church will also openly confess and receive forgiveness at home. This intimacy serves to strengthen the covenant relationship between parent and child that is modeled in the relationship between God and his people. It allows them to foster the atmosphere of grace by teaching their children of the grace which was shown them by Jesus, and empower them to live lives of service to God and others.<sup>31</sup>

God has established a way in which training and education of Christian children is done best. Throughout Scripture, this partnership is essential between parents and the church, where they work together, where the parents take on their responsibility as primary educator of their

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<sup>28</sup> Elshof, 196.

<sup>29</sup> Elshof, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Elshof, 197.

<sup>31</sup> Elshof, 197,198.

children and the church supports, supplements, and partners with them in training their children. Saying that this partnership is essential is not a statement to limit the power of the Holy Spirit, as if it were possible for anyone to do so. This partnership is essential because it is the way that Christian education works best. That is the way our LORD set it up.

In the WELS, we acknowledge the essential nature of this partnership between parents and church in our hymnal's order of Holy Baptism. Of course, our baptism liturgy is not mandated or necessary, but we as a church body recognize that once the child is washed clean through baptism, Christian training and education must continue so that the new faith in that child can be nurtured and grow strong. This responsibility lies first with the parents and the sponsors who bring the child to the font, and then as secondary partners, the entire congregation. It is the whole congregation that responds to the exhortation:

Our Lord commands that we teach his precious truths to all who are baptized. Christian love therefore urges all of us, especially parents and sponsors, to assist in whatever manner possible so that \_\_\_\_\_ may remain a child of God until death. If you are willing to carry out this responsibility, then answer: Yes, as God gives me strength.<sup>32</sup>

As children are brought to the font, their parents and sponsors make the essential partnership commitment to raise their children with the church's help, in Christian love, as God established in his Word. Praise God for this.

## 2. THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND THE CHURCH HAS BEEN ACHIEVED THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY

This chapter will show that the Christian church since its very infancy has regarded the partnership between parents and the church as essential for Christian education. There will be three divisions: 1) The Early and Medieval Church, 2) The Reformation Era, and 3) The Era of Pietism and Revivalism. This will bring our timeline of Christian education to the modern era, which will be covered in the following chapter.

### **The Early and Medieval Church**

The fledgling Christian Church of the first century A.D. educated their children using the same partnership paradigm. Parents were the primary Christian educators of children and the

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<sup>32</sup> *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993) 14.

church served as secondary and supplemental partners. There was a new development in religious education from which the Christian church no doubt benefitted. Jewish culture had begun educating its children with Hebrew elementary schools. This was a way in which the Jewish synagogue leaders and teachers of the law could supplement the training that the children got at home and for the first time gave the church a direct role in the education of children. It was yet another way in which the child who grew up in the deeply religious Jewish culture could learn of his religious heritage. It was a new tool for the church to use in carrying out its role of assisting parents.<sup>33</sup>

It is uncertain when these Hebrew elementary schools started. It could be just before, during, or just after the time of Christ. For this reason one may challenge whether they could be included among early forms of Christian education, since the Jewish faith has rejected Christ as the Messiah. They are included for the purpose of this paper because the Christian church has its roots in Judaism. There's a very good chance that a vast majority of early Christians were trained in schools like these. There could have been Hebrew elementary schools in conjunction with the synagogues where Paul would start his mission work when he came into a city on his missionary journeys. These were the first schools that trained children in religion, and one can assume they had a great impact on the development of Christian education.

Rather little is known about the Christian education of children in the early Christian church, but the silence on the subject implies that children were taught the Word of God in their homes by their parents as always. The very early Christian church under the apostles was a communal society. The teaching of children could have been an entire community activity. Theodore Gerald Soares, in his essay "The Study of Religious Education," addresses the difficulty associated with determining if there was any religious education of children other than by the parents in the early Christian church.

Education being so largely a discipline in the communal life, the disciples took for granted that the children of Christians would grow up in the practice of the Christian life. The catechumenate was established especially for the instruction of the heathen before their reception into the church. Later it became customary for children to receive instruction before their confirmation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Theodore Gerald Soares, "The Study of Religious Education," *The Biblical World* 47 (January 1916): 4.

<sup>34</sup> Soares, 14.

The modern Christian should be careful when studying the early church not to confuse terms used then with the ones used today. Catechuminate, in this era, does not necessarily mean a child of twelve to fourteen years of age who is being instructed before confirmation. While the catechuminate were people being instructed, it was more often adults who were being instructed before being baptized. Once baptized, the adult convert was a full member of the church, able to receive Lord's Supper.

The institutions of religious education that were formed during this time were known as the catechumenal schools. Their original purpose was to train the catechuminate for church membership, but later they expanded to also offer education to all ages in many disciplines. These schools became institutions of higher learning, teaching everything from theology to philosophy and rhetoric. The thought was that Christians should not just study what God has said but also what man has said on every subject because every subject has its origin in God. These institutions were more along the lines of a university than an LES of today.<sup>35</sup>

The catechumenal schools put Christian education on the church's radar. During the fourth and fifth centuries, many of the church fathers began to consider what forms Christian education should take going forward. Most notable for the purpose of this paper is the work of John Chrysostom of Constantinople. He wrote extensively on the primary responsibility of parents, especially fathers, to educate their children in God's Word and in the Christian faith. Church Fathers such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Augustine of Hippo developed curricula for instruction of new converts of all ages. Augustine especially emphasized the need for patience in instruction and adapting to the needs of individual students.<sup>36</sup>

While we don't have much direct reference to the Church Fathers seeing the need for there to be a partnership between parents and the church in the Christian education of children, we can infer that it was important to them from the work that they did. These men realized the importance of Christian education, the essential nature of parents meeting their responsibility of training their children at home, and the church's need to give parents the training needed to pass the truths of the Bible along to their children.

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<sup>35</sup> Lawson, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Lawson, 19.

The church of medieval times, however, was truly broken in every way. Christian education was no different. Society was divided into three “estates” – clergy, nobility, and the commoners. There was a marked decline in the focus of education on teaching children the truths of God’s Word. The partnership which had been formed from the beginning was largely lost.

The church’s focus on education which had been so prevalent in the early days shifted to a desire to control every aspect of life for the commoners and to win the favor of the politically powerful nobility. The clergy cloistered themselves in monasteries and tried to work their way into God’s favor by punishing themselves for their sins. They thought by doing so they were achieving a higher spirituality for themselves. This came at the expense of caring for the spiritual needs of the people. The church during the middle ages was no partner of parents.<sup>37</sup>

The other two estates were in no position to pick up the slack. While the primary responsibility for teaching children God’s Word belongs to the parents, the nobility had very little interest in doing so. The education of their children shifted to matters of warfare and chivalry. Better, they thought, for their sons to know how to govern and win a battle than to know their Savior. The commoners were also lacking because they were not educated at all. The parents were probably unable to read, much less able to explain God’s Word to their children without the support and training of the church. With regard to Christian education, these truly were the dark ages.<sup>38</sup>

## **The Reformation Era**

Coming out of these dark ages, there are many reasons why the Christian church needed Martin Luther, and why it is such a wonderful working of the hand of God that he would use Dr. Luther to reform his church and bring the gospel back to the forefront. Christian education was no exception. Luther’s influence on Christian education was monumental. He put God’s Word in the hands of the people in many ways. His translation of the bible into German made God’s Word accessible to anyone who could read. The hymns and forms of worship that he wrote were

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<sup>37</sup> Lawson, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Lawson, 20.



a teaching tool that edified even the most common people. Perhaps his greatest contributions to Christian education are his Small and Large Catechisms.<sup>39</sup>

In 1528-29, after the Reformation was well under way, Luther participated in the Saxon Visitation. While visiting the congregations that had become Lutheran, the Reformer found the most deplorable conditions. One of the more glaring ways in which this was evident was the training of children. This was the impetus for Luther to write his catechisms. The first to be published was the Small Catechism, which was in the form of wall charts for use in educating children both in the home and in the church. Shortly thereafter was published the Large Catechism, the first to be put into book form. This was intended for pastors, teachers, and parents (especially fathers) as a tool to be able to understand the truths of the Small Catechism with more depth so that they could then pass that knowledge along to their children.<sup>40</sup>

While the catechisms were used as teaching tools by both the church and parents, Luther understood that the primary role of instructing children in God's Word has been given to parents with the church as a supplementary and secondary partner. Luther started the practice of instructing young children to be able to partake of Lord's Supper. Parents were to teach the parts of the Catechism to their children before they were instructed and confirmed by the church as communicant members. As Bente explains in his *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord*:

The Large Catechism was to serve all; the same applies to the Small Catechism. But above all it was to be placed into the hands of the children, who were to use and to memorize it at home, and bring it with them for instruction in the church....Luther was accustomed to direct his admonition to partake of the Lord's Supper diligently also to children, and that, too, to children of comparatively tender years. In his sermon of March 25, 1529, he says, "This exhortation ought not only move us older ones, but also the young and the children. Therefore you parents ought to instruct and educate them in the Decalog, the Creed, the Prayer, and the Sacraments. Such children ought to be admitted to the Table that they might be partakers" [of the Lord's Supper] (W. 30, 1, 233). In his sermon of December 10, 1528, we read: "Hence, you parents and heads of families, invite your subordinates to this Sacrament; and we shall demand an account of you if you neglect it. If you will not go yourselves, let the young go; we are much

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<sup>39</sup> Lawson, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Dale R. Schulz, "Our Instruction and Confirmation Practices: Is It Time for a Change?," <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1748>.

concerned about them. When they come, we shall learn, by examining them, how you instruct them in the Word as prescribed. Hence, do come more frequently to the Sacrament, and also admonish your children to do so when they have reached the age of discretion. For in this way we want to learn who are Christians and who not. If you will not do so, we shall speak to you on the subject. For even though you older people insist on going to the devil, we shall still inquire about your children. Necessity: because sin, the devil, and death are ever present. Benefit: because the remission of sins and the Holy Spirit are received.” (121 f). The tender age at which the young were held to partake of the Lord’s Supper appears in Bugenhagen’s preface to his Danish edition of the Enchiridion of 1538, where he says, “that, after this confession is made, also the little children of about eight years or less should be admitted to the table of him who says: Suffer the little children to come unto Me.”<sup>41</sup>

Nobody can question Luther’s passion for the education of children. Nobody can question Luther’s understanding of the essential nature of the partnership and roles of parents and church. Fathers, in a sense, are pastors of their little congregations that God has given them when he blessed them with a wife and children. They are the ones with primary responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their household. The church is a resource for them to use to give them the tools to equip them to carry out their task. Luther goes so far as to say that if men wish to shirk this responsibility, or if they are ill equipped to carry it out, they would be better to remain unmarried and childless. F. V. N. Painter, in his book *Luther on Education* explains Luther’s attitude toward parents who do not live up to their responsibility.

Some parents are so lacking in piety that, like the ostrich, they harden themselves against their own offspring. Others by reason of their ignorance are unqualified to raise their children in a proper manner. And still others, who have the requisite piety and intelligence, are constantly burdened with cares and labors. Luther would have only such persons marry as are competent to instruct their children in the elements of religion. “No one should become a father,” he says, “unless he is able to instruct his children in the Ten Commandments and the Gospel, so that he may bring up true Christians. But many enter the state of holy matrimony who cannot say the Lord’s Prayer, and knowing nothing themselves, they are utterly incompetent to instruct their children. Children should be brought up in the fear of God. If the kingdom of God is to come in power, we must begin with children, and teach them from the cradle.”<sup>42</sup>

If the parents were incompetent to properly educate their children, as was very often the case in Luther’s day, parents were to turn to the church for material, training, and education for

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<sup>41</sup> F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 82.

<sup>42</sup> F. V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1889) 119,120.

themselves so that they could then teach their children. In this case, the church would step in as the primary educator of their children while teaching the family how to educate itself through study of God's Word in the home. Luther never imagined any scenario where there would not be a partnership formed between parents and church for the religious training of children.

When dealing with sinful and unreliable people, there is always the question, "What if parents just don't do it?" In that case, Luther saw religious training in schools as essential, but one must remember the context of Luther's time before making comparisons to our LES of today. The main difference is that the schools Luther had in mind would be run by the state. He urged the state to set up and maintain primary education and insist that all children be made to attend. These state run schools were also encouraged to include religious training in their curriculum. It is important to note that Luther's era included the concept of *cuius regio eius religio*, which meant that whoever the ruler of the territory was, his religion was the religion of the territory. In Lutheran territories all of the institutions were Lutheran.<sup>43</sup>

For our rulers are certainly bound to maintain the spiritual and secular offices and callings, so that there may always be preachers, jurists, pastors, scribes, physicians, schoolmasters, and the like; for these cannot be dispensed with. If the government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle, to mount ramparts and perform other martial duties in time of war; how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil, whose object it is secretly to exhaust our cities and principalities of their strong men, to destroy the kernel and leave a shell of ignorant and helpless people, whom he can sport and juggle with at pleasure. That is starving out a city or country, destroying it without a struggle, and without its knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Luther did promote religious instruction in schools that were run by the state instead of by the church as we have today. This did not, however, mean that these schools were to replace the need for religious training at home. In fact, they were to be yet another tool, along with the church, for parents to use to carry out their responsibility of being the primary religious educators of their children. There can be absolutely no doubt that, according to Luther, the buck stopped with the father of the household for the religious training of his children and he was to use the church and the school (where available) as his secondary partner.

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<sup>43</sup> Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 7.

<sup>44</sup> Painter, 137,138.

## **The Era of Pietism and Revivalism**

During the time following the Reformation, there was a shift in the focus of Christian education to the sanctified living of Christians instead of justification by faith alone. Education emphasized living a life of Christian piety. It was more about what someone must do to achieve a higher spirituality than what Jesus did to win forgiveness of sins. The goal of religious training was closeness with God in order to have a genuine spiritual experience. Christian living makes one feel like a Christian. Therefore, instead of memorizing bible passages, creeds, prayers, or the Ten Commandments, children were taught ways in which to be more spiritual and pious in their daily lives.

This was also the time when Methodism and holiness groups were gaining popularity. This sanctification emphasis didn't change the thinking that Christian education must take place first in the home with parents as primary educators and the church as secondary and supplemental partners. John Wesley established schools where parents were expected to give spiritual training at home as well as reinforce what the children learned in school. He also encouraged the formation of small groups to increase spirituality and accountability in order to spur members on to greater holiness.<sup>45</sup>

Along with the Scriptural basis for the roles of parents and the church in Christian education, throughout the history of the Christian church parents were expected to assume the primary role of educating their children in God's Word while the church was their secondary and supplementary partner. This is the way it has always been done. From the very beginning, this partnership has been considered essential to training children for lives of faith in and service to Jesus.

### **3. FORMING A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOLS IS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO ALL FORMS OF EDUCATION TODAY**

In the modern era, Christian education of children has taken many forms. The most common form of education that is done by the church is the Sunday school, followed by catechetical instruction before confirmation. In many Christian denominations in the United States, Sunday school is the only way in which the individual congregations engage in educating

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<sup>45</sup> Lawson, 22.

children in God's Word. This is no different in the majority of WELS congregations. Where there is no LES, often Sunday school, vacation bible school during the summer, and catechism instruction are the sole forms of religious training provided by WELS congregations. While it is true that an LES gives an excellent way for the church to fulfill its partnership role on a daily basis, the parents must assume their role as primary religious educators of their children. The church should never be relied on as primary religious educator of children because the church is not the one with the most influence on the children, even in an LES setting. Parents were given this role by God, and are to take it seriously no matter what educational opportunities the congregation offers. The roles of parents and church must be carried out. The partnership between them must be encouraged and strengthened in any congregational setting.

The WELS has been blessed by our Lord with a wonderful school system that provides, in most places in the United States, the opportunity for daily Christian education from early childhood through the college years. The most common form of full time Christian education is the LES, which has always been emphasized in the WELS. There are well over 350 schools and almost 30,000 LES students synod wide. These schools have always been a ministry arm of the congregation that supports it. While one purpose of the LES is the religious training of children, it is not the only purpose. They also teach all the same subjects that are taught in a public school, letting God's Word shape the way that all academic subjects are presented.

While the LES is able to supplement the Christian education that children receive at home, it has never been intended to replace parents as the primary educators. In fact, there is modern expert evidence from all branches of education, both secular and religious, that the partnership relationship between parents and schools is as essential to achieving optimal results as it has ever been. This chapter will lay out that evidence in three sections: 1) Secular Education, 2) Protestant Christendom Outside the WELS, and 3) The Traditional Paradigm of the LES in WELS.

## **Secular Education**

The Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS) is a resource provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). They have an internet based

“Successful School Guide,” where they list “family, school, and community partnership”<sup>46</sup> as one of seven “best practices.”<sup>47</sup> They include this explanation as to why they consider this a best practice.

Families are a child's first teacher. When teachers and families work together, the children in their care succeed. Effective, meaningful, partnerships with families and the community can take many forms. Here are some ideas for improving partnerships in your school-community.<sup>48</sup>

This website includes many guidelines for schools and teachers to follow and suggestions as to how to form and grow a partnership with parents to achieve optimal results in their students in all educational endeavors. The emphasis throughout is that this partnership is essential to education.

In 2002, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), in conjunction with the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools published their annual synthesis of research studies on the impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. The following bulleted list highlights the key findings from their analysis of 51 different research studies:

- Many studies found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background were more likely to:
  - Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.
  - Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.
  - Attend school regularly.
  - Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.
  - Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.<sup>49</sup>
- Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.<sup>50</sup>
- The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex educational system. The more

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<sup>46</sup> <http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/practices/index.html>, (September 25, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> A “best practice” is just that – best. It is a practice that with research and study has been found to be the best way of doing things.

<sup>48</sup> <http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/practices/family.html>, (September 25, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of school, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,” <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>, (September 19, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Henderson and Mapp, 25.

families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.<sup>51</sup>

- Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all families can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning.<sup>52</sup>
- Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific skills.<sup>53</sup>
- Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.<sup>54</sup>

The secular education community supports with research and analysis what God's people have been practicing in the religious training of their children since the very beginning. The primary teacher of any child is the parents, with the school, or in the case of religious education the church, as the secondary and supplemental partnership. If optimal educational results are to be achieved, this partnership is essential. The research indicates that no matter what the socio-economic make-up of the school is, this partnership still can, and must be recognized and fostered in order for the children to reach their full learning potential. This should come as no surprise to Christians. It is the way God set it up.

### **Protestant Christendom Outside the WELS**

In most of Protestant Christianity, full time elementary schools that are supported as ministry arms of individual congregations are somewhat rare. Many if not most churches are fighting an uphill battle to educate children in the ever more secularized society of the United States today.

This has made it necessary for experts in Christian education from other denominations to promote the traditional roles of parents and church in Christian education. Parents must take the lead. They must partner with the church. Dr. Randolph Crump Miller was a professor of

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<sup>51</sup> Henderson and Mapp, 30.

<sup>52</sup> Henderson and Mapp, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Henderson and Mapp, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Henderson and Mapp, 51.

Christian education at Yale Divinity School in the 1950's. He wrote of the uphill battle that parents and congregations fight when they try to adequately carry out Christian education of their children in a secularized society. With so many factors working against the Christian home and the devil using all of society to work against the growth in understanding of God's Word by Christian children, parents and church simply must work hand in hand.

In modern society, the home usually finds that the basic implications of daily living are based upon a secular philosophy. The family exists in a society which is governed by the mechanics of industrialism and by the economics of the profit system, and it is against this cultural infiltration that the Christian home must work. It is not a problem of building a Christian home in a Christian society (and indeed the problem has never been that simple); it is rather the discovery of the relevance of the Christian home within a society which permits, condones, and approves many unchristian motives and actions.<sup>55</sup>

If society in the 1950's was secularized to the point where the religious education of children was an uphill battle, how much more is that the case today? The devil is hard at work, especially in the homes of Christians. The key is that parents need to work with the church and receive support from the church to carry out their role as primary teachers of their children. Perhaps more importantly, parents need to teach their children how to live as Christians "in the world," but not "of the world." If a child hears God's Word at church, at school, or even at home, but has nobody show him what it means to live as a Christian, what are the chances that the child will resist the temptation and lure of a world with ever declining morals and ever increasing mockery of all things Christian? If there is no partnership between the parents and the church, if there is nobody to model what the life of a Christian is like at home, is not the education of children who have no Christian role models creating generations who look in the mirror and walk away and forget what they look like?<sup>56</sup> This child is not doomed, but the deck is far more stacked in the devil's favor.

The need for Christian role models does not end with daily education in a Christian school. These role models need to be the parents who take on their God given responsibility to educate their children in God's Word. Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, professor of philosophical theology at Yale Divinity School promotes the importance of parental involvement in the

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<sup>55</sup> Randolph Crump Miller, "The Clue to Christian Education," in *A Reader in Christian Education: Foundations and Basic Perspectives*, ed. Eugene s. Gibbs, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 265.

<sup>56</sup> James 1:22-24



Christian education of their children. He goes so far as to say that if a parent is not involved in the education of their children, in any subject, but especially in the child's religious training, the parent is not only shirking their responsibility to their child, they are acting in an unloving manner, even treating their child as subhuman.

I said that to love children includes caring for them in such a way that they will mature into responsible agents who find joy in their existence. I spoke thus because in my vision of human existence – which, let me make clear, is the Christian vision – the essence of human dignity, the essence of what is unique to us among all God's creatures is that we are responsible agents. Accordingly, it is my view that when parents fail to do what they can to rear children so that they will become responsible agents, the parents fail them at the most fundamental point of all. They treat the children as if they were only complicated animals, creatures devoid of dignity. Likewise, to fail to rear children is to fail in one's responsibility to others, for though we can argue as to the cause of the phenomenon, the truth of the matter is that children are all too often mean and cruel. Accordingly, simply to allow children to pursue their own inclinations and interests is to allow them to wreak their passion for meanness on others, and to allow that to happen is to act irresponsibly toward those others.<sup>57</sup>

There is much language in the above quotation that makes Lutherans uncomfortable when referring to Christian education of children. In the WELS, we would say that the purpose for Christian education as it is put forth in the bible is to share the gospel so that the Holy Spirit can make children wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Wolterstorff's purpose of Christian education, to instill in the child the ability to be responsible agents and have a happy existence makes us cringe, but the main point that is being made is apropos. God gives parents little souls to care for. They are responsible for bringing them to their Savior, where those little souls that by nature are dead and blind enemies of God are miraculously transformed into little Christian heirs of heaven. For a parent to fail in this task is truly unloving.

Parents have this primary responsibility because God, in his wisdom, knows that they are the only ones who truly are in the position to carry it out. They are the ones who are the role models, the ones that children look to for everything, the ones who have the most influence on their children. The church, the school, even others in the family will never have the impact on a child that the parents do.

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<sup>57</sup> Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning*, ed. Gloria Goris Stranks, Clarence W. Joldersma, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 219.

<sup>58</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15.

This is why in every form of education of children from the beginning of time, parents have played the primary and most important role. Other educational agencies, whether they are the church, the school, the pastors in the church or the teachers in the school, have always been secondary and supplemental partners with parents. Without parents taking the primary role, these agencies are fighting an uphill battle to try and teach children with little or no help from the people who have the most influence in a child's life during their formative years. Of course, in Christian education nobody is taking on this uphill battle alone. With educating in God's Word, the power of the Holy Spirit is at work, making this hill one that can be climbed. Without a partnership with parents, the educator's task is not impossible, but it is truly daunting.

### **The Traditional Paradigm of the LES in WELS**

Since its founding in 1850, the WELS has had a strong focus on Christian education of its children. Congregations used their educational institutions, whether they had an LES or not, primarily to nurture the faith of their member children and train the next generation of congregational leaders. Education was supported at home by parents who were church-going people with goals that were in line with the biblical emphasis of Christian parents.

The home took the lead in imparting these emphases. Moral values and religious habits were learned by children at home from parents and grandparents; they were solidified at the church school. There were some children, of course, who rejected these values as adults, but there were many others who knew that any attempt to repudiate Christian values and break spiritual habits would be impeded by the strong arm example of the home. In the main, children grew to adulthood and remained within the sphere of gospel influence because of the strength of their home and family structure.<sup>59</sup>

As the WELS grew, so did the emphasis on religious education of children. The numbers of Sunday schools, LES's and children enrolled in them steadily increased over the decades. Unfortunately during this same period, society in the United States has had a marked decline in family values. There has also been a general secularization of society in the United States. These societal changes have had an effect on parental involvement in the LES.

In our generation a reversal has taken place. Where the home formerly served as the primary agency for Christian nurture, and the Christian school was to reinforce that which was being taught in the home; today, for whatever reason, Christian education programs have become the training ground for Christian life, with parents taking on the

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<sup>59</sup> James Tiefel, "Issues in Parish Education," [www.wlsessays.net/node/1515](http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1515), (September 4, 2012) 3.

role of the reinforcing agent, supporting that which is taught in the classroom. Here, I feel is the most important issue facing Christian education today. The lead role of training children in God's way must be shifted back to parents. Christian education must find greater emphasis in the home.<sup>60</sup>

As a result of this reversal there has risen an attitude that confirmation equals graduation from church, perhaps in part because confirmation and graduation from the LES happen in the same year. There is also a sentiment that religion is an academic subject, and lessons are treated as homework. Pastors and teachers are often frustrated that instead of being a secondary and supplementary partner, the LES has often replaced the parents as primary educator of their children. This frustration comes from the fact that when parents do not keep up their end of the partnership, the system does not work optimally.

The church's education of children presupposes, however, that the home is strong and supportive, offering to children a fundamental set of Scriptural values and habits. If one accepts the contention that many WELS homes are not strong and supportive, then one must conclude that the WELS educational priority is not operating in the environment which conceived it and made it what it intended to be. This has created a difficult situation.<sup>61</sup>

While the LES that is focused on nurturing the faith of member children struggles with the issue of parental involvement, there is still the expectation of the traditional roles and partnership between parents and the church. When the vast majority of the students in the LES are WELS members, issues of parental involvement in the religious training of their children can be handled within the congregation using a law and gospel approach, knowing that, at least in the parents' public confession by their church membership they are on the same spiritual page with the congregation and have the same goals for their children.

There are also proactive measures that can be taken to make this partnership expectation known. Church attendance is often taken, which fosters parental involvement in the child's religious training. Parents that worship with their children will be more active in the religious training of their children. Non-member parents are often required to take Bible Information Class (BIC) with the pastor as a condition of their children enrolling in the LES. This gives the

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<sup>60</sup> Gerald F. Kastens, "A Changing World, ... An Unchanging Challenge: God's plan for Rearing Children," [www.wlssays.net/files/KastensChildren.rtf](http://www.wlssays.net/files/KastensChildren.rtf), 1,2.

<sup>61</sup> Tiefel, 4.

pastor an opportunity to communicate the expectation of this partnership to parents. Even if the parents never join the congregation, they have the knowledge of what their children are being taught that would be sufficient for them to become communicant members of the congregation if they should so choose. This knowledge can provide a starting point for the parent to carry out their responsibility to be primary educators of their children.

When children reach the age to start catechism class, pastors are also able to be proactive in forming a partnership with parents. An example of this is holding quarterly pastor/parent sessions where it is mandatory that at least one parent be in attendance. During the session, the pastor reviews with the parents the lessons which will be taught to their child during that quarter. This allows the parents a review of the catechism and gives them the resources and ability to help their child understand the things learned in catechism class. It also impresses on them the importance of their task as primary educators of their children who will soon be adult members of the body of Christ. One pastor goes so far in impressing this importance on parents that he requires the parents to sign a contract at the first pastor/parent session where they promise to carry out their role.<sup>62</sup>

The general paradigm of the LES in WELS since the very beginning has been as a ministry arm of the congregation focused on nurturing the children of the congregation and training them to be future leaders in the church. This paradigm has always included the roles and partnership between parents and the church that has been shown to be standard practice in Christian education since the very beginning. This partnership is counted on, even demanded by pastors, teachers, and parents in the WELS, as it should be because this is how God set it up.

#### 4. DEALING WITH THE PARADIGM SHIFT THAT COMES WITH PARTICIPATION IN A CHOICE OR CHARTER PROGRAM

In order to accomplish the purpose of this paper, three things need to be determined:

- 1) Is there a paradigm shift with regard to the parent/church partnership and roles that takes place with the influx of non-WELS students into an LES that participates in a choice or charter program?

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<sup>62</sup> This contract is included as Appendix A.

- 2) If there is a paradigm shift, what is being done in the LES that participates in such a program to deal with that paradigm shift?
- 3) What recommendations can be made for congregations that are considering a choice or charter program as an option for their LES?

To find answers to these questions, a survey was conducted of congregations that support an LES that participates in the School Choice Program in the cities of Milwaukee and Racine, WI.<sup>63</sup> These surveys were sent out via email along with a letter explaining the topic, scope, and goals of this paper.<sup>64</sup> Two different versions of the survey were used. One was sent to each pastor serving the congregations that support an LES which participates in the School Choice Program. This version focused on forming a partnership with parents in catechism instruction in the LES.<sup>65</sup> A slightly different version of the same survey was sent to the principals of each LES that was surveyed.<sup>66</sup> The principals were then asked to forward the survey to each member of the faculty at their LES. The version that the teachers received focused on forming a partnership with parents in daily classroom religious education as well as secular subjects. Eight pastors and twelve teachers responded. The responses to these surveys were then analyzed, and those which were deemed relevant to the topic of this paper<sup>67</sup> by the author were used to shape the upcoming section.<sup>68</sup>

Some factual information about the School Choice Program and the WELS schools that were surveyed is needed as a background before delving into the task of answering the above questions. The current program provisions state that “a school must excuse a student from participation in any religious instruction or activity at the request of the child’s parent or

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<sup>63</sup> A list of the schools surveyed is included as Appendix B

<sup>64</sup> Appendix C.

<sup>65</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>66</sup> Appendix E.

<sup>67</sup> “Relevant to the topic of this paper” does not mean that responses were chosen by the author based on preconceived notions or that any responses were ignored which do not support the premises which are put forth in this paper.

<sup>68</sup> If any reader wishes to see the survey responses, a document which lists every response to each survey question will be made available to the reader individually by request from the author. The names and congregations of the respondents will be removed from this document.

guardian.”<sup>69</sup> While, on the surface, this legal right of students to opt out of religious instruction would seem to undermine the evangelism aspect of participation in a choice program, the survey results show that zero students of those schools surveyed have ever exercised this right. One survey respondent indicates that the religious instruction is what makes the WELS school more attractive than other private schools, and that it does open a door to discussing religious matters with parents. Another stated that to opt out of religion classes means that students would then opt out of the school, since religion is part of the curriculum. These answers show that concerns over the right of students to refuse religious education being detrimental to the purpose of the LES are based more on perception than on what is current reality.

Question #2 on the surveys is “What percentage of your students are non-WELS?” The vast majority of responses were from schools which consist of over 80% non-WELS students. A much smaller number of responses report that their school is around 50% non-WELS, and the two schools which began participating in the School Choice Program within the last two years report that their school is around 25% non-WELS. Of those where the school is over 80% non-WELS, two of the answers included comments which are noteworthy:

- 88% - but please take into account that some parents who took the pastor’s instruction class were confirmed and accepted as members have fallen off in their worship participation. So the children are technically members, but have been exposed to WELS worship for a very limited time.
- The school began with 0% WELS members and as of last year we had 36 (out of 240) students whose families had joined *the congregation*.<sup>70</sup> One thing to remember is that while “only” 30-40 students claim membership at *the congregation*, many, many, many more consider *the congregation* their church home and our pastors their pastors.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ritche, internet.

<sup>70</sup> “*The congregation*” is italicized because it replaces the name of the congregation in the response. The reason for this is that in the letter that accompanied the survey I offered anonymity to the respondents. If those answering the survey wished to give me their name for the purpose of further discussion, they were able to do so, but permission was never sought to put their names or the names of their congregation in the body of the paper. For the purpose and scope of this paper it is unnecessary to do so.

<sup>71</sup>This respondent answered question #1, “How long has your school participated in the School Choice Program?” in this way: “*The congregation* started their school 10 years ago with the intent to fully utilize the MPCP (Milwaukee Parental Choice Program) as the main funding source for the school. The congregation does not use any offering to subsidize the school.” This means that while this school participates in the School Choice Program and the school bears the name of the congregation, it is not supported financially by that congregation, making this particular school different from the others surveyed that existed before the School Choice Program started.

Here we have two different schools that have nearly the same percentage of their students as members of their congregations. Yet these comments indicate that they are in very different situations as far as the relationship they have with the parents who send their children to the school. As the survey results are presented to show a thumbnail sketch of what those who participate in the School Choice Program are facing, it is important to remember that there are no numbers, no single survey, and no individual paper that is going to tell the whole story as far as the way a congregation carries out its ministry. Blanket statements are dangerous. This paper and the survey that accompany it are in no way attempting to tell the whole story, but are focused on opening a dialogue about aspects of participating in a School Choice Program that deal with parental involvement. The answers to the surveys varied to such a degree that no general truths or all-encompassing statements can be made. They can, however, report some of the blessings experienced and challenges faced by those who are involved in this program and give those considering participation in a similar program a way to become better informed as to whether it is something they want to do in their LES.

Now the focus will be on the three questions at the beginning of this chapter. Each of the questions will be answered individually based on the survey results. There will not, however be a bulleted list of quotes from the completed surveys. Instead, the answers will be compiled into paragraphs giving a synopsis of the thoughts that are relevant to each of the three questions.

**1) Is there a paradigm shift with regard to the parent/church partnership and roles that takes place with the influx of non-WELS students into an LES that participates in a choice or charter program?**

The short answer to this question is a simple “yes.” It should come as no surprise that the survey results show that when the majority of parents are of a different faith than the church that is giving their children religious training that the parents would not be able to be counted on to be the primary educators of their children as presented earlier in this paper. They really cannot be expected to, since nobody has equipped them to do so. Therefore, the role of the school is shifted to the primary role, and any partnership with the parents would be with them as the secondary partner, supplementing what their children learn at school with reinforcement at home.

It is the opinion of the author Babinec that given the essential nature of this partnership and the roles that God has given to both parents and the church as we have already established, this partnership should be kept at the forefront as a goal to strive for. Every member of an LES family who is a WELS member, from pastor, to teachers, to parents, should be working to find a way to equip the parents of non-WELS children to assume their God given role as primary Christian educators of their children so that the roles of the partnership can be shifted back to the way that God intended it. This new paradigm should be a fluid process, where, as new students come into the LES with parents who are ill-equipped to educate their children, the church takes the primary role as educator of the children for a time and works with the parents to make them able to understand, respect, and take over that role. The church can then assume their role as supplemental and secondary partner. The survey responses show that participating in School Choice has made this easier said than done. Finding this formula for building this partnership is an ongoing process, but the efforts have not been without blessings. The following paragraphs will show some of the challenges and the blessings that have resulted from this paradigm shift.

The survey answers show that even assuming the reversal of roles, parental involvement from non-WELS parents provides a new and weighty challenge to pastors and teachers. Practical challenges, such as families moving or changing phone numbers and not informing the school have made it difficult for conversations to take place, much less a partnership. Other challenges faced are the devastating effects of poverty, drugs, and alcohol on families, as well as the fact that children are often raised by guardians other than their parents.

Parents who do get involved in their children's education also pose some challenges to forming a partnership with the school in the religious training of their children. There is a general willingness to be involved in their children's academic life, and that includes religion in a religious school. Religious training, however, is easily viewed and treated by some parents as just another academic subject. Survey respondents are of the opinion that among non-WELS parents who take an active role in their child's education, there is more interest in the secular subjects than in religious education. Other respondents indicate that non-WELS parents who are involved in their child's education are interested in religious training for their children as a moral compass but want little to do with religion for themselves. Many of these parents will claim



membership in other churches as a reason to not get involved in entering a partnership with the school to assist in the religious training of their children.

There are also ways in which the influx of non-WELS students has impacted the ability to form a partnership in the religious training of WELS children. One teacher cites lowered academic and behavioral expectations overall as a difficulty with maintaining the parental involvement of WELS parents. This teacher comments that the bar is set quite low when some children do not consider religion as a vital part of their education. When there are some in the same class who see no purpose for religion it makes it difficult to expect much from any student, even those who are WELS members. In the opinion of the author Babinec, if the established essential partnership is to be the goal, the teacher must find a way, in partnership with the WELS member parents who have children in the class to raise these expectations by challenging the parents and children who do not value religious instruction to realize its importance. To do anything less would be to the detriment of those WELS member children who have parents that should value their children's religious instruction enough not to accept the lowered expectations of those who see religion as less than vital to their children's education.

Additional difficulties that are cited are that religious education throughout the school is kept very basic. There is a challenge that comes with needing to provide spiritual milk to the baby Christians who, in some cases, have never held a Bible before while still providing an age appropriate level of spiritual meat to a student in the same classroom who has been in an active WELS family all of his or her life. In catechism classes there is an inability among many students to navigate the Bible and look up passages. The format of the catechism itself is sometimes confusing. Memory work is another area where expectations are lowered. Some pastors commented that these things which are challenges in teaching the catechism in a Choice school are things that they could count on parents to help with in another setting.

Many of the respondents made a point of the fact that the difficulties that are faced are ones that are more attributable to being a school in an urban setting than the percentage of non-WELS students. The family issues, poverty, culture of underachievement, and biblical illiteracy of the students are cultural and not exclusive to the non-WELS students. Often the WELS families face the same problems. As far as difficulties at home and the parents supporting the

religious training of their children in school, the reality seems to be that parental involvement is pretty hit and miss whether the family is WELS or not.

The blessings that are pointed to by respondents as results of this paradigm shift are that when a partnership is able to be formed where parents start getting really involved with the religious education of their children, it is often the baptism of the child which is the starting point for that formation, or when the parents come to see their children sing in church and the Holy Spirit brings them back for more, and more, and more. Sometimes that partnership is formed later, when the child starts confirmation class and wishes to become a confirmed member of the congregation after receiving instruction in the Catechism. This, like a child's baptism, gives the church a way to start a dialogue with the parents which with the Holy Spirit's help can lead to the parents not only being instructed themselves, but doing the best they can to keep their children on the path to a life of faith.

Other blessings the respondents indicate are situations where the parents are not interested in being involved with the child's religious training when other students, especially WELS students have the opportunity to share their faith with their classmates. The children are able to encourage each other, be the Christian family that many of the students lack at home. This offers the children real life experiences as young ambassadors and missionaries for Christ.

In classrooms where a good number of the students are members of other Christian denominations, respondents note that children are able to make some practical, not just theoretical, applications of doctrines where heterodox Christian churches differ from what Scripture teaches. The real presence in the Lord's Supper, infant baptism, the method of baptism, and ideas related to millennialism are all things which one survey respondent pointed to as real discussion points. The difference between discussing what "those Baptists" believe concerning baptism and what "the church that ten of my friends go to" teaches about baptism is a significant one, especially when students realize that what "the church that ten of my friends go to" teaches something that goes against what it says in the Bible. What gospel minister, this author included, would not love to have the built in "teachable moment" when he or she gets to say something like this to the whole class, WELS and non-WELS?

"There are some things in which your church teaches what the Bible doesn't. That isn't okay because we are to believe and teach everything that God's Word says. Your church

doesn't, and because of that, you and I aren't the same (as far as our doctrine), even though Jesus loves us the same. I still love you as your teacher, and I long for the day when because of what Jesus did for all of us, you and I will be the same when Jesus comes and takes us to heaven because we know him as our Savior. But until then, because I love you and I want to be sure you're in heaven with me, I'm going to teach you everything that the Bible says and hope that with Jesus' help you come to believe it just like I do."<sup>72</sup>

The paradigm shift that takes place in this setting is one where parental involvement in religious instruction cannot be counted on, at least not initially. As we have seen from the historical evidence, this is a sharp change from the way that the church has ever done Christian education. Along with this paradigm shift come many challenges and blessings. The next section will show what is being done to take on those challenges and enrich those blessings.

## **2) If there is a paradigm shift, what is being done in the LES that participates in such a program to deal with that paradigm shift?**

Almost all of those who responded to the surveys indicated that they still attempt to partner with parents of non-WELS students in their children's religious education. There was only one person who indicated that a partnership approach is not pursued. The challenge is that before a partnership can be reached where the pastors and teachers are truly working together with the parents, there has to first be a relationship formed.

Some respondents commented that they often experience the same difficulties getting parents of both WELS and non-WELS children involved in their child's education, whether that education is in religion or in other academic subjects. The majority of survey respondents do still attempt to begin and grow a good relationship with the parents by conducting home visits and with regular communication regarding behavior, homework, and academic progress. They try to have as much face to face conversation with parents as they can with periodic parent/teacher meetings, as well as conversation in passing whenever possible. During these meetings and conversations with parents, the teachers try to focus on the achievements that their child has experienced, not just areas of problem or concern.

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<sup>72</sup> This is not a direct quotation of anyone. Rather, it is a paraphrase of something I heard a pastor say to his confirmation class when teaching his 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders a way to talk to their friends who go to heterodox Christian churches – adapted here for a teacher in a classroom. It is a loving, Law and Gospel approach that is not an offensive, “I’m better than you” attitude. It would be a blessing to be able to express those loving thoughts to a classroom full of children from all religious backgrounds. I thought it a fitting end to the section on the challenges and blessings that come from the shift away from the partnership paradigm we have discussed at length.

Each time there is contact with parents, respondents indicate that the religious training of the children is discussed. Parents are informed of what their children are learning, invited to attend church with their child, especially when the child's class sings in church. Parents are encouraged to have their children baptized, and are invited to take Bible Information Classes or receive other instruction from the pastor for their own spiritual well-being. In the School Choice Program, pastors and teachers cannot require anything of parents as far as involvement in religious education. Some pastors offer a basic "pre-BIC" or "foundations"<sup>73</sup> class for parents who want to hear and understand what their children are learning in school. These classes, which one pastor indicated are only three sessions, are not well attended.

Some respondents indicated that the presence of non-WELS children in the classroom has changed the way they keep order and carry out discipline. Law motivation is employed more often than in a traditional LES setting. Some schools have implemented methods of classroom management that are taught in the *Love and Logic*<sup>74</sup> program. Many of the responses indicate that while the fact that the vast majority of their students are there because of School Choice, the order and discipline challenges are not exclusive to the School Choice children. In fact, quite a few indicate that the discipline methods which have been implemented most likely would have been necessary whether or not the school was participating in the School Choice Program.

An intriguing tension comes to light in a point made by one pastor. He remarked that since the LES has participated in the School Choice Program, their entire ministry model has changed. Before participating in the School Choice Program, their primary purpose was nurture of their own children. Now they are primarily outreach. This pastor went on to say that "The problem is, we're not bringing the kids and their families into our larger Christian family; we're only serving them in the school." This respondent indicated that this balance between nurture and outreach, and building a setting where outreach becomes nurture is something they are still struggling to find in the school.

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<sup>73</sup> These two items in quotation marks in this sentence are names of classes that were part of individual pastor's survey responses. BIC stands for Bible Information Class, or the class that adults take who wish to become communicant members of a WELS congregation.

<sup>74</sup> Love and Logic is a philosophy founded in 1977 by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D. It is the approach of choice among leading educators, parents, and other professionals worldwide. They offer books, CD's, DVD's, as well as seminars and workshops nationwide to teach their methods. <http://www.loveandlogic.com/>.

There are a few additional overarching conclusions that can be drawn from the surveys.

1. Using an LES as an outreach tool, whether in the School Choice Program or otherwise is a brand new idea, or at least brand new in the grand scheme of the church.
2. This brand new idea has posed some unique challenges and provided some special blessings, as all new outreach ideas do.
3. The people who are doing the work of reaching out with the gospel in School Choice schools are doing all they can do deal with these challenges, but they do not have it figured out yet, nor do they claim to.
4. All of us in the Kingdom can rejoice that as these trail blazers work toward finding ways to address these unique challenges, they are proclaiming the pure and sweet gospel of Jesus Christ to little souls that may never hear it otherwise.

There has not been a lot of quoting directly from the surveys in this paper, but to conclude this section on how those who are participating in the School Choice Program are dealing with the shift in the partnership paradigm; the comments of one principal are too fitting to paraphrase.

“The partnership between home and school is critical. There will be no success without it. However, a consideration that is not mentioned nearly enough is TIME. When we receive a new faculty member, no matter their prior classroom experience, that faculty member will struggle with classroom management . . . period - every time. Over time, and I’m talking years, once the children (and parents) know that faculty member cares, and stays, relationships develop and behaviors and attitudes typically improve.”<sup>75</sup>

Patience is needed when reaching out with the gospel. Those who are reaching out through participating in the School Choice Program are learning this firsthand. Those who are considering a choice or charter program for their LES should know this beforehand. The Holy Spirit works where and when he wills. Praise God for that.

### **3) What recommendations can be made for congregations that are considering a choice or charter program as an option for their LES?**

As choice and charter programs expand to new communities around the United States, and as more and more WELS congregations consider whether or not participating in such a program is for them, there are many things to consider. This paper is focused primarily on

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<sup>75</sup> I have not obtained permission to use any survey respondent’s name in this paper because, as can be seen in Appendix C, I offered anonymity to respondents. Some did wish to remain anonymous, and to publish names in the paper, even of those who were not anonymous; I feel would compromise the credibility of the survey. Again, if any reader wishes to see the answers as I received them, they can contact the author and the information will be provided, without names of respondents.

parental involvement, but there are many ways in which the changing expectations with regard to parental involvement have an effect on the school. The following is a list of things for a congregation to consider as they make the decision whether or not participation in a choice or charter program is the right one for them.

**1. Be prepared to change your ministry plan of your LES.**

This may seem obvious, but when the vast majority of the LES becomes non-WELS, the entire purpose of the LES shifts from nurture to outreach or some combination of the two. If it does not, there is no reason to participate in the charter program. The survey responses indicate that there will most likely have to be curriculum changes. There will be struggles to adequately feed the souls of the WELS children the meat they need while providing milk to the baby Christians in the same classroom. Be ready to offer supplemental classes in religion to those who need them. Perhaps extra time with the pastor for those who will be confirmed will be needed. There is no formula for balancing nurture with outreach in an outreach based LES, so extra time and effort will be needed to come up with what works for each individual LES to meet each child's individual spiritual needs. No longer will you be able to assume that every seventh grader should be able to look up John 3:16 in their bible, then recite it to you from memory, and then explain what it means. No longer will you be able to count on the same level of parental involvement in the religious training of the children in the LES. This is an obvious change, but an impactful one, with far reaching affects for both the WELS and the non-WELS student. The rest of the recommendations will stem from this change in the ministry plan of the LES. If your LES is to balance outreach and nurture, then do whatever is necessary to best achieve that balance.

**2. Know your setting.**

Choice or charter programs are implemented by the government for a reason. They are not cheap, so if your community wants to start a program where the government pays for private education, it is most likely due to perceived shortcomings of public education. People are not satisfied and are searching for better solutions. You must be that better solution. The survey respondents highlighted some things about their setting they have had to consider. In an urban setting, learn all you can about being a high achieving urban school before participating in the

charter program. If you are in a culturally diverse neighborhood, learn as much as you can about the cultures around you, especially if the congregation has become disconnected with the cultural make-up of the neighborhood in general. In other words, if you are in church on Sunday, or in the classroom of your LES and you look out the window and the faces outside are much different than the faces inside, learn about those outside so that you are prepared to bring them inside.

The surveys indicate that if your school participates in a charter program, the majority of non-WELS parents will send their children to your school for the secular education. The LES needs to provide them with the best secular education that they can get – better than they can get anywhere else. The LES needs to be culturally relevant to the people who will consider sending their children to there. The LES needs to stand out above all other schools as a place where the children can get the chances at life that they don't believe they can get going to their current school. Once the LES is attractive as a better option, once the LES knows how to handle possible discipline issues, family issues, cultural issues, academic issues, or any other issues that may come up, and has plans and policies in place to deal with those things that are better than what the public school has been doing, there will be less obstacles to the children receiving what they can only get at an LES, the gospel of Jesus their Savior.

To do this, the LES needs to be proactive instead of reactive. One response recommended that a congregation do their homework first, before participating in a charter program, instead of reacting to things that come up once you start. Find out why the public schools are failing. Find out what the public schools are doing, or not doing, to get parents involved. Set up detailed policies from the very beginning which can be pointed to as a way to encourage parental involvement. Bring in consultants from schools outside our fellowship or non-religious private schools. Contact other WELS schools that are participating in a charter program and learn from their experiences what works and what does not, but realize that every setting is different and not everything a school in Milwaukee does will work everywhere. Therefore, it is extremely important to know your setting.

- 3. Use the WELS parents with whom you already have a traditional partnership to help achieve new goals.**

Make sure that while the congregation is doing its research and finding out what to expect while trying to balance nurture and outreach that the WELS member parents are kept well informed as to what is expected to change. Perhaps a committee of parents to assist in the research could be formed. The surveys indicated that there have been some WELS parents that have pulled their children out of the LES because of the changes that took place. Perhaps that could have been avoided if everyone involved was better informed about what to expect.

For the WELS parents who are already filling their roles as primary religious instructors of their children, present them with the opportunity to be missionaries by sending their children to the LES, and present it as an opportunity. Their role as primary teachers of their children will not change, but the amount and form of secondary and supplemental education their children will receive from the LES will be different. Teach them how to partner with the LES to form relationships with the parents of the non-WELS students. Train them to help with the outreach of the congregation into the community as the community comes into the LES. Teach them how to encourage their children to share their faith with their classmates. Help the WELS parents to be good examples to their children by sharing their faith with the non-WELS parents.

If there are WELS parents who aren't filling their roles as primary Christian educators of their children, work on building the partnership that has been lacking. Keep them informed as to what is expected to change, and help them to realize how these changes make that partnership all the more important. Challenge them to become leaders as the congregation starts this endeavor of reaching out through the LES. Forming relationships with the non-WELS parents will be easier for the LES if there are strong relationships modeled by the WELS parents. Outreach is not only the job of the called worker. It is the job of every member of the congregation. If the mission of the school is to be a balance of nurture and outreach, every WELS member in the LES family needs to help create and maintain that balance to help that mission succeed.

#### **4. Beware of seeing a choice or charter program as a financial quick fix.**

Some of the surveys indicated that the school would have closed without the revenue generated by participating in the School Choice Program. Another comment was that participation in the School Choice Program has adversely affected the financial stewardship of the congregation. It has made the problem of the congregation failing to financially support their



LES even more profound. Those who responded in this way did so knowing that these comments are outside the direct scope of this paper, but they felt the need to mention it anyway.

However, the financial stewardship of the congregation falls directly under the scope of this paper in many ways. If a congregation sees programs like the School Choice Program as a financial quick fix to save their school, is that the proper motivation to participate? If the revenue that is generated by doing so makes the lack of financial support from the congregation more of a problem how will the congregation support any effort to do outreach into the community? These are all questions that the author of this paper has no answers for because they are specific circumstances of specific congregations. This author does not claim to know the circumstances which prompted those comments on the surveys, nor is he able to comment on what anyone has done or is doing. However, the fact that those comments were made without any solicitation on the survey makes these things worthy of consideration for any congregation that is looking at the possibility of participating in a charter program with their LES.

The financial stewardship of the congregation is apropos to building a partnership with non-WELS parents. Imagine all that could be accomplished if the congregation supported the LES through its offerings. Then if a program like School Choice was implemented, the LES would be much better equipped to reach out with the gospel into their community by participating because the revenue generated could finance more programs to bring in the community instead of merely keeping the doors open.

Being able to form a relationship with the parents that can lead to a partnership with them involves offering help with the problems they have which hinder that relationship. Some of these problems were mentioned on the survey. How much better would the outreach effort be if the congregation could offer free addiction counseling to those parents who struggle with drugs and alcohol, or free pregnancy counseling for single mothers who find themselves with another baby on the way? These are just a couple examples of how funding could be used to make a real difference in the lives of those who bring their children to the LES if the revenue that comes with them does not have to foot the bill for the congregation's member children also.

Instead, the sinful nature in us all does not always see these opportunities. There's the temptation to financially support the school even less because of the money that is generated by

being a Choice School. To the sinful nature in us all, the children and parents that are a rich harvest field can easily be seen merely as a revenue stream to keep the LES going and a means to provide Christian education for WELS children, keeping the real purpose of the school as nurture instead of striving for the balance between nurture and outreach.

This also tempts the congregation to be involved in the life of the LES less and less, which makes the job of the faculty harder and harder. It hinders the ability of every congregation member to see the non-WELS children and their parents as real people with real problems who need the only real help there is. These survey responses that point to a decline in the congregation's financial stewardship show that if financial support of the LES is a problem, a charter program will not fix it. It will, however, enhance the need to address it so that it doesn't become a hindrance to the real opportunity for gospel outreach that comes with the influx of so many people, children and parents, who need to hear about their Savior.

Showing Christian love to children and their parents is not a money issue. The parents need to know that their child is going to a school where they are loved, where their children not only get an education, but where the faculty and everyone involved, including the members of the congregation care deeply for their children and want to see them succeed in this life, but ultimately want their children to spend eternity with the saints in heaven. The same attitude needs to be shown toward the non-WELS parents. They too are blood bought sinners who need to know their Savior. The love of Jesus is to be reflected towards them by every member of the congregation that they come in contact with. Imagine all the ways that could be accomplished if the congregation could support the LES without the money generated by participating in a choice or charter program.

##### **5. Remember the importance of TIME.**

This is a fundamental principle of all evangelism efforts. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel, but not on our time table. The earlier survey quote addressed the time it takes a faculty member to become acclimated to classroom management, but that same patience is required by every member of the LES family. This includes faculty, parents, children, and every member of the congregation. If a congregation makes the decision to apply Jesus' command to preach the good news to all nations by participating in a charter program with their

LES, they are making a long term commitment that may or may not show significant numerical results for years. This is the reality that is indicated by the survey responses which point to the struggle to bring the people who come into the LES through School Choice into the larger church family. This is a hard thing to come to grips with in a results oriented culture in the United States. The temptation is to get discouraged when we do not see the kind of outcomes we had hoped for.

The importance of time goes hand in hand with the importance of knowing your ministry setting. Our job is to proclaim the gospel, remove all obstacles to that proclamation that we are able to remove, and not do or say anything which would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our fellow sinners. This work includes finding the balance between nurture and outreach that is needed in the ministry setting of the LES. It includes equipping all parents, WELS and non-WELS to carry out their role as primary Christian educator of their children. It includes recognizing challenges that are posed by our ministry setting, and not using those challenges as excuses to shirk the God given responsibility to reach out to the parents as a way of equipping them to train their children in God's Word. The challenges may be messy, but they present opportunities to reach into a person's messy life and bring them the one thing that can clean up any mess, the gospel. Praise God for that opportunity. It is this author's prayer that all who have this opportunity be given patience and perseverance to carry out this work, no matter how much time it takes.

## CONCLUSION

There is a paradigm of partnership between the parents and the church that has been the way Christian education has been carried out from the beginning of time. Parents are to be the primary educators and the church is to supplement and support that education in a secondary way. This partnership has stood as the way to achieve optimal results in all forms of education ever since.

Recently, there has been a shift of that paradigm with the LES in the WELS that participates in the School Choice Program in Milwaukee and Racine, WI. Because of this, the purpose of the LES has changed from primarily nurturing the faith of WELS children and training the next generation of congregation leaders to reaching out with the gospel to the

community, then trying to feed faith of baby Christians that come in their doors. The vast majority of the children in these schools are non-WELS. No longer can the LES count on all parents of their LES children to be involved in religious education, at least not initially. It is the church's job to equip them so that they are able to fulfill their God given role as primary Christian educator of their children.

This shift in paradigm has been dealt with in many ways. It has posed many challenges and provided many blessings, not unlike any other outreach program that includes providing a service to the community. The difference is that this evangelism effort is much bigger. The entire ministry model of a major part of the congregation changes. Balancing nurture with outreach and equipping parents so that they are able to assume the primary role as Christian educator of their children are things that School Choice schools struggle to achieve. Some methods have worked better than others. The challenge remains to find ways of forming the essential partnership that God set up as the best way to educate children in his Word. The question still remains, "How do we get people to realize that the purpose of the education we are offering is to bring them into contact with their Savior? How do we help our target group see that we are offering saving gospel truth and not just secular education?"

Can we expect parents of children from outside the WELS to be on the same page as far as their God given role as primary instructor? Of course not, at least not initially, and it would be foolish to think so. Add in the fact that programs like School Choice are set up for low income families where there are less stable home environments for children, and that expectation of being able to form a traditional partnership with parents becomes even lower. However, this partnership, and the roles that it includes do not go away because the majority of children in an LES are from outside the WELS. It is still the method God set up for the training of children. It is still the way that works best. It is still the goal to strive for.

Therefore, when a congregation uses its LES for outreach, it would be shirking its God given responsibility if it did not work to find a way to equip the parents to fulfill their God given responsibility to their children. Cultural barriers, economic conditions, moral decline in society, and every other challenge that a Choice school faces are real challenges that should never be minimized. These challenges, however, can easily become excuses as to why equipping parents to fulfill their God given role as primary educator is impossible. For any Christian to make such

excuses would be handcuffing the Holy Spirit by not bringing the gospel to those who have the most influence on the children that a Choice school is trying to reach out to.

Evangelism efforts cannot be done half way. Outreach to children has to be outreach to their parents as well. The partnership paradigm is the goal of the evangelism effort because it is the way God set it up. When the parents are ill-equipped to form that partnership and carry out their role, the church must equip them. The same challenge that Luther faced when visiting the churches in Saxony where parents were unable to be primary Christian educators of their children is the challenge that faces congregations that chose to use their LES as an outreach tool. I pray that this challenge never turn into an excuse to do anything less than strive to fulfill the roles that God has given for Christian education.

Luther met this challenge by writing his Catechisms. Choice Schools have attempted to meet this challenge in a variety of ways. The survey results suggest that the solution to equipping parents in a Choice setting is still to be found. Maybe there is no single method to form the essential partnership. That does not mean that the effort to find a way can ever be abandoned. The souls of the children and their parents depend on it. We have a mission to do what is best for all people that we have the opportunity to minister to. Forming a partnership with parents is what is best for the Christian education of children. It is the way God set it up.

The formation of this partnership is the ideal to strive for, and it is one that many of the survey respondents have indicated is still something they are trying to figure out how to do. There seems to be no “one size fits all” solution, but when a congregation is considering whether or not they want to try to do outreach through their school, and when they are considering a choice or charter program as a means to do that outreach, they should be able to know as much as they can about what to expect. The best place to get that information is from those who have been doing what they are contemplating. I pray that this paper opens up those avenues of communication.

Once an LES gets into such a program and makes a commitment to educate a large number of students while receiving public funding to do so, it would not be very hard to back out of if the congregation decides it made a decision they are uncomfortable with, or that they didn't have all the information they needed. With the switch from a nurture focus to an outreach focus,

or “nurture plus outreach,” or “outreach plus nurture” focus, depending on the congregation’s unique circumstances, there are a lot of things that will be different from the way it has always been done. The expectation of a partnership with parents is an important example.

This paper provides a resource for those who are considering this form of evangelism as an option for their LES. It allows those considering this option to see the changes that are required and become better informed as to whether they are able to take on these changes and challenges. Should a congregation decide to participate in a choice or charter program, this paper can be used to take on these challenges in a proactive instead of reactive way by providing insight into what others have faced and how they have dealt with these challenges.

Since there has been very little written in the WELS about the results of an LES participating in a choice or charter program, there are many opportunities for further study. Bible studies that show the scriptural basis for the partnership between parents and the church in Christian education would be very useful tools as congregations seek to strengthen those ties in their ministry. They would also help the LES that is considering participating in a charter program to show the WELS parents why we do what we do and how that will change if the school participates in the charter program.

Evangelism training programs specifically geared toward WELS parents whose children attend a choice or charter school would be extremely beneficial. This would equip those parents to talk with non-WELS parents that their children go to school with so that the relationships that are formed with those parents are not only formed by the pastor and the teachers. It would help the WELS parents see that evangelism is their job too. It is a congregation-wide effort.

Tools for parents of WELS children can be developed which help those parents explain to their children the things they will encounter when most of their classmates are not of the same religious background. This would also be useful for WELS parents whose children attend public school.

Classroom management tools which focus specifically on the kind of challenges that are faced in School Choice schools would be extremely helpful to the teachers. *Love and Logic* is a wonderful resource, but it is a secular resource. There have been WELS schools participating in School Choice for a long enough time where enough experience has been gained to know what

to expect when the classroom is filled with students who would normally be in a public school. There could certainly be material developed and published for everyone which would help teachers cut down on the learning curve that comes with entering a situation that is not necessarily covered by the training at Martin Luther College. *Love and Logic* with a “Law and Gospel” approach would be a wonderful resource.

Classroom tools could also include a religious curriculum that is specially designed for a School Choice setting that is geared toward cutting down the gap between those who need spiritual meat and those who need spiritual milk. This would be the most difficult of the practical projects proposed here.

While numerical results never show the entire spiritual picture, studies can be done which would tell if there is any correlation between participation in School Choice and numbers of adult baptisms and confirmations. A study could also be done between the number of baptisms of children who entered the school via School Choice and the number of adult confirmations. Those numbers could then be used as a basis for studying trends, not just in individual congregations but in all congregations who participate in choice or charter programs nationwide. It would give them a basis for comparing notes as to what has helped or not helped, what has worked and not worked and the blessings and challenges with each individual congregation’s approach.

Studying the impact of School Choice on the financial stewardship of the individual congregations would also be beneficial in many ways. It would let the congregations see their own strengths and weaknesses compared to others who are doing the same form of evangelism. It would also be an invaluable tool for those who are considering a choice or charter program for their LES. Again, the dangers of numerical studies when considering spiritual matters cannot be overemphasized, but they do tell part of the story. If numbers and the trends they show can be used to give direction to the evangelism effort, they need their due no matter what conclusion they force us to draw.

Finally, all of these studies and possible ways to further analyze the things that have come up in this paper lead to one overarching conclusion. Opening a loving, brotherly, Christian dialogue would be one of the best tools for everyone, whether it is an LES that is currently

participating in School Choice, a congregation considering it for their LES, or a WELS church in a rural area of the Midwest who may never have the opportunity to participate in a charter program. We are all working in the same Kingdom, and any brotherly communication between corners of that Kingdom can only benefit the Kingdom.

Many outside Milwaukee are unaware of the blessings and challenges that School Choice schools face, so the natural human reaction is to make assumptions and draw conclusions based on what you have heard, perhaps second, third, or fourth hand. When this involves something new to the WELS, something that has never been done for, a break from tradition, or a paradigm shift as this paper reports, those assumptions and conclusions are often slanted toward the status quo, and the best construction is often not put on the motivation for the change.

Conversely, when assumptions and conclusions are drawn from second, third, or fourth hand information, and when motivations are questioned without putting the best construction on everything until firsthand information can be gained, those engaging in a new practice, a break from tradition, or a paradigm shift can often be put on the defensive and made to face their challenges without the help of many who would be happy to if they were better informed. They then are also unable to share their blessings with those who would help them overcome the challenges. As in all forms of gospel ministry, including Christian education and School Choice matters, loving Christian dialogue between like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ is something that I pray is fostered by the reading of this paper. With the Holy Spirit's help, may we all be able to work together to make disciples of all nations, no matter what form of disciple making we choose to use.



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APPENDIX A

\_\_\_\_\_ **Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Catechism Class Pastor-Parent Sessions**

I understand from God's Word the great privilege and responsibility my Lord has given me as a Christian parent. I want my child to grow in the grace and knowledge of his/her Lord Jesus Christ all his/her life. I want my son/daughter to be in heaven with me by God's Grace through faith in Jesus.

Because of such understanding and desires for my child, I will, with my Lord's help, support my child in his/her Catechism instruction by attending the Pastor-Parent Sessions, by regularly worshipping with my child, and by actively taking part in his/her Catechism homework assignments.

SIGN: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

RETURN TO PASTOR AT END OF THIS FIRST SESSION.

## APPENDIX B

Christ St. Peter Lutheran School  
2229 and 2235 West Greenfield Avenue and  
1204 South 8th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
(414) 383-2055 Grades:K4-8

Atonement Lutheran School  
4224 West Ruby Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53209  
(414) 871-1224 Grades:K4-8

Garden Homes Lutheran School  
2450 West Roosevelt Drive  
Milwaukee, WI 53209  
(414) 444-9050 Grades:K4-8

Mount Lebanon Lutheran School  
6100 West Hampton Avenue and  
8444 West Melvina Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53218  
(414) 464-5410 Grades:K4-8

Risen Savior Lutheran School  
9550 West Brown Deer Road  
Milwaukee, WI 53224  
(414) 354-7320 Grades:K4-8

Saint John's Lutheran School  
4001 South 68th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53220  
(414) 541-5881 Grades:K4-8

Saint Lucas Lutheran School  
648 East Dover Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53207  
(414) 483-9122 Grades:K4-8

Saint Marcus Lutheran School  
2215 North Palmer Street and  
2210 North 1st Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
(414) 562-3163 Grades:K4-8

Saint Philip's Lutheran School  
3012 North Holton Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
(414) 263-7614 Grades:K4-8

Salem Evangelical Lutheran School  
6844 North 107th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53224

Siloah Lutheran School  
3721 North 21st Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53206  
(414) 873-8240 Grades:K4-8

Word of Life Evangelical Lutheran School  
3545 South 23rd Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53221  
(414) 281-7808 Grades:K4-8

Wisconsin Lutheran School  
734 Villa St and 2920 Bate Street  
Racine, WI 53403  
(262) 633-7143 Grades:K4-8

## APPENDIX C

Dear Pastor, Principal, or Teacher:

My name is Daniel Babinec. I am a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. For my senior thesis I am conducting a survey of pastors, principals, and teachers serving at WELS Lutheran Elementary Schools that participate in the School Choice Program in both Milwaukee and Racine. If you would allow me some of your time to explain the scope of my thesis and then please fill out the survey that is attached, it would be greatly appreciated.

My thesis will address the formation of the partnership between parents and school that is essential to all forms of education, especially religious and catechetical instruction, specifically in the School Choice environment. With the educational trend moving towards the advancement and expansion of choice and charter programs, the ultimate goal of this thesis is to provide a resource for future congregations and schools to look at when deciding whether or not to participate in such a program. My research seeks to accomplish these goals:

1. Lay out the scriptural basis for the essential nature of this partnership.
2. Show how this partnership has been practiced in secular and Christian education from the very beginning.
3. Point out the unique challenges that the School Choice Program poses to forming this partnership in religious instruction with non-WELS students.
4. Show how schools that are participating in School Choice are dealing with those challenges.
5. Point out if and how the adjustments that have been made affected the religious instruction of the WELS students.
6. Provide guidelines and possible advantages to be considered, as well as potential pitfalls to be avoided as more schools consider participating in a choice or charter program.

As you can see from my thesis description, the majority of my research depends on the feedback I receive from this survey. I hope that you see this as important work, not just to help me complete my thesis, but also to provide an avenue for others in the WELS to learn from your experiences, both positive and negative, as they make a more informed decision as to whether a choice or charter program is a good option for them.

When filling out the survey, answer as many or as few of the questions as you want/are able to. I prefer you type your answers in the space between the questions, save your changes, and then email it back to me at [babinecd@wls.wels.net](mailto:babinecd@wls.wels.net). You may be as brief or verbose as you wish. I ask that if you participate, you would return the surveys to me by November 3, 2012.

I am offering confidentiality and anonymity for your responses and feedback. The way I intend to do this is save the surveys into a file folder, renamed with numbers in the order they are received. Then two days later I will print them and then shuffle the pile before analyzing and tabulating the responses. There will be a place on the survey for your name and email address, along with a question asking whether you would be willing to talk to me face to face if I seek more insight or clarification from you. If you value your anonymity, just leave that section blank. Unless you put your name, congregation or school name on the survey itself, I should have no idea whose responses I'm reading.

Thank you in advance, and may our Savior Jesus continue to bless you as you feed his lambs.

Your brother in Christ,

Daniel Babinec

## APPENDIX D

### **Parent/School Partnership Survey For Pastors**

Please answer as many questions as you want/are able to by typing your responses in the area below the question. Please return the survey to me by saving your changes and emailing it back to me at [babinecd@wls.wels.net](mailto:babinecd@wls.wels.net). Thank you very much.

Daniel Babinec

\*For the sake of brevity on this survey, the partnership between parents and school where parents participate actively in their child's education will be referred to simply as *the partnership*.

\*The purpose of this survey and my entire thesis is not to debate the merits of School Choice as an evangelism tool. It is merely to report the practical implications of School Choice on *the partnership*, both positive and negative so that others can learn from and use your experience to know what has worked and not worked with regard to feeding Jesus' lambs in a School Choice setting.

1. How long has your school been participating in the School Choice Program?
2. What percentage of your students are non-WELS?
3. It is my understanding that students in the School Choice Program have the right to opt out of religious instruction with parental permission. How many students (actual number or percentage) have exercised this right?
4. Do non-WELS students participate in catechetical instruction?
5. Are you able to discuss the catechetical instruction of non-WELS students with their parents? If so, how?
6. Have you been able to form *the partnership* with the non-WELS parents in the catechetical instruction of their children? Why or why not? If so, what methods do you use to form *the partnership*? If not, what obstacles stand in the way of *the partnership*?
7. Are you able to form *the partnership* with parents of WELS students in their child's catechetical instruction? What methods are used to form *the partnership* with WELS parents? What obstacles have stood in the way of *the partnership* with WELS parents?
8. Has the presence of non-WELS students impacted (either positively or negatively) your ability to form and maintain *the partnership* with WELS parents? If so, how?
9. How has the presence of non-WELS students changed your classroom methods and practices with regard to catechetical instruction?
10. Comment on the ability of non-WELS students to navigate the Catechism, look up Bible passages, do their memory work, etc. Does this differ from the WELS students?

11. Comment on the blessings and challenges that result from the presence of non-WELS students with regard to your ability to prepare WELS students for confirmation?
12. Do you feel the need to supplement the catechetical instruction of WELS students in order to prepare them for confirmation?
13. How do you teach at a personal level with non-WELS students without teaching beneath the level of the WELS students?
14. Roughly what percentage of non-WELS students belong to another Christian church?
15. Do you find it easier to form *the partnership* among non-WELS students who are from other Christian churches or with those who are unchurched?
16. In general, do the non-WELS students have positive role models at home? Do the WELS students?
17. Do the children who belong to other Christian churches talk about doctrinal differences between the WELS and their church? Do you bring them up (teach polemics) in catechism instruction?
18. How do you address issues of church fellowship in catechism instruction?
19. What, if any, changes have been made with regard to classroom discipline since participation in the School Choice Program began?
20. In your opinion, is the impetus for these changes the growing number of non-WELS students, or would they have been necessary anyway?
21. How do you think *the partnership* or lack thereof contributes to the discipline changes in the classroom?
22. Please share with me any additional insights you think may be helpful that haven't yet been covered on this survey.
23. Would you be willing to sit down with me face to face if I seek additional input or clarification on any of the points above? If so, give your name and email address.

## APPENDIX E

### **Parent/School Partnership Survey For Teachers**

Please answer as many questions as you want/are able to by typing your responses in the area below the question. Please return the survey to me by saving your changes and emailing it back to me at [babinecd@wls.wels.net](mailto:babinecd@wls.wels.net). Thank you very much.

Daniel Babinec

\*For the sake of brevity on this survey, the partnership between parents and school where parents participate actively in their child's education will be referred to simply as ***the partnership***.

\*The purpose of this survey and my entire thesis is not to debate the merits of School Choice as an evangelism tool. It is merely to report the practical implications of School Choice on ***the partnership***, both positive and negative so that others can learn from and use your experience to know what has worked and not worked with regard to feeding Jesus' lambs in a School Choice setting.

1. How long has your school been participating in the School Choice Program?
2. What percentage of your students are non-WELS?
3. It is my understanding that students in the School Choice Program have the right to opt out of religious instruction with parental permission. How many students (actual number or percentage) have exercised this right?
4. Are you able to discuss religious education of non-WELS students with their parents? If so, how?
5. Have you been able to form ***the partnership*** with the non-WELS parents in the religious education of their children? Why or why not? If so, what methods do you use to form ***the partnership***? If not, what obstacles stand in the way of ***the partnership***?
6. Have you been able to form ***the partnership*** with non-WELS parents in their child's education in other academic subjects (reading, math, science, etc.)? Why or why not? If so, what methods do you use to form ***the partnership***? If not, what obstacles stand in the way of ***the partnership***?
7. Are you able to form ***the partnership*** with parents of WELS students in their child's religious education? Other subjects?



8. What methods are used to form *the partnership* with WELS parents? What obstacles have stood in the way of *the partnership* with WELS parents?
9. Has the presence of non-WELS students impacted (either positively or negatively) your ability to form and maintain *the partnership* with WELS parents? If so, how?
10. How has the presence of non-WELS students changed your classroom methods and practices with regard to religious instruction?
11. Roughly what percentage of non-WELS students belong to another Christian church?
12. Do you find it easier to form *the partnership* among non-WELS students who are from other Christian churches or with those who are unchurched?
13. In general, do the non-WELS students have positive role models at home? Do the WELS students?
14. Do the children who belong to other Christian churches talk about doctrinal differences between the WELS and their church? How do you address those differences?
15. What, if any, changes have been made with regard to classroom discipline since participation in the School Choice Program began?
16. In your opinion, is the impetus for these changes the growing number of non-WELS students, or would they have been necessary anyway?
17. How do you think *the partnership* or lack thereof contributes to the discipline changes in the classroom?
18. Please share with me any additional insights you think may be helpful that haven't yet been covered on this survey.
19. Would you be willing to sit down with me face to face if I seek additional input or clarification on any of the points above? If so, give your name and email address.